

Modernization of Northern Marianas College Campus Store

CASE STUDY
2025



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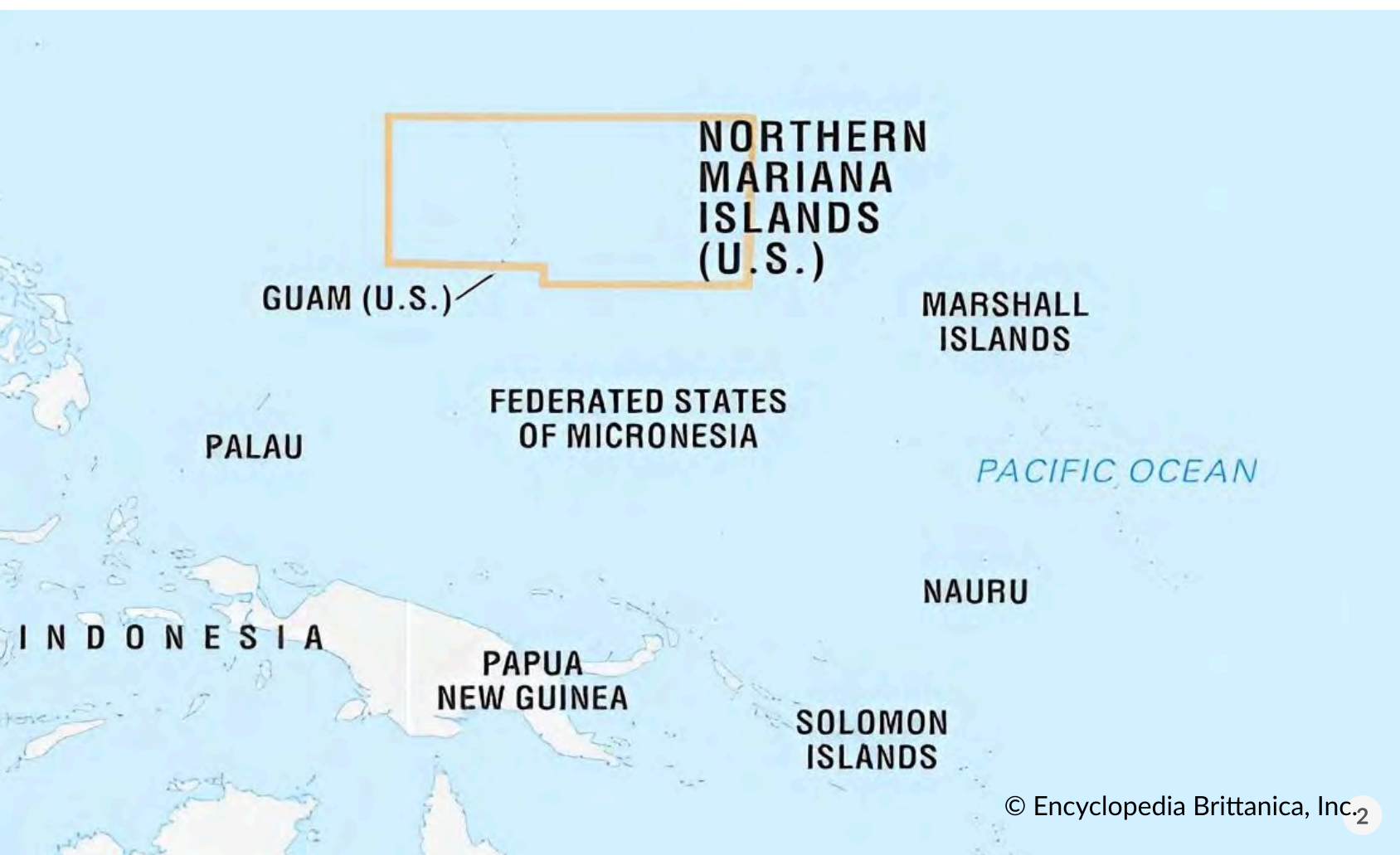
Introduction

For college students, having reliable access to course materials and campus resources can make a significant difference in their academic success. However, institutions can face unique logistical and technological challenges that can hinder efficient campus store operations. Northern Marianas College (NMC), located in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, encountered several obstacles in providing timely access to course materials, digital resources, and branded merchandise.

These challenges included difficulties in obtaining physical textbooks due to high shipping costs and long transit times, the absence of a digital course materials provider, an outdated point-of-sale and inventory system lacking robust reporting functionality, and the absence of an e-commerce platform. Additionally, NMC's manual and complex financial aid process created barriers for students seeking to use their aid to purchase course materials and supplies.

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive modernization strategy, NMC engaged MRM Consulting, led by Dr. Mike Moore, to assess, recommend, and implement solutions that would transform the bookstore's operations. This initiative aimed to streamline bookstore management, integrate digital course materials delivery, improve financial aid transaction efficiency, and enhance the availability of general merchandise through innovative procurement and distribution methods.

By leveraging industry expertise and strategic vendor partnerships, MRM Consulting is guiding NMC through a modernization that will create a more efficient campus store operation and significantly improve the student experience. This case study outlines the key components of this modernization effort, the solutions identified, and the anticipated impact on NMC's campus community.





BACKGROUND

Northern Marianas College is a public land-grant college serving the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, a remote U.S. territory in the Western Pacific Ocean. The college's main campus is located on Saipan, with satellite campuses on Tinian and Rota. As a small but vital local institution, NMC primarily offers associate degrees, with bachelor's programs in Business and Education to meet the workforce demands of the region.

Challenges of a Remote Institution

With an enrollment of 1,253 students in Academic Year 2024-2025, NMC plays a crucial role in higher education access for residents of the Northern Marianas. The majority of students rely on federal financial aid, with over 80% receiving Pell Grants, making affordability and financial aid accessibility central to the college's operations. However, the bookstore's outdated systems created significant barriers for students trying to obtain their required course materials and other essentials.

In addition to logistical and operational challenges, NMC has faced significant disruptions from natural disasters. The region endured direct hits from Super Typhoon Soudelor in 2015 and Super Typhoon Yutu in 2018, the latter being the strongest storm ever recorded to hit the Marianas. The devastation forced the college into rebuilding efforts after losing key campus infrastructure, including classroom buildings and student facilities. While NMC has since resumed normal operations, the ongoing economic and logistical challenges of operating in a remote island setting remain.





BACKGROUND

Bookstore Operations Before Modernization

Prior to engaging MRM Consulting, the NMC campus bookstore faced several operational and technological gaps that affected both students and institutional efficiency:

- ▶ Limited access to physical textbooks: Due to high shipping costs and supply chain constraints, students frequently experienced delays in receiving print course materials.
- ▶ No digital course materials provider: NMC had no streamlined method for delivering digital textbooks or courseware, leaving students with fewer affordable options.
- ▶ Suboptimal point-of-sale and inventory system: The bookstore relied on a system that lacked the necessary sophistication and functionality, making it difficult to effectively serve students and campus stakeholders.
- ▶ No e-commerce platform: Students had no online option for purchasing books or merchandise, requiring all transactions to occur in person or via email.
- ▶ Manual financial aid processing: Students using financial aid for bookstore purchases had to navigate a cumbersome, time-intensive process that often led to delays in using their aid or obtaining their materials.
- ▶ Limited general merchandise availability: Due to high shipping costs and order minimums, the bookstore struggled to maintain a diverse selection of apparel and branded merchandise.

Recognizing these challenges, NMC leadership sought to modernize bookstore operations to improve efficiency, enhance student service, and ensure that all students, regardless of location, could access their required materials without unnecessary barriers. To achieve this, MRM Consulting and the college developed a comprehensive modernization strategy aimed at addressing logistical challenges, integrating digital solutions, and establishing a sustainable model for the future of the campus bookstore.



MODERNIZATION EFFORTS

MRM Consulting began the modernization initiative with a comprehensive assessment of NMC's bookstore operations, identifying critical inefficiencies and opportunities for improvement. The primary goals were to implement a robust point-of-sale and inventory management system, establish a financial aid automation process, integrate digital course materials delivery, and improve general merchandise procurement and distribution.

Upgrading the Point-of-Sale, Inventory, and E-Commerce System

The existing bookstore system at NMC lacked the ability to efficiently track inventory, manage transactions, or support online purchasing. A modernized point-of-sale (POS) solution was essential for improving operations, enabling real-time inventory tracking, and allowing students to purchase materials both in-store and online.

MRM Consulting conducted a thorough vendor evaluation, considering factors such as:

- ▶ Interface capabilities with NMC's Student Information System (SIS) and Learning Management System (LMS)
- ▶ E-commerce functionality to support online course materials and merchandise sales
- ▶ Inventory management features to reduce stock shortages and overordering
- ▶ User-friendly interface for bookstore staff

After reviewing several options, a vendor was identified and presented to the NMC leadership. The selected system will meet NMC's operational needs and allow for streamlined financial aid transactions. The implementation of this system is expected to improve service speed, inventory accuracy, and enhanced financial reporting capabilities.



MODERNIZATION EFFORTS

Automating Financial Aid Transactions

With nearly 80% of NMC students receiving Pell Grants, ensuring access to financial aid for course materials was a top priority. Previously, the financial aid process at NMC was manual, time-consuming, and prone to delays, requiring the navigation of multiple steps before aid could be used in the bookstore.

MRM Consulting explored financial transaction vendors that could seamlessly integrate with NMC's SIS and new bookstore systems, allowing students to use their aid at the point of sale without unnecessary delays. A solution was identified and presented to the campus leadership, offering the following benefits:

- ▶ Automated verification of student aid eligibility at checkout
- ▶ Real-time reconciliation of bookstore purchases with financial aid records in the Student Information System
- ▶ Reduction in manual processing workload for bookstore, financial aid, and student accounts staff
- ▶ Improved student experience by eliminating administrative roadblocks

The adoption of this financial aid automation system is expected to increase efficiency, reduce errors, and enhance compliance, ensuring students can access their materials without financial or administrative hurdles.





MODERNIZATION EFFORTS

Implementing Digital Course Materials Delivery

The transition to digital has become a critical priority for institutions worldwide, and NMC is no exception. Historically, NMC students have faced delays in receiving print textbooks due to shipping challenges and no centralized system for digital course materials acquisition and delivery.

To address this, MRM Consulting evaluated digital course materials management platforms that could:

- ▶ Integrate with NMC's POS, e-commerce, and Learning Management System (LMS)
- ▶ Provide seamless access to digital textbooks and course materials
- ▶ Allow students to purchase and access digital materials using financial aid
- ▶ Offer faculty tools for course material selection and student engagement

A platform was selected and presented to the campus, chosen for its strong publisher relationships, global reach, and customer support infrastructure. This system ensures that students – whether on Saipan, Tinian, or Rota – have unrestricted access to required course materials on or before the first day of class.





MODERNIZATION EFFORTS

Expanding General Merchandise and Apparel Options

Beyond course materials, the NMC bookstore also serves as a hub for general merchandise, including school-branded apparel, supplies, and accessories. However, the bookstore faced significant challenges in stocking and distributing merchandise due to high shipping costs and order minimums that made traditional purchasing impractical.

MRM Consulting identified multiple drop-shipping and bulk purchasing partners to address these challenges. Key objectives included:

- ▶ Reducing inventory risks by leveraging drop-ship models for online orders
- ▶ Providing students and alumni on the U.S. mainland with access to NMC merchandise
- ▶ Negotiating better pricing and shipping rates through collective purchasing agreements
- ▶ Introducing a broader selection of nationally recognized apparel brands

A vendor was selected that allows NMC to offer more diverse, high-quality merchandise without prohibitive shipping costs. This will benefit students on campus and expand the college's ability to sell merchandise to supporters and alumni around the world.





THE ROAD AHEAD

While the bookstore modernization project is still underway, the foundation for a more efficient, student-centered operation has been established. The integration of modern systems, automated processes, and digital learning tools will significantly improve how NMC students access course materials, use financial aid, and purchase general merchandise.

As the implementation phase progresses, MRM Consulting continues to work closely with NMC leadership, faculty, and bookstore staff to ensure a smooth transition. The lessons learned from this initiative may also serve as a model for other institutions looking to modernize their bookstore operations.

Build Your Course Materials Vision

Looking to future-proof your campus bookstore operations?

Scan or click the QR code to see how MRM Consulting can help.



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