Gateshead College: iPads for e-Governance

Summary

Gateshead College adopted the use of iPads in all board meetings in 2011. The tablet computers have made the meetings more efficient and significantly reduced the use of paper.

The iPad has proven to be a popular ‘green’ option and also helps streamline the management of information.

About Gateshead College

Based in the North East of England, Gateshead College offers further education to 16-18 year olds, higher education, apprenticeships, part-time adult learning and training for employers.
**Board of Governors**

Gateshead College's Board of Governors is responsible for the strategic direction of the College, its mission, and the effective and efficient use of College resources. It is made up of representatives from a variety of backgrounds and sectors.

**The challenge**

Board meetings generally involve a lot of paperwork, which raises a few issues:

- Posting board meeting paperwork to the members can be expensive and sometimes involves express couriers when documents have been added or changed at the last moment.
- Some board members spend much of their time travelling, which makes it difficult to get the correct paperwork to them in time and much of that travel time is weighed down by thousands of pages of board meeting paperwork.
- Board members are often on the board or committees of multiple companies, resulting in even more paperwork they have to deal with.
- The high cost associated with paper and printing.
- The archive of the paperwork takes up a lot of storage space.
- The use of all that paper is environmentally unfriendly.

Allan Steele, Chair of Governance & Search Committee and Chair of Remuneration Committee proposed to trade paper in for a portable digital device to the Board of Governors at Gateshead College. The aim was to make the board meetings more efficient and environmentally friendly.

**The activity**

The board decided to trial the Apple iPad2. A board member who had worked with this particular tablet at another organisation had recommended it.

**Trial**

Before introducing all board members to the iPad, many of whom were not acquainted with this type of portable digital technology, two board members used the iPad for a few meetings to test its suitability. They also trialled different applications (Apps) for sharing documents and decided that ‘Dropbox’ worked best.

**Dropbox**

Dropbox is a free App (up to 2GB of storage is free) and any file that is saved to Dropbox is also instantly saved to other computers and phones that are linked to that account. At Gateshead College, the Clerk to Governors adds the board reports and other information to her Dropbox and it is then also instantly uploaded to the linked board members’ accounts.
**Introduction & Training**

After the initial trial, the iPads were introduced to all board members. A member of Gateshead College’s IT team gave an introductory session about the use of iPads and board members can follow up by contacting him at any time if they encounter a problem with their iPad. Most board members started using the iPad straight away, only a few preferred to continue to use the paper-based system.

**The outcome**

The iPads have been used in Gateshead College’s board meetings since 2011 and the majority of board members are happy using them. Only a few board members decided they preferred using the paper based reports.

Although IT support is available, the iPad has proved to be very intuitive and IT support has rarely been required.

**The impact**

- The iPad receives high marks for increasing efficiency:
  - The structure of the meetings has improved, as the board members can be sure that the reports are the current version and can be found easily.
  - The iPad has also made it easier to deliver information to board members prior to and in-between meetings.

- Although Gateshead College hasn’t calculated the exact figure, there has certainly been a cost saving in terms of paper/printing costs, postage and staff time. Plus, Apps such as Dropbox make for an efficient and easy way to store records long term, thus freeing up physical office space.

- Using the iPad has made the board meetings more environmentally friendly by practically eliminating the use of paper.

Bob Bell, Board of Governors Co-optee, said: ‘The chosen system of iPads accessing documents from the ‘Dropbox’ system has been very effective. College administrators ‘post’ meeting papers into ‘Dropbox’ which Governors access before and during meetings.’

‘Not only are there cost savings and reduction of paper wastage- there is better control of which versions Governors are able to access and late papers do not have to be expensively couriered around to Governors homes. Oh – and the Governors enjoy having the iPads too...’

**The lessons learned**
**Wireless**

To open documents in Dropbox, an internet connection is required. To make sure all board members can open the documents during the meeting, they are advised to open them beforehand. The documents can be left opened on the iPad, so there is no need for a wireless signal. An alternative solution is to use the Kindle App and upload the documents in there, before the meeting starts.

This has been the method used at Gateshead College and everybody manages fine during the meetings without having wireless access.

**Useful links**

- JISC RSC Northern
- Gateshead College

**Links to related case studies**

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