



## Collaborating to change lives

**Per Scholas** is an American not for profit that drives positive and proven social change in communities across the country by preparing motivated and curious adults who are un- or underemployed for successful careers as IT professionals. Per Scholas provides IT solutions in six cities across the United States. Per Scholas is growing fast and needed a tool that could connect and give employees a voice while enabling them to drive collaboration across their expanding number of locations. They needed a platform that would empower their workforce and foster a strong sense of corporate culture across the organization.

Previously, Per Scholas had tried to solve this problem by building an intranet using a third-party vendor tool. By replacing this with Jostle's **People Engagement**® platform, Per Scholas was able to solve their biggest pain points. Within weeks of implementing the platform, employee engagement has risen drastically, staff across different sites are collaborating on projects, and a stronger sense of community and purpose has begun to emerge.

<b>Company:</b>	Per Scholas
<b>Size &amp; Locations:</b>	76 employees across six locations in the USA
<b>Sector:</b>	Nonprofit / Education
<b>Interviewee:</b>	Kenneth Walker, Vice President of National Site Operations Jerome Dazzell, Director, Information Systems Emalee Rodriguez, Talent and Internal Communications Manager
<b>Participation:</b>	<b>91%</b> weekly <b>100%</b> monthly



## Who is Per Scholas?

Per Scholas is a United States national nonprofit that provides rigorous and tuition-free technology training and professional development to people who are unemployed or in low-wage jobs. They help people launch successful and life-changing careers in technology, creating on-ramps to businesses in need of their talents. Per Scholas works closely with local employers to tailor their training and certifications to the staffing needs of local companies. The organization aims to build diversity in the IT industry by creating opportunities for women and people of color, both drastically underrepresented groups in IT employment. 90% of Per Scholas' students are people of color, one third are women, and one third are disconnected young adults.

To date, Per Scholas has trained and helped over 5,400 people build rewarding, lucrative careers in IT. The organization is headquartered in the South Bronx of New York City but over the last few years has expanded its operations throughout the nation, with remote offices in Atlanta, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dallas, and Silver Spring.



Per Scholas students in an interactive classroom

## **Intranet 1.0: content not community**

With a team of nearly 80 employees dispersed across six offices, Per Scholas needed a tool that would enable intra-site communication, cross-functional collaboration, and a platform on which they could shape, define, and celebrate their corporate culture.

In 2012, after experiencing rapid expansion from a localized to nation-wide nonprofit, Per Scholas was looking for a platform that could connect and engage its employees around the country. They decided to build their own platform making use of Google Sites. Per Scholas took a traditional content-centric approach to the creation and implementation of their first intranet.

Six months into using the new platform, nicknamed “Intranet 1.0”, the company started facing challenges around their culture of communication. Most employees were using Intranet 1.0 as a content repository to gather HR documents rather than a central collaborative hub. New hires logged onto it during their initial on-boarding, but beyond that, it was generally not used. Only two or three employees were given administrative access to update content on the intranet site, further lowering engagement rates.

Emalee Rodriguez, Talent and Internal Communications Manager, gave us this background on their structure: “The way that our organization is set up is that we have all of the ‘national support’ - our HR department, our marketing department, development, finance, IT, basically all of the operational functions, in the New York office. Any information that was org-wide was really hard to get everywhere. Our inboxes are crazy filled, so we really had no way of knowing if an email we sent was read or received, and we were just finding a lot of breakdown in the way that we were working together.”

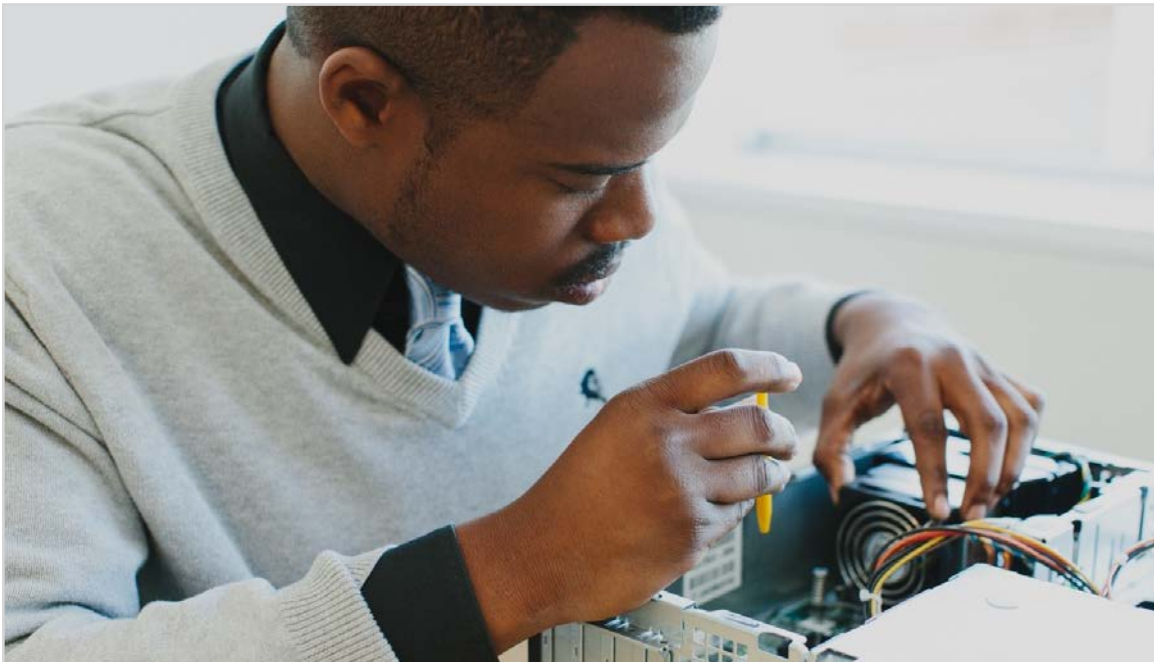
Per Scholas recognized that their needs had outgrown the original parameters of Intranet 1.0. Apart from the amazing work they do every day, one of Per Scholas’ major objectives is to become one of the best nonprofits to work for in America by 2020. With this long-term goal in mind, driving forward a strong and consistent corporate culture across all sites was a priority. With their current framework, internal communications at Per Scholas were just not being delivered in a way that would enable this to happen.



## A need for change

The management team decided to send out a company-wide survey to see how staff felt about levels of employee engagement and corporate culture at Per Scholas. With the survey, the management team at Per Scholas was able to hone in on their major pain points.

After having grown so quickly in such a short period of time, Intranet 1.0 did not allow them to keep track of company-wide happenings. Things like news of a staff member joining the team, or a company-wide announcement were going undetected. Even key pieces of intellectual property were not flowing through the organization the way they wanted it to. The organization still felt New York-centric, something they wanted to shift away from.



A Per Scholas student working in a hands-on classroom

Kenneth Walker, Vice President of National Site Operations, shared this about their situation: “We had to do some self-reflection on where we were as an organization and what were the key things we needed to focus on moving forward. After doing that reflection, it was a matter of looking at tools that might aid us in some of the areas that staff said we needed to focus on.”

## Choosing the right tool

While evaluating various tools, Per Scholas was turned off by the complexity of other intranet platforms. They wanted something that they could use right away and that required minimal implementation from the IT department.

“When we looked at the **Jostle**® platform we were thrilled that we didn’t have to figure out APIs or additional programming. The product came right out of the box and met a lot of our needs, and that was really important,” said Kenneth.

## Launching with momentum

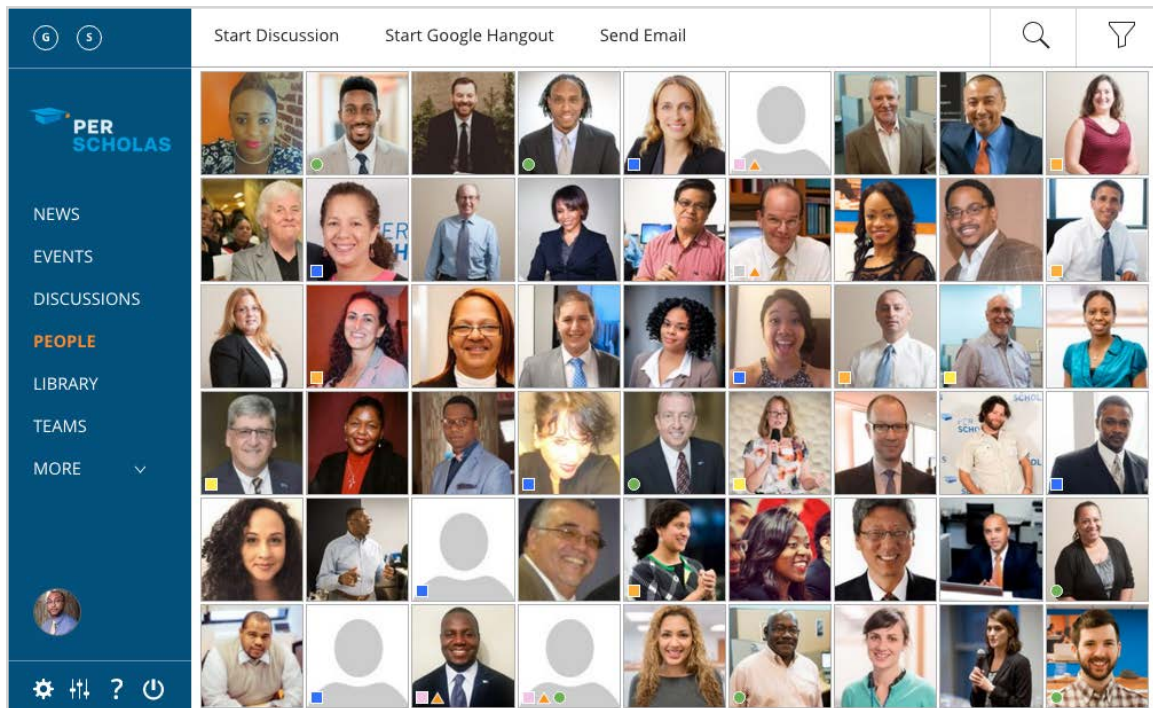
After deciding to go with the Jostle platform, Per Scholas designed a roll-out plan over the three weeks leading up to their official company-wide Jostle intranet launch to generate buzz and educate employees. With weekly 30-minute meet-ups, Per Scholas’ staff learned about how to use the platform and its various capabilities in a casual and fun setting. By getting employees both educated and excited about the Jostle intranet, Per Scholas created the perfect launch pad from which employees could jump into using the platform.

In mid-April 2016, Per Scholas had a string of very successful Jostle intranet launch parties across all six sites, complete with refreshments, trivia, dancing, and a company-wide address from CEO, Plinio Ayala. Following the launches, employees at Per Scholas started to become much more active on the company intranet. The buzz created in the lead up really encouraged employees from all different sites to get their hands dirty and start exploring the platform for themselves.

Emalee shared: “Leading up to the launch, we demonstrated all the features to get our people jazzed about what they could do on this platform. However, they could not get on it yet, which created a lot of buzz. Once we gave them access right before the official launch, everyone was psyched. Everyone was commenting on DISCUSSIONS and using the Shout-Outs and Activity feed. We found that to be really successful.”







PEOPLE in Per Scholas' new Jostle intranet

## The impact: many voices – one culture

The new Per Scholas intranet immediately helped change the way employees communicated and interacted with one another across the organization. Within a few weeks of implementation, what was once a static content repository became a dynamic and engaging collaborative hub. What at one time felt like a New York-based organization, now felt like a truly national not-for-profit with six locations, each with their own exciting contributions and ideas. For the first time, it really felt as though every employee at Per Scholas had their own voice, which contributed to a positive and unified corporate culture.

Each of the sites began taking ownership of new projects by brainstorming ideas and interacting through the Jostle platform. Kenneth gave this example: “Cincinnati is working on a pilot Quality Assurance (QA) course after collaborating with members of the New York team who had recently and successfully, implemented a part-time QA and full-time Software Testing course. As a New York headquartered organization, it is important for employees to see growth happening at sites outside of New York. With the Jostle platform, the spotlight is

able to shine the light on Cincinnati's growth, spreading the wealth and giving everyone a voice to showcase what's going on that's new in their market, which is very cool."

Since launching their Jostle intranet, collaboration across Per Scholas' sites has also increased significantly. For instance, a staff member at the New York office responsible for corporate engagement and working with alumni started a company-wide discussion on how to more effectively engage alumni in 2016. Employees from other sites began to chime in and give suggestions when, in the past, they wouldn't have even known about the initiative in the first place. Using the Jostle platform, the miles separating these employees no longer prevents them from collaborating and coming up with exciting concepts and ideas – and implementing them.

*"Just seeing the people-centric aspect of it, seeing all 76 employees able to look at each other and look at their bio, and knowing who to go to for what, was really important. It serves to help with the connectedness and sense of culture across our sites."*



**Kenneth Walker**

Vice President of National Site Operations

Information and intellectual property has begun to flow much more freely after the implementation of Per Scholas' new intranet. In NEWS, Per Scholas employees are able to get a first-hand look at company ongoings and updates without having to sift through tens of emails. The ability to make mandatory-to-read documents means that management can keep track of who is up-to-date with what. With the facilitated flow of information, employees have really begun to keep up and be involved in company happenings in a way that could not happen before.

This heightened sense of collaboration and communication has also had a positive impact on the organization's culture. With the Jostle platform, all 76 staff members at Per Scholas are able to speak up and have a voice in the organization. Participation rates have gone through the roof, with weekly participation rates of over 90% across the business.

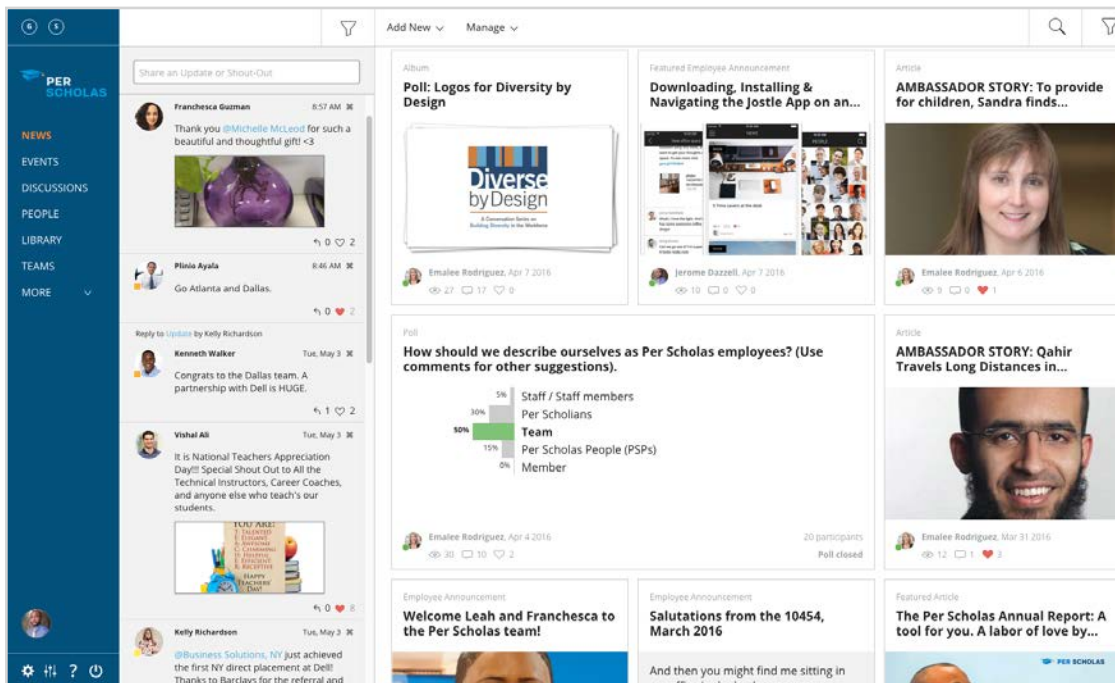


*“We thought that we would have had to spend a little bit more time guiding staff on how to utilize DISCUSSIONS, but it was really interesting to see all of the conversations that were happening both at an org-wide and private level. For me, that is a really good indicator that our staff’s engagement level on the Jostle platform is very high, and we want to keep it that way.”*



**Jerome Dazzell**  
Director, Information Systems

When everyone has a voice, everyone feels as though they matter. When everyone in an organization feels like they matter, a sense of community, belonging, and purpose starts to shine through. Jostle has provided Per Scholas with a platform that will grow with them and facilitate the expansion of their incredible operation to new levels, new places, and new achievements. We’re proud to be their partner on this exciting journey.



Dynamic NEWS in Per Scholas' Jostle intranet





## What's next for Per Scholas?

The future of Per Scholas is bright. The organization plans to expand their operation once again by opening a brand new office in Brooklyn, New York later this year. They have also hired a PR agency to spearhead a new nationwide communications strategy. With the addition of the PR team to their roster, Per Scholas hopes to initiate a wider conversation around non-traditional ways to break into IT with diverse demographics. With their Jostle intranet on their dashboard along with remarkable skill, passion, and determination, there's no doubt this nonprofit will have the tools necessary to achieve all of these goals and more.

*"I would say the way that we communicate has become tremendously more dynamic than the way that it was in the past."*



**Emalee Rodriguez**

Talent and Internal Communications Manager

## About Jostle Corporation

Jostle is the creator of a new kind of intranet that is designed to help leaders engage their workforce. Its elegance and relevance yield exceptional participation rates – exceeding five times industry standards. Jostle's intranet is turnkey, cloud-based, and requires no IT resources. For more information contact [info@jostle.me](mailto:info@jostle.me) or visit us online at [www.jostle.me](http://www.jostle.me).

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