



Case Study 03

Student Purchase Scheme:
How standardising student laptops
delivered a “Plug & Play Experience”
at Warwick University

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Requirement

A leading UK university were looking to make computer ownership as affordable as possible for students and to raise the quality of computing support available. Students are bringing computers to University in record numbers and clearly recognise the essential nature of this study tool. The University's challenge is to widen access to computing as far as possible while containing the costs of running a responsive helpdesk service and reliable network. This was hard to do with the huge range of different computer configurations, with or without virus protection, that were arriving each year with the new student intake.

Solution

A Student Purchase Scheme. Insight and IBM worked to develop a range of discounted, pre-configured laptops with students e-procuring the equipment prior to commencement of studies. The result? Turn up, plug in, instant logon and instant access to all learning resources, web-enabled services and communication tools.

Student Purchase Scheme: How Standardising Student Laptops Delivered a “Plug & Play Experience”

The advantages of both centralising and standardising IT procurement are well documented. The most obvious benefits are found through consolidating and leveraging your purchasing power with one IT provider and the reduced cost of ownership via hardware and software standardisation.

These benefits are now widely acknowledged in both the business and public sector community. When Insight and IBM were approached by Warwick, one of the UK's leading universities to offer a student purchase scheme the key aspects were to provide affordable 'university ready' laptops for students with associated cost and service benefits for the University.

Their experience, and those of most UK Universities, was that whilst technology has become an intrinsic part of the higher education sphere, management of who connects to the university's infrastructure, where they connect and what they connect using was extremely difficult.

In essence, with 15,000 students and over 4500 new starts a year – the vast majority of whom either invest in a new computer or bring existing computers with them – the costs and logistics of providing full support and protecting the network from viruses, were untenable.

Mike Atkins, Insight's Public Sector Sales Director explains, 'students no longer regard access to IT as a nice to have. To get the most from University life they need to know they can rely on their PC and access to the network. The University IT department was already finding it difficult to meet that need with dramatic increases in helpdesk calls at the outset of each new year and frequent down time caused by badly protected computers connecting to the network. Demand not only went beyond the capacity of the deployed helpdesk resource but prevented additional technical resource from being free to work on 'mission-critical' technical issues. In essence, there were two options, resolve the discontinuity amongst the number of devices that were attempting to connect to the network or fail to meet service availability targets.'

Their vision of IT and IT access to enhance the educational experience was ground-breaking amongst the UK University establishments. The introduction of fast Ethernet connections in the Halls of Residence and Wireless Hotspots to the library, lecture rooms and social spaces would allow students to access the university's infrastructure from multiple campus areas. It was obvious that by doing so students would enjoy increased productivity and information access allowing them to learn any time, any where.



Without doubt, the customisation of an e-procurement solution from Insight removed any commercial or logistical issues away from the University. The ability to order online in advance of term start, and collect your laptop upon commencement of your studies offered a streamlined supply chain approach.

LINDA LAVELLE
IBM'S E-LEARNING
SOLUTIONS DIVISION



The provision of standard 'university ready' laptops with a range of essential software meant that students would have the ability to turn up, turn on and login in to their e-learning resources with complete network compatibility. Loading on the Helpdesk could be contained and all would enjoy the advantages of access.

The selection of Insight and IBM had notable strengths. Insight are the largest global reseller of IBM equipment, this status was reflected in the unified approach to the project. Insight and IBM both operate with education-specific business departments housing specialist knowledge of the issues faced by educational establishments. Insight offered the distinct advantage of fulfilling the schemes requirements in-house, a single source provider.

The combination afforded the ability to select from IBM's extensive product portfolio, e-procurement via MyInsight – a 'university-specific' procurement page, configuration would be carried out at Insight Configuration Centre and delivery would rely on Insight's established supply chain and logistics expertise.

Following careful consideration that encompassed the IT requirements for study, affordability and product specification, three laptop standards were selected, Entry Level, Ultra Portable and High Level. The IBM ThinkPad range was selected to offer a laptop in each category.

Working in conjunction with University's IT department, image builds were created and tested through the Insight Configuration Centre prior to rollout. Each laptop was optimised for connectivity to the University's network including Wi-Fi technology to utilise campus Hot Spots. Software applications were standardised including Windows XP and Symantec Antivirus Corporate Edition to further reduce support cost improve inter-operability and increase network protection/security.

The procurement mechanism centred on Insight's 'MyInsight' e-procurement solution, a University-specific page for secure online

ordering. The online catalogue of approved university products including the pre configured laptop range and suitable peripherals and consumables at special-bid prices linked directly from the University's intranet. Students were also able to order through a dedicated phone number. Finally, delivery was available either to home addresses or to the University Campus Service Point using individual's student ID number to collect orders.

Linda Lavelle, from IBM's E-Learning Solutions Division, believes that Insight's e-procurement solution was imperative to the success of the project. 'Without doubt, the customisation of an e-procurement solution from Insight removed any commercial or logistical issues away from the University. The ability to order online in advance of term start, and collect your laptop upon commencement of your studies offered a streamlined supply chain approach. The whole e-procurement experience was tailored and branded for the University incorporating the agreed laptop product range and price. Couple this with the ability to access University resources from the moment you plug-in your pre-configured laptop and the quality of the student experience is clear.'

The collective motivation to ensure the project succeeded involved Insight and IBM investing in marketing support for the scheme. The provision of literature, merchandising, advertising funds and promotion at University open days ensured awareness of the scheme and it benefits would be known by each student, new or existing.

The scheme is proving to be highly successful with over 300 laptops ordered at the start of this year's term. This was the first project of its kind in the UK; it is a large step forward in terms of technology implementation and information access in Universities. Insight and IBM were successful because not only did we understand the University's vision, and have the expertise to deliver each aspect, but also we understood the wider context and issues that drove the creation of the scheme.