From on-campus to online exams

EBZ Business School's digital journey amid the disruption

About EBZ Business School

EBZ Business School, a University of Applied Sciences, is Germany's premier university for real estate management studies and related subjects. The University offers bachelor's and master's degree programs and vocational and lifelong learning programs.

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Challenges & business requirements: an overview

The ongoing health emergency has disrupted the educational continuity of countless students globally. EBZ Business School, too, faced the challenge of safeguarding hundreds of students' future and educational continuity. EBZ's distance learning students continued with their courses remotely, but learning and teaching remotely were not simple propositions for on-campus students and professors.

EBZ Business School needed to scale its online learning system to fully transition to the online mode. The university temporarily reassigned staff from other areas to its IT department to make the desired shift. However, it did not have the requisite processes to conduct online exams. While oral examinations continued unabated in the online environment, the University was forced to cancel all its scheduled written exams, causing genuine concerns among its students.

Germany's foremost real estate management university sought a robust online examination platform that addressed students' existing concerns, ensured high standards of security in on-campus examinations and provided a seamless experience to all stakeholders. After analyzing all available services on the market, the University decided to employ Mercer | Mettl's platform that successfully addressed its challenges and business requirements.

GDPR compliance

The University's choices were significantly restricted because of stringent data protection laws in Germany. The University's chosen system needed to abide by the GDPR and ensure the privacy and protection of students' personal data.

Human proctoring

EBZ Business School also needed to ensure academic integrity. Therefore, the chosen online examination system had to allow one or more proctors to monitor the students taking the exam, similar to an on-site examination. EBZ wanted to employ its in-house proctors to supervise the exams and needed the service provider to customize its offering, factoring in this arrangement.

Format support

A common challenge faced by numerous institutions is that a single system does not support multiple question types and answer formats. Since the courses at EBZ Business School encompassed a wide range of subjects,the platform needed to support numerous formats. The formats included drawing entity relationship diagrams, filling in tables, creating workflow diagrams, undertaking mathematical calculations, typing complex mathematical formulas and coding.

Language support

EBZ has a predominant German-speaking student base. Therefore, the institution wanted the student interface in the German language. The University wanted to ensure that the sudden transition to the online ecosystem did not cause anxiety among students and teachers. Therefore, EBZ emphasized on the user-friendliness of the chosen platform to provide a familiar test-taking environment for the students.

Round-the-clock assistance

The transition to the online ecosystem required continual support. EBZ Germany needed a system that offered instant support when faced with challenges in setting up an exam or at any other such instance. Continual support and assistance were critical as it was EBZ's maiden attempt at conducting online exams.

Federal state regulations on data protection, university-specific examination rules, IT infrastructural requirements, IT skills and comfort levels of the lecturers, administrators, students, and other stakeholders, cumulatively, posed considerable challenges for EBZ Business School, Germany.
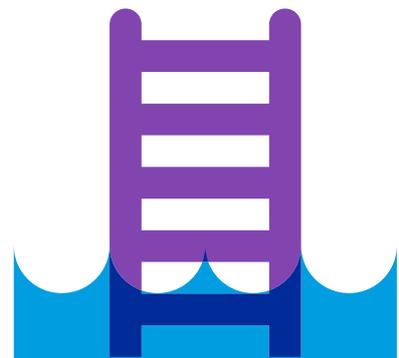
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Mercer | Mettl's online examination platform: the solution

EBZ's most pressing concerns were maintaining educational continuity and shifting entirely to the online mode. These were intricate issues for the University.

Mercer | Mettl offered a demonstration for EBZ, tested the system with multiple stakeholders, and conducted a few test runs to demonstrate the platform's anti-cheating features. Mercer | Mettl administered a training session for EBZ after its diverse requirements were addressed adequately. The platform was set up with the following features to solve their challenges:

AI & human proctoring

Mercer | Mettl's platform offered EBZ the flexibility to employ its in-house exam supervisors to proctor the online examinations. Each proctor was allocated less than 30 students to monitor, ensuring a superlative experience.

In addition to human proctors, Mercer | Mettl's online proctoring tool featured an add-on layer of artificial intelligence(AI) operating in the background, flagging students' questionable actions. Proctors could zoom in on students in question, check on them, even chat with them to assuage their concerns. The system also recorded every action of test-takers in a time log to ensure the credibility of the examination. These processes ensured a verifiable mechanism to alleviate any doubts on the integrity of the results. Complete control for human proctors was a non-negotiable for EBZ, and Mercer | Mettl's proctoring platform was among a handful of vendors to offer the same.
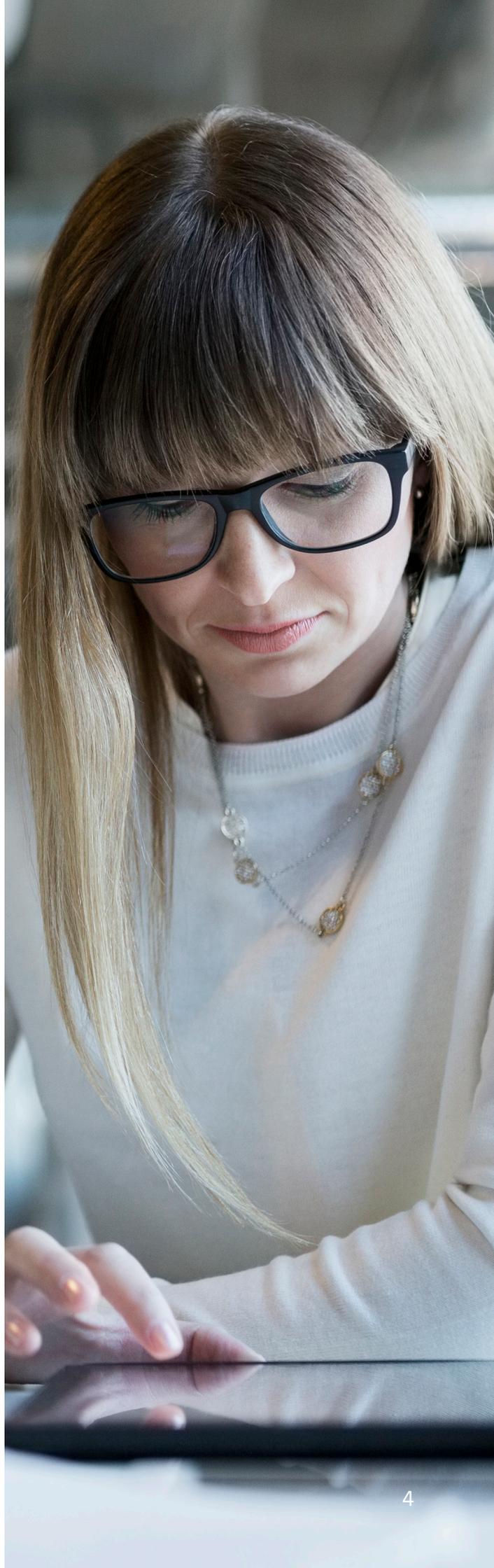
Stakeholder experience

Mercer | Mettl's quick turnaround time and round-the-clock support in offering the exam interface in German and setting up systems, among others, assured EBZ Germany of Mercer | Mettl's prowess and capabilities. After the trial tests, the students were pleased with the ease of using the platform. Mercer | Mettl assured thorough support by providing two helpline numbers - one for English-speaking students and the other for German-speaking candidates. The English-speaking students were redirected to Mercer | Mettl for direct support and ensured that they could reach out for technical support and queries.

Proctors and professors were other stakeholders in the process. Proctors' training was conducted under an hour and emphasized the platform's features. EBZ and Mercer | Mettl detailed the platform's ability to save the faculty from paperwork and grading hours. The platform could be pre-fed with the right answers after the pen-and-paper tests were converted into an online format. This ensured that the system could auto-grade exams, and there was no need for manual intervention, barring rare cases of discrepancies.

Mercer | Mettl fortified EBZ's system to impart an exam-taking experience at par with the on-site exam. The platform supported diverse question types and answer formats and enabled using diagrams, tables, mathematical functions, to suit the requirements of various subjects.

EBZ's foremost priority was to ensure the ease of use for students in the new 'normal,' and Mercer | Mettl's user-friendly platform fully adhered to the university's vision.

Security & GDPR compliance

Considering strict regulations on data protection, Mercer | Mettl's adherence to GDPR compliances and extensive protocols ensured information privacy and data security at every stage of the examination process. Data encryption, access right management, and multi-factor authentication feature further enhanced the platform's security.

Additionally, EBZ allowed students six weeks to raise a dispute, if any, on the results, after which, all exam data, video snapshots, conversations, time logs, and everything else, stored in Mercer | Mettl's system was deleted entirely.

Anti-cheating measures

Mercer | Mettl's Secure Browser (MSB) or lockdown browser restricted access to search engines, new tabs or browsers, websites (unless whitelisted), screen sharing, or screen duplication. However, it allowed the University to whitelist certain digital assets for reference and all students could access them during the exam.

Stability & accessibility

A vast majority of EBZ's students had stable internet connections. However, students at remote locations risked facing an unstable connection or a router outage. Mercer | Mettl's system ensured minimal bandwidth usage and allowed students to continue with their exam, from where they had left off, without any data loss, in the case of any connection errors. Mercer | Mettl's platform assured that no student was at a disadvantage due to the loss of internet connection.

Mercer | Mettl's continual support helped EBZ to proffer a great experience to their students.

The impact of digitization

With Mercer | Mettl's assistance, EBZ Germany digitized its examination processes in less than two months. The process of digitization included seamless integration, mock tests, stakeholder training, preparing online exams, feeding the system with answers for auto-grading, and setting up of support channels. Mercer | Mettl enabled test-takers and test-givers to operate remotely, from the safety of their homes, without compromising on the quality, security, and credibility of the exams.

Complete cheating prevention

Mercer | Mettl's AI detected over 95 percent of cheating instances, and the rest could be identified by the human proctor during the exam or later through the snapshots and time logs.

Educational continuity

Students across all courses shifted to an online mode of exams, without letting the pandemic-led disruption hinder their progress.

We want to be prepared to address all our students' needs and concerns. Now that we have used Mercer | Mettl, we will undoubtedly continue to use its platform for the rest of eternity because of our great experience."

Raphael Beuthner
CIO, EBZ Business School, Germany
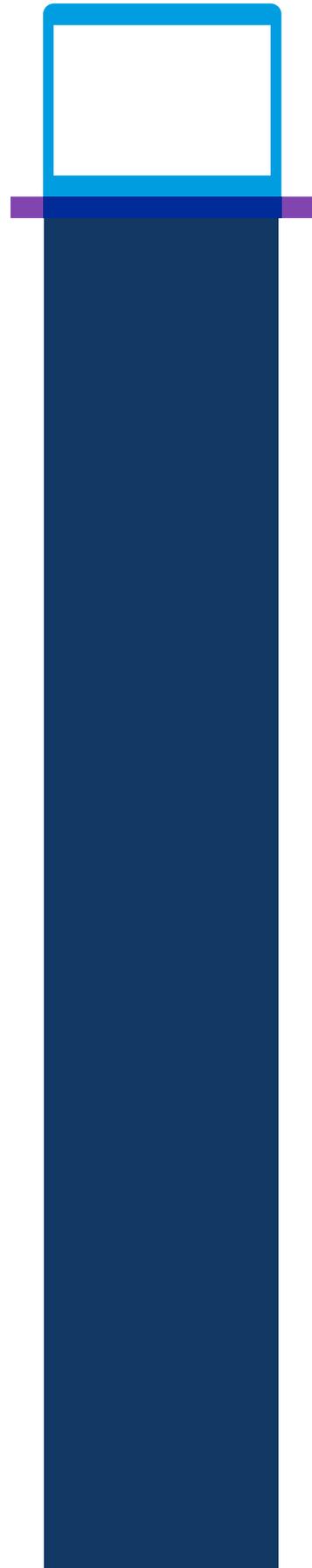
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At Mercer I Mettl, our mission is to enable organizations to make better people decisions across two key areas: Acquisition and Development. Since our inception in 2010, we have partnered with 4000+ corporates, 31 sector skill councils/ government departments, and 15+ educational institutions across 90+ countries.

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