

Software for the Agile Business.



John Paul College: Meeting individual learning Styles with the Tablet PC

Company Profile

Located twenty minutes south of Brisbane, John Paul College is Queensland's first ecumenical Christian school. Born out of cooperation between the local Catholic, Anglican and Uniting churches, the College was founded in 1982 with 144 students and has grown to become the state's largest school with 2,600 students. The college is governed by a board of directors elected by John Paul College Limited and is administered by a headmaster. The college is a completely independent entity, which allows for great autonomy and flexibility in its operations.

Over its twenty-year history, John Paul College has established itself as a leader of educational excellence and innovation. From the outset, the school has been dedicated to a philosophy of education which places the student firmly at the centre of the learning process. This philosophy has been the driving force behind many of the school's initiatives including an extensive and integrated use of technology across the curriculum.

Business Scenario

With all students from years 5 to 12, and all teachers, having their own notebook computers, the College is considered a world leader in the use of technology for learning. Supported by a sophisticated wireless network providing campus-wide access to the Internet and digital resources, and a Web-enabled interactive learning environment powered by Microsoft Class Server, students and teachers at John Paul College are well-prepared for anytime, anywhere at any time learning. Headmaster, Stephen Paul, says: "We are completely committed to a student centred education and technology enables us to successfully create that. Technology moves the focus of power from the teacher to the student. It empowers the students and enables them to customise their education to suite their learning needs."

With such a significant commitment to the use of technology for learning, the college is constantly looking for new and better ways to provide this integration. With the announcement of the new Tablet PC, they were keen to investigate its potential for both student and teacher use.

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Tony Carrucan

Director of Technology and

Information,

John Paul College

Organisation

John Paul College

Web Site

www.jpc.qld.edu.au

Industry

Education

Business Scenario Summary

As one of Australia's leading schools, Queensland-based John Paul College is committed to placing the student at the centre of the learning process. Part of this commitment is to constantly look for new and better ways to cater for each student's individual learning style.

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Business Solution

John Paul College trialed a number of Acer TravelMate C100 Tablet PCs with its students and staff to evaluate the potential of the devices within their school environment. Carrucan says: "Deploying the Tablets was very straightforward. The college currently uses Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional as the basis of its Managed Operating Environment and because the Tablet PC uses an optimised version of the Windows XP Professional operating system it integrated simply and seamlessly into the existing college network."

Digital Ink

The Acer Tablet PC was created with a distinctive convertible design that allows it to be used in either the traditional Notebook PC form or to swivel its screen 180° and fold it back upon itself to become a full writing Tablet. In Tablet mode, users can then write directly on the screen and their handwriting is instantly interpreted by the device.

To make the most of the handwriting feature, Windows XP Professional Edition for Tablet PC incorporates a new application called Microsoft Journal. Journal is a unique writing application which enables the user to write with "digital ink" to create handwritten notes. Although these notes are able to be easily converted to text, they are also fully searchable. This powerful feature enables users to take many pages of handwritten notes, including the ability to draw, diagram and annotate, but unlike notes written on paper, they can then be easily searched for key words or phrases.

Handwriting on a computer opens up a range of possibilities for note-taking in class or in meetings as they can be saved, emailed, printed or archived the same way regular typed text can be, without changing their original handwritten form.

Benefits

Improved mobility and productivity

Mathematics teacher Terrence McCorkell was immediately struck by the greater mobility of the Tablet PC. "As a high school maths teacher, I am always moving from room to room so the improved portability of the Tablet PC made a big difference to me. The fact that it is so light and small makes it much easier to carry around. It also has a smaller footprint on the desk, so it is much more convenient than a regular Notebook PC because it can easily fit along with all my other books and papers." The advanced power management features of Windows XP also add some unique benefits. "I find I tend to use it more regularly because even when I hibernate it at the end of a lesson, it wakes up almost instantly when I get to the next class. This means it is more convenient for me to use and I find myself using it to do things that I just never bothered to do with a regular Notebook PC."

The other aspect of the Tablet PC's portability is its built-in wireless connectivity and long battery life. "I can roam freely around the college

Business Solution Summary

With its ability to offer a variety of configurations, interface styles and input methods, the Tablet PC provides some unique advantages to schools. Coupled with its improved mobility through its light weight, small size and minimal footprint, the Tablet PC demonstrates its great potential in the classroom.

Partner Details

Acer Computer

Tel: (02) 8762 3217

Email: aleone@acer.com.au

Web: www.acer.com.au

and be constantly connected to the network. The wireless connectivity is excellent and seems much more robust than my regular Notebook PC," comments McCorkell.

"The other thing I really like about the Tablet PC," he says, "is the handwriting recognition. It easily recognised my writing the very first time I used it; now I use it to take notes in class and staff meetings which is replacing my paper notepad. Apart from the fact that writing is such a natural means of input, it is also far less intrusive than having a Notebook PC propped open on the table in front of me in meetings."

Express ideas clearly and creatively

Educational researcher Howard Gardner had a profound influence on teaching and learning when he proposed his Theory of Multiple Intelligences; - the idea that each person learns best if they can learn in a particular way. For example, visual learners tend to learn best by seeing things. Year 11 student, Oressia Zalucki, identifies herself as a student who learns best in an auditory manner – by speaking and hearing information.

For Zalucki, the Tablet PC's in-built Speech Recognition capabilities were extremely useful. "I actually prefer to speak and listen when I learn, so I like the way I can use speech to dictate notes into the Tablet PC and have it type them for me," she says. "I found it very easy to set up the speech recognition and it worked very well for me, even without much training."

The other significant benefit identified by Zalucki was the Tablet's light weight. She notes that, for a student, the idea of having a single lightweight device which can do all the things her regular Notebook PC computer can do while also serving as a notebook, textbook and sketchpad means she has less to carry around from class to class. "It's really practical having everything in one place," she remarks.

Capture powerful ideas

Bradley Duffy teaches in the primary school at John Paul College and uses his Tablet PC to cater for a range of different learning styles in his classroom. Because he is always in the same classroom with his students, he often uses his Tablet PC as a digital blackboard.

Connecting the device to a large screen in his classroom, he uses the tablet to write, draw, annotate and brainstorm ideas with his students. Unlike a regular blackboard, the Tablet PC enables him to integrate a range of digital resources – pictures, sounds, Websites - to create powerful and compelling lessons. "The students really like it because it's so different", he notes. At the end of a lesson, the "blackboard" can be saved, complete with all the handwritten notes. "I like the feeling of interacting with the screen using a pen. I find it much more natural than a mouse," says Duffy. "It provides the tactile feeling that I think is missing in traditional computers."

Technology

The Tablet PC hardware is provided by a number of vendors, but John Paul College use TravelMate C100 units made by Acer. With its clever folding screen design, the Acer unit can be operated like a regular Notebook PC computer but convert easily and quickly into a hand-held writing Tablet form factor.

Benefits

Students and staff were impressed by the increased mobility of the unit due to its small size, light weight, long battery life and built-in wireless capability.

Users found the device's ability to operate in a number of configurations enabled them to choose to use it in a way which seemed most natural for them. Some preferred to handwrite in Tablet mode, some preferred the speech recognition and others chose to use it like a regular Notebook PC. The school was impressed by the device's ability to offer choice to the user.

This ability to operate in a number of modes, and to enable users to choose the method of interaction which best suits them, is an attractive feature for John Paul College. Carrucan says, "The school is committed to providing students with learning tools which cater to individual differences. We use the notebook PC in a range of ways fairly extensively throughout our learning. But one of the drawbacks is that it's one-dimensional – the students have to use the keyboard to enter data and interact with their machine. With the Tablet PC, we can integrate in a range of ways that cater for the individual learning differences. That's a real positive for us".

The power and simplicity of Windows XP Professional

The operating system for the device is Microsoft Windows XP Tablet PC Edition, a superset of Windows XP Professional that provides all the existing capabilities of Windows XP Professional, plus the enhanced functionality to support handwriting input as well as a range of optimised features. These features include Microsoft Journal, the Tablet PC Input Panel (a virtual keyboard within the operating system), handwriting and speech input and customised features for Microsoft Office XP. The device can also be optimised for both left- and right-handedness which delivers the best user experience and works in a more natural way.

Maximising Success

In line with the philosophy that after sales service/support is one of the most enduring aspect of owning a computer, the Acer Tablet PC offers a unique two-hour Express Service, so, in the event that something should go wrong, the owner can be confident that it will have a minimal impact on their productivity.

Although John Paul College has its own excellent onsite computer service centre, it is reassuring to know that the Tablets are also extensively supported by the manufacturer.

The Future

The Tablet PC pilot at John Paul College proved that the Tablet form factor offers ideal benefits in an educational setting. The smaller size and light weight offered significant advantages in portability and mobility, while the ability to accept input in a variety of ways was seen as a powerful way to cater for different learning styles. Using Microsoft Windows XP Professional as the underlying technology delivers the security, reliability and manageability that John Paul College requires. Microsoft, together with third-party software vendors, will develop customised applications in order to take advantage of the new Tablet PC functionality. Many of these applications will be leveraged by educational institutions. As Carrucan observes: "The Tablet PC would seem to be an ideal choice for schools as it enables better access and greater choice in how it gets used."

Microsoft Technology

- Microsoft Windows XP Tablet PC Edition
- Microsoft Office XP
- Microsoft Office XP "Add-On" for Tablet PC

Other Technology

- Acer TravelMate C100 Tablet PC



For more information

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