Hopwood Hall College: Touchscreen technology overtakes interactive whiteboards as interactive teaching tool of choice

Summary

Hopwood Hall is adopting the use of touch screen technology and gradually replacing its interactive whiteboards to improve access to interactive learning. The touch screen monitors connected to LCD TV's provide a cheaper classroom build with technology that's more user-friendly and better suited to classroom delivery. Until now, interactive boards had been the mainstay of classrooms but they created teaching barriers for staff including the additional software to learn and master. They are also expensive and often have usability issues with 'pens' not working or having a delay when used as the mouse tool.

About Hopwood Hall College

Hopwood Hall College is one of Greater Manchester's leading Colleges, offering a wide range of part-time, further and higher education courses. Significant, ongoing investment in the facilities at both the Rochdale and Middleton campuses ensures that learners have the best possible opportunities for progression.

The two campuses are situated five miles apart to the north-east of Manchester. They have a wide range of student facilities and support networks across both sites.

The challenge

One of the core issues with the interactive whiteboards was that only about 20% of teachers were using them because they had problems with the technology and some didn’t want to risk using it again after having just one bad experience.

The biggest challenge with implementing the change was from senior management because they had a standard build for classes which was a projector with an interactive whiteboard.
Scott Anderton, e-Learning Manager comments: "They envisaged what we had as ‘a class of the future’ but as technology has moved on, I would say that it was ‘a class of now.’”

The cost of replacing the current equipment before it needed to be was also an issue as classrooms had only been upgraded to Promethean Interactive whiteboards over the last three years.

As such, a decision was taken in February this year to start a touchscreen pilot in four rooms that weren’t using any whiteboards so that the existing technology wasn’t wasted.

**The activity**

- Staff using the four classrooms that didn’t have whiteboards were trained using Windows 7 Touch Pack, which is installed on each PC and free. The feedback from staff is they are more relaxed with the touch screen as they are using software that is familiar to them and already present on their staff room machines.

- The Hopwood Hall touch screens are connected to the PCs running its virtual Windows 7 environment. The screens are ‘plug and play’ so no additional software is required to get started straight away.

- The screens can be used with fingers or with an ordinary pen. Users interact with Windows and are able to use either Paint, or PowerPoint to write and annotate on the board. This makes them more accessible as most interactive boards use their own bespoke software.

- Learners share the same advantages and bigger screens provide multi-touch capabilities. A 75" screen provides 26 multi-touch options. They are currently using 22" monitors projecting onto 42" - 50" LCD screens. The 22" monitors allow for 2 multi-touch, so you can use both hands, or learners can collaborate.

**The outcomes**

The benefits of touch screens include:

- No longer is the teacher casting a shadow on the board, or having their back turned to the class

- It uses the same kind of technology as that in phones

- Dozens of touch points can be supported at once

- It works with pen and touch
They are resilient and easy-to-use nature of touch-screen devices make them suitable for users of all ages and skill levels.

Since the act of touching is instinctive, touch-screen devices are relatively simple to operate.

The impact

The financial impact was significant with the touch screens representing much better value for money than interactive white boards. The total cost of implementation is £800 per room, as opposed to the interactive board build of between £2,500 - £3,500 per room.

The cost of maintaining the touch screens has also not thrown up any problems, the most likely replacement cost is the TV but they are much easier to fix as you can just replace that part individually.

Scott Anderton, e-Learning Manager

Scott tells us: “Teachers have been really positive about it. One thing you don’t want to worry about is technology - if you have a bad experience with technology then you don’t want to go back to it but the touchscreens has been a much easier progression because it’s based on windows which they already use.”
Students find it really engaging – in the same way that touchscreen phones are taking off. I think they are more inclined to use the screens as opposed to whiteboard because their size is more personal and the screen touch is a novelty."

**The lessons learned**

eLearning Manager Scott Anderton says his two tips to Learning Providers who are interested in taking up touch screen technology are:

"1. When you are looking at the TV screens don’t get carried away by how they look. The fancy ones have the cost hiked up. An ordinary TV with a touch screen monitor attached for £200 or with an overlay for £800 will do the same job. It’s this technology rather than the screen itself that will do the job.

2. Some touchscreens come with their own software, avoid them as you are defeating the object of being able to use windows which teachers are already familiar with - it’s this simplicity which is one of the benefits."

**Useful links**

- Jisc RSC Northwest
- Hopwood Hall College

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