



2014 BETT Show Round-Up

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Having travelled across the world to attend the BETT (British Education and Training Technology), the largest educational technology show in the world, with international content and exhibitors, it is evident that technology in teaching and training is vital to the transformation of African and especially South African education.

BETT is a global meeting place for anyone who is passionate about the transformational power of learning technology. Every year, thousands of educators visit the show to see the latest in technology for learning. A myriad of speakers presented on an extensive range of topics, many of which (including Google), emphasised the need for students to be prepared for jobs that do not yet exist.

“Chalk and talk” is becoming outdated in developed countries with the focus on creative thinking and problem solving skills, in order to develop the entrepreneurs of the future. South Africa has a rich, diverse and creative talent pool which can now join the rest of the world, to avoid being left behind, by taking e-learning seriously. BETT highlighted some core building blocks of school improvement across the rest of the developed world: Solutions for Learning with tablet-based curriculum delivery Travis Allen, a young entrepreneur from Georgia, asked the audience to imagine being born in the early 90s, and now being a student in the digital information age, where students don’t relate to outdated textbooks with no interaction and gain little from cramming, which is often instantly forgotten.

Mobile learning is the way of the future giving students access to rich and engaging learning resources 24/7. However, barriers to adoption include outdated mind sets and approach and the poor practice of buying tablet hardware rather than tablet-based education solutions.

One to one programs inherently require that an enterprise, high-density wireless (Wi-Fi) network be installed across the entire school/university. Enterprise grade wireless network technologies were on display at BETT and the underlying message was that connectivity is not capacity and adding hundreds and thousands of students to consumer grade existing Wi-Fi networks at school will be a catastrophic failure.

In speaking to Ruckus Wireless they were blown away by the growth in demand for their solutions as schools continue to roll out at an increasing rate. Ruckus has been installed in nearly 600 schools across the UK alone and in an estimated 5 000 education institutions worldwide.

Tablets on Wi-Fi in education provide many benefits

- It’s about the overall solution – a tablet on its own regardless of what’s on it is not the answer;
- Align with the way teachers teach – the solution must support and supplement the teaching;
- Data driven management decisions – clearly beyond tablets is management information, integrated with the learning.

Without accurate student performance data provided by sophisticated real-time analysis tools, which are available to take e-learning to the next level (as in the UK and elsewhere globally), it will be impossible for schools to make informed operational decisions.

A single database has become vital to schools to enable teachers, administrators, management and parents to have a tailored view into a learner’s performance and progress

Rich content tailored to student learning styles

It seems that while “apps” were very much the “answer” in the past, progressive educators are realising that they

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augment, and not replace resources by a skilled teacher. The customising of “own” resources blended with the “best of the rest” is where excellent education lies.

By offering a range of ways to learn, self-assess and set targets, students are empowered and encouraged to believe that education belongs to the individual exercising their right to make the best of their potential.

It was clear that **technology must serve education and never vice versa**. Great lessons exist within parameters of teacher control and without this control technology becomes at best a distraction and at worst a serious impediment to the education it promises to serve.

BETT clearly revealed that many vendors are now building ed-tech from the ground up and not simply making minor changes to consumer devices with the hope that somehow they will fit into excellent education.

Integral Parental engagement through technology

Einstein once noted that “not everything that matters can be measured and not everything that can be measured matters”. Whilst this may be true, ed-tech is giving parents a valuable “real-time” insight into how their children are achieving, through Virtual Learning Environments and Management Information Systems. Ed-tech can be at the forefront of sharing the good with the bad. Maybe it is time to start “catching” kids doing right and reframing the triangle between parents, teachers and students.

Integrated solutions are emerging:

- Single sign on; Information sharing between systems – removing duplication;
- Automation is reducing the need for technicians and lowering costs while improving service;
- Simple yet powerful solutions = lower cost = more money for rich resources.

No one system does all of these, and hence the many exhibitors – a truly eye opening experience! ●