



Schools Achieving Success Through Wireless Computing

Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Singapore

Anywhere, anytime learning

All over the campus, Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students can be seen studying, huddling in groups discussing projects and working on their notebook computers. This is part of the polytechnic's focus on enabling an anywhere, anytime learning environment.

More than 8,000 students already own notebooks and the entire student population of 14,000 are expected to have notebooks by 2005.

According to Ch'ng Beng Hin, Senior Manager of NP's Teaching and Learning Centre, the notebook ownership scheme is part of the Mobile e-Learning Initiative (MeL), which includes the building of a campus-wide wireless network and development of an e-learning portal

The Mobile e-Learning Initiative (MeL) will empower students to have greater control over their learning and also enhance their IT-savviness. "It is important to impart these life skills to students," said Mr Chng. "Immersing them in a mobile workstyle will provide our students with an edge when they enter the job market."

The initiative also encourages teaching staff to be more innovative in teaching methodologies through the use of technology to make lessons more interesting and effective.



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*Ch'ng Beng Hin
Senior Manager
NP's Teaching and Learning
Centre*

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Beyond the classroom

Back in 1998, NP piloted the notebook ownership scheme with the aim of using the notebook computer as a learning toolbox and for emailing.

Notebooks facilitate learning beyond the classroom. "As students spend a lot of time on the campus, learning must take place not just inside classrooms but when they wait between classes as well as when they're at home," said Mr Ch'ng. "With notebooks, they can learn anywhere, anytime on the campus and become more productive."

To prepare for the widespread use of notebooks, NP started to e-enable its classrooms with power sockets, network points and LCD projectors. It also set up a wireless network across the campus – from the canteens to the offices.

Stringent selection criteria

NP called a tender for the supply of notebooks in 1999. The criterion for selection included competitive pricing, after-sales service and a track record in providing great campus services.

"We wanted the assurance and confidence that the appointed vendor can meet our delivery deadlines," recalled Mr Ch'ng. "Our students needed to have the notebooks when term starts."



"The campus-wide wireless networks made Internet access a breeze."

Ch'ng Beng Hin



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Steady rollout

The notebook ownership scheme was rolled out by courses, beginning with 400 accountancy students. The Toshiba notebooks were loaded with Microsoft Office productivity and programming tools.

As more classrooms were e-enabled, the scheme was extended to include business studies and computer courses.

“The challenge at NP’s end was to make sure that classes have enough power points and are suitably equipped to accommodate notebook usage,” said Mr Ch’ng.

Mobile computing caught on very fast with our students. Students began using the notebooks everywhere they went. The campus-wide wireless networks made Internet access a breeze. Whether they were in the canteen having a meal or researching a project in the library, students brought their notebooks with them.

By July 2003, the notebook ownership scheme will cover 26 out of 28 courses – the exceptions being Early Childhood Education and Horticulture & Landscape Management courses, which involve practical work.



“Toshiba has set up a service centre with two service engineers at the campus, helping to reduce turnaround time.”

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Evolution of usage

From standalone usage in 1999, notebooks have evolved to enable collaboration and online learning. NP has adopted a blended approach to learning, using online learning to complement face-to-face classroom learning.

“Notebook computers help to engage students in learning. They remain the best form factor and fit for purpose for learning,” said Mr Ch’ng. “Notebooks have not replaced paper or books. It has enhanced and augmented current teaching methodologies. Tutors can give references without printed notes, such as providing URLs for websites.”

Past year exam papers previously available in printed form now come in soft copy. The trend is that tutors are more careful in recommending prescribed textbooks.

Good Customer Service

Under the initial three-year tender awarded in 1999, Toshiba set up a service centre with two service engineers at the campus, helping to reduce turnaround time.



“Due to the high number of notebooks in use, there will inevitably be breakdowns but we are more interested in service level. Toshiba has complied with turnaround time and we are more than satisfied,” said Mr Ch’ng. “In terms of customer satisfaction, we cannot complain. Toshiba has met our expectations in after-sale service.”

As students become more familiar with notebook usage, expectation of service level will go up. But, Mr Ch’ng is confident that Toshiba will continue to match NP’s expectations and continue to value add.

“As a technology partner, Toshiba has been very prompt in providing fresh models every year during the matriculation period. “They also offer competitive prices for our students. As a custodian for our students, we are grateful to Toshiba for these,” remarked Mr Ch’ng.

For further information on this success story and how Toshiba can help you with the “Notebooks for Schools” (NFS) programme, please email nfs@toshiba-asia.com



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