



## **SIMPLIFYING YOUR DISTRICTS PURCHASING PROCESS**

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Providing enhanced service to our users, before, during and after the purchase was the challenge our Purchasing department embarked upon a few months ago. The most obvious area for enhancement was the management of our website of our contracted vendors, specifically how we presented them to our users. When an award was made, our process was to place a link to their website on our department Share Point site. To locate the awardees link, it was up to our users to find it and to bookmark it for future ordering. To access the awardee's site, they would more often than not, create a new log-in and password for each vendor. Too frequently what would happen is that as our contracted vendors would change, due to new solicitations and our users would continue to go to their bookmarked sites and buy from the old awardees. This led to quite a bit of "out of contract" spend.

To correct this and meet our challenge we had to come up with a solution that would meet the following requirements:

Problem: Our end users were continuously required to bookmark our vendor's websites

Solution: A single shopping platform where all current vendors could be accessed

Problem: Users were required to repeatedly create log-ins and passwords for new sites.

Solution: Have a single log-on site requiring only one username and password.

Have one username and password required.

Problem: Transition to new vendors was frequently missed because users were required to check our Share Point site to find out when vendors changed.

Solution: Vendor changes are managed in the shopping platform, creating no burden of time for end users to find out when vendors changed.

When exploring solutions to our problems we met with a few different vendors that offered this type of product. We narrowed down our selection to Equal Level. Equal Level provides a shopping marketplace designed primarily with government organizations and school districts in mind. During their presentation they provided numerous screen shots of shopping web pages they developed for other school districts, which was very useful. Additionally, we were able to interactively explore those web pages to see how the process worked. Being able to hear from the knowledgeable Equal Level staff, see the screen shots of what our users would see when they visited our page and "surf" through the current marketplace web pages they created were all very helpful for us to understand exactly what we needed, and wanted.



Harford County Public Schools selected Equal Level to be our third party shopping platform provider. To start the process, we provided Equal Level with a list of our contracted vendors that we wanted on our marketplace. They worked with those vendors and quickly had a working marketplace established for us to test. Once the testing phase was complete, we moved to live production and piloted the marketplace with a few of our schools. Thankfully, there were minimal issues and once resolved, the marketplace site worked very well.

We've been using the marketplace established by Equal Level for 4 months now with overwhelming success. We've had very minor issues with performance and our end users now have a streamlined path for the majority of their purchases. They no longer have to bookmark numerous websites with numerous log-on and password credentials. We have the ability to change vendors as contracts expire and new vendors are brought on without our users having to search for the information. This project could not have been accomplished successfully without the input, guidance and responsive service from the team at Equal Level. Working with a company that has experience implementing the very solution you are looking for is extremely helpful. One of the reason the initial set-up went smoothly is because Equal Level has worked directly with most of the vendors we had contracts with and previously developed punch-out shopping sites with them. That existing relationship they had with the vendor's technology staff helped speed up the implementation process and eliminate many of the pitfalls that can typically happen in projects such as these.

Based on our experience establishing a shopping platform, I highly recommend that if you do not have marketplace site for your users to shop from, that you consider implementing one. I also strongly encourage that if you do, consider Equal Level first.