Why Education Has Never Seen Better Days

There's a very good reason that our schools have never been in a better position to capitalize on the current state of affairs.

Technology is opening the door to great opportunities for education. This is happening with a strong thrust in three main areas:

1. mobile computing,
2. cloud computing, and
3. content.

Looking back, there has been a slow progression from mainframe and client-server computing to CDs, LANs and finally, to late-'90s and early 2000s online computing, but those days are quietly receding into the past. In the months and years ahead, fast change is coming.

To get a solid foundation on what's to come, let's start out with some definitions coupled with brief explanations and examples of each.

Mobile Computing. Global mobile data traffic will increase 66-fold between 2008 and 2013, at a rate of 131 percent, according to networking giant Cisco. Students are certainly taking technology with them, usually on a small hand-held device. From iPhones and iPads to Kindles, Nooks, netbooks and things you've never even heard of, this area is growing fast. Sure, you could pop a learning-oriented tape cassette into a Sony WalkMan back in the day. But the simplest apps on today's iPhone, with their ability to incorporate GPS, Internet and real-time information are creating a new normal that today's millennials may never fully appreciate--but it doesn't matter, because they intuitively know how to use them. Further, mobile solutions need not even be connected, but can still offer students individualized instruction anytime, anywhere.

Cloud Computing. Gartner predicts cloud services revenue will reach $150.1 billion in 2013, nearly triple its $56.3 billion haul in 2009. As a metaphor for the Internet, the "cloud" is a somewhat familiar phrase to school IT professionals. Today, most schools and

businesses have reliable, high speed access to the Internet, and parallel to this has been an increase in virtual servers, virtual services and virtually everything you might need or want—all available on the cloud. No longer do you need to install a program or call in a specialist, or to buy servers and increase electronic storage space. Though still in its early stages, cloud computing takes care of all that for you.

Content. Now, a larger picture begins to emerge: You've got the cloud, you've got all the little devices scattered everywhere that hook in to the cloud or that can just as well stand alone. Naturally, you then need to populate those devices with workable platforms, helpful services and useful information for any learner who taps in. Someone needs to conjure up the stuff, and then, how does one evaluate, organize and present all of this? It all falls under content.

Schools can now get much of what they need from mobile computing, cloud-based systems and all manner of engaging content.

Besides the timing—in terms of both the cultural and technological progression we now enjoy—there is another underlying factor at play that is fueling the current thrust: the bottom line. Tight times are nurturing an explosion in innovation, and apart from low-cost and free technology for social networking, publishing and collaboration, schools can now turn away from buying hardware and software and get much of what they need from mobile computing, cloud-based systems and through all manner of engaging content—for a much lower cost. With the convergence of these elements, technology purchasing today is not the same as in 1990. School districts must look ahead to stay current. But digital teaching platforms and individualized instruction have never held so much promise. From where we've come to where we currently stand, the future doesn't look that bad.

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