

ACE Community Colleges endures record flooding event with soma support

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1 Introduction

ACE Community Colleges, situated across Queensland and Northern NSW campuses, has made a name for themselves in delivering quality training and education for adults since 1972. They proudly conduct their mission of guiding their student's career development and furthering their personal growth, with 94% reporting significant and positive outcomes directly related to their time with ACE.

This success has always placed great emphasis on the tools and technology utilised by the hard-working and resilient ACE team, which has led to their longstanding successful relationship with soma.

The 2017 Lismore Floods heavily impacted the ACE team and their primary Lismore campus. The upgrades to their systems and devices delivered by the soma team in its wake enabled the team to become more resilient and location-flexible in its operation. This transformation empowered ACE to effectively transition into a remote operation with the onset of the COVID pandemic and its lockdowns. You can learn more about this situation and the solution provided in our initial case study '**How a timely tech upgrade from soma helped ACE Community Colleges overcome pandemics and floods**'.

However, these upgrades and increased business flexibility and agility could only deliver so much with the unprecedented disruptions and damage that devastated their region in 2022.

We've been around since the 70s, and we've had two and a half thousand students each year doing various courses with us. We are also involved in a lot of different community projects, which keeps things interesting. soma has helped us maintain this growth and success, even through incredibly difficult times.

KERRY JOHNSON,
PRINCIPAL OF ACE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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The Situation

2022 has unfortunately been one for the history books, which is no more apparent than in the situation suffered by Lismore and the ACE campus based there.

In the aftermath of the 2017 Lismore Flooding, and still reeling from the impacts of the COVID pandemic, March 2022 delivered Eastern Australia an unprecedented flooding event, with Lismore once again devastated by its damage.

Even with preventative measures after the 2017 event, little could be done to mitigate the unprecedented flood levels in 2022, which reached an estimated 14.4 metres in height, exceeding all reported flooding records significantly. This record-breaking flood devastated the town, including the ACE campus and all its equipment. The Lismore City Council estimates that the rebuilding cost would come close to 1 billion dollars.

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On February 28th, the entire Lismore CBD was once again flooded. The day before, we moved equipment to the second floor and put it above waist height as a worst-case scenario. But come Monday, we saw the flood had far exceeded 2017 with floodwater inundating both floors of our campus. It was ferocious. We couldn't believe the whole top floor was full of mud, and the desks and everything on them was destroyed.

ERIN HUTCHINSON, OPERATIONS MANAGER AT ACE COMMUNITY COLLEGES



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soma entered the picture on the Monday it happened. I was on the phone straight to them, explaining that we needed all their team together because the campus had been wiped out, and we needed their help to figure out what to do and how to move forward. Their team is always there for us, which is wonderful, and they had already put business continuity plans in place after the last flood and were ready to help us get everyone up and running again.

ERIN HUTCHINSON,
OPERATIONS MANAGER AT ACE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Enter soma

The flood damage stretched beyond the campus, with staff experiencing impacts and damage to their own homes. Erin quickly established who was willing and able to work remotely and who needed to be supported with time off. As she elaborated, her goal was to 'get as many people up and running as they could so people felt less helpless. We just told our staff that for those that can work, soma would assist them, and for those that can't work, don't worry about it.'

soma quickly re-established phone communications, redirected campus landlines to mobile devices and promptly ordered and set up all the technology in ACE staff homes to get them back up and running.

The soma staff personally delivered the technology, including laptops, to both staff and students. They took the time to set up the systems for the staff and guided them through comfortably operating from their homes.

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Outcomes

Whilst the impacts are still very significant for ACE Colleges and Lismore in general, and insurance, building infrastructure and face-to-face education is still a work in progress, the ACE team were fortunate soma's quick support and effective business continuity delivery prior to and post flood has provided progress and a path forward.

ACE was able to avoid losing student records this time around due to soma providing a cloud-based file management system, and Erin and her team deciding 'paper is no longer a friend'. A lot of data they rely on that had been lost previously in 2017 was not impacted this time around as a result.

ACE has now moved to a structure where they will provide laptops for the entire campus, a project already well underway with soma's fast ordering and delivery. They will no longer rely on on-premises computer rooms for their technology and will continue providing remote education.

Erin sums up the experience with hope for a more resilient future and feels fortunate for her relationship with soma to ensure that both staff and students were supported and for ACE to continue to provide the important educational services they deliver to their community.





We were very lucky that in such a disaster, soma was just a phone call away. We were able to set up a meeting within the first week, and I went, ‘right, I’ve got no idea’, and we were all under such stress. But the soma team were there throughout the whole thing, both professionally and personally. I can’t fault them. They did a fantastic job, and I really was appreciative of the support they gave us during what was just an unbelievable time for us.

ERIN HUTCHINSON,
OPERATIONS MANAGER AT ACE COLLEGES

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arrange a free consultation and quote.

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