

## Planning for Success, Technically Speaking

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There has been much discussion and debate in schools recently regarding the purchase of computer equipment. Specifically, school boards are faced with 'The Platform Choice': Apple vs. Wintel hardware. The following article outlines some critical factors a school board must address before authorizing a computer purchase order.

### **The School Technology Plan Will:**

#### 1. Focus on Learning

Software choices are kept simplified these days when schools cover basic workstation needs with an Office suite that includes a word processor, spreadsheet and a presentation application. The industry standard is undoubtedly Microsoft Office which sells for approximately CAN\$75/copy if a school board purchases more than 300 copies. There is little need to upgrade to newer versions beyond Office 97/98 and YES, Office files saved on a MAC can be opened on a PC (the opposite is also true, and occurs frequently across networks since the mid-90s). One of the nicest features of Office 2001 is printing to .pdf, allowing teachers to share critical files with others in a secure format. Once in the .pdf format, a file can not be edited, essentially printing a 'hardcopy' to another computer. For example, I frequently make a .pdf copy of letters, quizzes and tests that I share with students and parents via email, allowing them to read it, but not change the content.

#### 2. Embrace New Technology

It's always exciting to bring new technology into the classroom, unless the school is satisfied with the above applications. Typically, teachers want the students to do more than type a set of notes and search The Internet in their classroom activities. I'll share one successful Pure Math 30 activity that I've shared with my colleagues here in Calgary, Alberta:

Students captured a bouncing-ball video clip, displayed real-time on a projection screen, with a meter stick placed behind the ball. After slowing down the clip, students measured total height of each consecutive bounce, repeated the procedure several times and analyzed the data on paper. To their surprise, the height of the ball was reduced by the same factor each bounce, generating a geometric series. Students were presented with a similar video clip on the unit test and asked to calculate the total distance traveled by the bouncing ball.

With access to [Pasco Digital Science](#) equipment (free software), a more accurate geometric series arises from the digital pendulum. How much does all of this cost and how much time does it take to prepare such an activity you ask? Very little to answer both questions. Include a firewire computer, digital video camera, a meter stick and a rubber ball in your next class wish-list. Apple does a very nice job packaging the above equipment in all of their computer lines. I've installed firewire cards in PCs before with some luck but was challenged mostly by the Windows video software application. Anybody know of a good PC video editing package for K-12 students? [email me](#) with some suggestions.

The most important part of a Technology Plan is that teachers must be trained on how to use the software.

[Computer Based Training Café](#) is a great place to start self-training on many multimedia apps.

### 3. Include All Stakeholders

Often decisions like these take the wrong turn when meeting agendas spend too much time debating the specs on hardware or the best deal out there. Strike an IT Team today, composed of all stakeholders including students, with a mandate to research and present detailed options, propose their wish list to the School Board by early fall, and equipment can be ordered, installed, and tested during one of the breaks before the students return in the new year.

#### **A few questions to leave you with:**

- i. How will this new technology change the classroom?
- ii. Does the new technology enhance learning?
- iii. Is there support available after the equipment arrives?
- iv. What is the rollover plan when this equipment becomes outdated?

#### **Resources:**

- [Technology Planning](#)