



appsembler



Progress[®] Chef[®]

Case Study

Chef Software removes operational issues in Learn Chef, their education-as-marketing, online university

Background

Founded in 2008, **Chef Software** is a Seattle-based software company that builds DevOps automation tools. Their products enable enterprises to overcome the complexities involved with automating their infrastructure, security, systems, and applications. Approximately 70% of Chef's clients are Fortune 1000 companies, including SAP, IBM, CapitalOne, TESCO, Walmart, and Rakuten. Chef open-sourced their full product suite in 2019 and in 2020, the company was estimated to have annual recurring revenue (ARR) of \$70 million. In the fall of 2020, Chef announced that they were being acquired by Progress Software for \$220 million.

Fast Facts



Customer Since
2020



Use Case
Developer Education



Appsembler Products
Appsembler Tahoe
and Virtual Labs



Industry
Computer Software



Size
Mid Enterprise



Locations
United States, Netherlands



Company Website
www.chef.io

The Challenge

Chef's Developer Advocacy and Marketing Team was responsible for increasing the awareness and adoption of Chef's products with the DevOps audience. To do so, Chef built educational product courses, which proved to be an effective way to attract technical buyers like DevOps, software engineers, and system administrators. And to deliver those product experiences, Chef used LearnDot for certifications, course bookings, and the course landing pages; TrueAbility for assessments; in-person proctors to monitor certification exams; Amazon for hosting and deployment of the online university; and Google Analytics to track learner activity. Chef's courses did not have a hands-on product sandbox.

This disparate architecture resulted in several challenges:

- 1 Archaic deployment of online courses and a glacial pace for making the smallest changes (e.g. typos) in the course curriculum;
- 2 Changes to courses and curriculum required an outage in the publicly-facing university;
- 3 A ballooned cost structure because of expensive 3rd party systems and in-person proctors;
- 4 No central location for all of Chef's learning content;
- 5 No hands-on product sandboxes offered to technical buyers; and
- 6 Inaccurate reporting.

Despite these challenges, **Learn Chef was the company's largest lead generator – but these challenges needed a resolution.**



“Hands-on product sandboxes are so important. We need these environments to be able to spin-up the product quickly and to have everything what learners need in order to learn Chef's products. If they have to learn how to setup an environment just so they can learn about your product, they're not going to stick around.”

**– Jody Wolfborn,
Senior Developer Advocate**

The Solution

When Chef's Developer Advocacy and Marketing Team embarked on the journey to improve Learn Chef, they were only looking for a solution-provider who would help them add a hands-on product sandbox to their online university. When they discussed their plans with TrueAbility, their assessments and proctoring provider, TrueAbility referred them to Appsembler.

When Chef contacted Appsembler to learn about their hands-on product sandboxes, they discovered that Appsembler had a product sandbox platform and an online university that was purpose-built for delivering training to technical audiences like DevOps and developers. So what initially started as a procurement discussion for Appsembler's virtual labs platform evolved into an exploration of how Appsembler could fully-replace Chef's entire technology stack (hosting, course registration, landing pages, certifications, hands-on sandboxes, and integration with Chef's marketing automation). Chef was also delighted by Appsembler's features that were geared specifically for developer education, for example, displaying code snippets:



“We have code snippets in our courses and learners needed to be able to cut-and-paste it, and we wanted it displayed in markdown format. The vast majority of vendors I spoke to just took a screenshot of the code and put the picture in the course. They didn't get it. And there are a lot of nuggets like this in Appsembler that shows how purpose-built the platform is for developer education.”

**– Kimball Johnson,
Senior Developer Advocate**



The Results

Learn Chef was already the company's largest lead generator, but moving to Appsembler removed the operational and deployment issues Chef faced, drastically lowered its cost structure, and improved the experience for DevOps learners. It was a goldilocks outcome of cost reduction, better operational efficiency, and happier customers. Specifically for Chef's Developer Advocacy Team, Appsembler accelerated how fast they could add and modify courses. It also removed the need for them to manage the logistics of the university and its learners, allowing them to focus their efforts on course creation. Finally, they could build a centralized location for all of Chef's technical courses with the added enhancement of frictionless product sandboxes:



“Within Appsembler Virtual Labs, learners have all of the Chef software setup. Learners can launch commands in their browser using a remotely-provisioned virtual machine. Developers don’t have to install anything on their local machine, worry about setting-up a virtual box, or worry about which operating system they’re using. It just works in the browser without any problems.”

– Kimball Johnson, Senior Developer Advocate

The positive results of Chef's partnership with Appsembler also extended to Chef's Marketing Team.

They gained a much deeper level of integration with their marketing automation software, Marketo, along with an endless list of activities/events that they could use to trigger marketing campaigns. Without Appsembler, marketing campaigns were triggered with high-level, non-targeted learner activities. With Appsembler, marketing campaigns could and were triggered based on course sign-ups, course start and/or completions, section start and/or completions, and other learner- and event-based activities. The ease with which Chef's Marketing Team could trigger campaigns resulted in a sudden influx of highly-targeted, audience-specific, well-timed marketing messages that had a significant and positive impact on Learn Chef's monthly active users (MAU) – so much so that within 12 months, Chef needed to expand their contract with Appsembler.



“How are we using all of this data? We're creating personas that enables us to market better and we have a better picture of who's using Learn Chef. Our sales team can also see if their accounts are active in Learn Chef, do better campaign targeting, and improved reporting. We are loving this investment into Learn Chef and are renewing with Appsembler.”

– April Nash, Marketing Operations Manager



Ready to get started?

Visit us at appsembler.com to speak to our team or get a live demo.