

# Aspects to be considered when selecting an IWB for future use in your school

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## • **Introducing the IWB (again!)**

In a world of technological advancements the adoption of IWB's into the classroom is becoming an *integral part of the everyday work of an educationalist/teacher*.

Advisors and consultants who fully understand the education market will always agree that IWB's are not replacement teachers but are tools to enhance teaching and learning and aid in the delivery of a programs of study.

Sitting children in front of an IWB, computer screens and other technologies all day does little to enhance their individual development. It is important to provide a balanced learning environment which blends physical activity, verbal response and integrated technologies in their learning process.

Interactive Whiteboards have been considered by early adopters to provide total solutions to their instructional board needs. Many have installed traditional whiteboards alongside these as the surfaces of these boards are not designed to accept the staining of 'common place' marker pens resulting in large stickers being added by the side of the IWB "Please Do not Write on this Board!".

This makes little sense when it is advertised as a whiteboard to write on. The PolyVision ēno board has addressed this issue head on with its unique ceramicsteel surface. No longer does the classroom have to be overpowered with multiple variations of boards each having its own properties.

## • **Budget constraints**

Conscientious and responsible companies who operate within the IWB market will all agree that high quality, reliability and ergonomic design are the basics on which they develop their products.

It is unfortunate that there are many who (in this economic climate) are of the opinion that this is an area that will retain its spending power, therefore supplying inferior low cost products will encourage education to invest in these IWB seeing as an opportunity to keep up with technological advancements at a lower cost and enabling them to make 'the fast buck'! Unfortunately in technological terms 'You get what you pay for'

Recently published numbers in France indicated that almost 1 out of 4 Interactive Whiteboards bought over the last 8 years is out of order and needs to be replaced.

## • **Software**

A classic myth is '*You have to buy our whiteboard to use our software*'.

There may be a case for certain drivers to be associated with a board which is why manufacturers differ in their approach which in turn enables them to develop their business, but if a school has a range of boards from different manufacturers and this rule applies it would make all the interaction between them useless.

Investing in one supplier who suggests that you cannot use others software or systems and would be detrimental to the development of the school as they would be limited to a manufacturer with little opportunity to explore or invest in better or newer technologies as they develop.

**Warning:** *An IWB that is a tool which should work with a variety of applications and software not just one manufacturer.*

## • The Real World

PolyVision is a company that has been producing high quality products for the educational and corporate markets since the 1950's and is going from strength to strength.

Young people who leave the educational system to enter into the world of work will inevitably encounter a wide range of highly advanced technological products some of which may be PolyVisions.

It is now possible to purchase these industrially high quality (tried and tested) products at a reasonable price and provides an excellent opportunity to move away from the 'just designed for schools' IWB products.

Many such countries write in their government manifestos that they consider it important to invest in the future of education by preparing their young population for the international world of work and business. PolyVision has been operating within this global arena for many years and has always been involved in the educational side as well. Now is the ideal opportunity for governments, schools and institutions to move forward in the implementation of their plans by investing in a globally tried and tested product range.

Whilst we grow and develop as individuals we are encouraged to use tools and technology often starting with writing implements which enable us to record and respond to the world around.

It seems that we are going in a reverse direction by taking youngsters back to using only touch screen technology and discard all the skills we have learnt of accuracy, co-ordination and control of tools.

IWB manufacturers have become aware of this aspect and many have entered the market with pen systems to support their touch technology option.

Even well established tactile board systems supply pens as a further option for working on the surface with.

## • Health and Safety

Health and safety in this age is a high profile area of serious consideration and the spread of infections grave concern for all. We have already experienced throughout hospitals globally how important a clean environment is especially with so many users of this facility.

We are more aware in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of just how quickly disease and illness can travel from just touching an affected area by a number of individuals and how quickly it can spread and multiply not just locally. There are many cases where this has been seen with some devastating effects.

IWB manufacturers are always aware of health and safety matters especially when a vast majority of their products are for the educational market and used by a large number of individuals.

The trend for touch screen technology in mobile phones, plasma screens and tactile boards must be considered as heightening the risk of spreading germs.

Many try and overcome this problem with a range of solutions including the use of a pen. Although it is agreed that this is by no means infallible it does go some way to reducing the risk.

## • Hypocritical critics

Bluetooth technology has become part of our everyday life and has been adopted by many companies and organisations. It is interesting to note that those who advocate it as a detrimental form of communication use it internally in their everyday work and business often through their mobile phones and other technologies.

The inclusion of Bluetooth technology in their products is a true reflection of what happens in the industrial and business world.

Miniature cameras, data transmission without cables, WiFi and other mechanisms are all advancements which are used in the real world from computers and internet through to space technology. It would be foolish to suggest that this technology should not be embraced when every other aspect of the working world is utilising it.

IWB surfaces are often under criticism through their quality and fitness for purpose.

The daily wear and tear that is placed upon such products is considered by PolyVision to be an important aspect of their designs.

There are cases reported of other companies' softer surfaces being damaged and replaced on a regular basis that companies often have to adopt a course of action that provides a continued servicing process.

This is false investment as the IWB will be non-functional for a period of time which may be critical in the deliver of an important lesson.

It is true to say that no product is perfect despite the claims by many that they have the 'perfect solution'.

PolyVision's ceramicsteel surface is used globally in a range of environments and carries extensive credentials regarding its fitness for purpose.

Quality of fabrication, construction and finish are always important none so much as products provided for the educational market. PolyVision's manufacturing process involves a system of continual testing and quality control to eliminate some of these key lesser quality surface issues.

Companies such as PolyVision minimise the risk of faults or parts which can be easily damaged through extensive testing in complex and sophisticated laboratories.

A warranty is offered on many products without fully understanding what is being offered as protection. 3 years warranty. 5 years warranty. What do these actually mean to the end user?

## • In conclusion

It is always easy to be a critic in hindsight but just by

- Following some simple ground rules
- Using common sense and considering what you really want rather than what is offered
- Do your homework
- How does what we buy relate to the real world?
- Are we using a product that considers new developments or just buying what we have always bought?

If as educationalists we constantly used the same images, information and technology we would never advance as a nation.

True educationalists look for new ways to move forward and invest in new Fit for Purpose Technologies.

**Ian Maber** has over 25 years of experience in the educational field.

Started as a teacher but quickly gained interest in how new technology could improve learning skills.

Got involved in developing educational software and as being linked to his domestic market – the United Kingdom – participated from the start onwards in the introduction process of IWB in a school environment.

His expertise is based on practical experience combined with expert knowledge of pedagogical principles and how they need to be transferred into the new age of technology in a learning environment.