

Workplace ready from the universities of life

Looking more like ultra-modern office spaces or an international consultancy; university campuses have installed breakout areas, the ability to BYOD and video conferencing capabilities. These critical technologies are not just helping students achieve good results but will make them workplace ready when they leave. **Midwich can help you package your concept, provide demos and win the business.**

» Stroll round a modern university campus and you could easily believe you’ve walked into the wrong building. In numerous breakout spaces kitted out with hot technology and cool furnishings, little huddles of young people with smartphones, tablets and laptops converse animatedly in front of the latest touch-screen technology, or listen as a remote colleague joins them via videoconference.

It looks very much like the ultra-modern office space of a software giant or multinational consultancy. And it’s supposed to. Because today’s students don’t just want a degree. They want a job, and they know that familiarity with the kind of collaborative technologies and working methods used by businesses will be a big help in securing one.

“Students have an increasingly important voice in the way courses are delivered, and universities are taking a more student-centred approach,” says Simon Hayes, end-user manager for higher education and business at SMART. “It’s not just about students being taught using technology, but how they use it themselves to collaborate with their peers.

“Although the traditional lecture theatre is still a key part of the learning experience, we’ve seen a



SMART Remote management – Any device. Any location

move towards more open, collaborative and workgroup spaces on-campus. These are everywhere now: the library, coffee shop, student union, bars and halls of residence are all opportunities for installers and vendors to provide interactive technology.”

Complimenting the lecture theatre

This type of interactive space is becoming increasingly common in the workplace for enabling collaboration, encouraging creativity and maximis-

ing output. So by providing a similar environment on-campus universities are encouraging students to develop skills such as creative and critical thinking, communication and collaboration that are becoming critical for the world of work.

“Universities are now looking to have direct links with local and national employers to ensure the technology being used is preparing their graduates for the workplace of tomorrow,” says Hayes. “Often a faculty will work in partnership with a particular employer, and if the employer says, ‘We use this technology and this approach,’ the faculty may go off and mimic it exactly.”

There’s another good reason for universities to install the latest technology for their students. Today’s undergraduates are very much digital natives – not just in their personal lives but from the advanced technology most will have experienced at school – and they expect to see the same standards at university.

“Digital practices are deeply embedded in the way young people research, learn and collaborate,” says Hayes. “What we’re seeing is higher education institutions providing the ‘plumbing’ and the spaces to encourage students to use the technology they want. Universities also understand the importance this has in attracting and retaining students.”

So how can universities ensure their investment in collaborative technology is successful? First it needs to be scalable. “The challenge for the AV industry is to provide universities with a broad range of collaborative devices that can fit different requirements from the large lecture theatre to the small huddle space that can facilitate a quick, impromptu brainstorm anywhere on campus,” says Hayes.

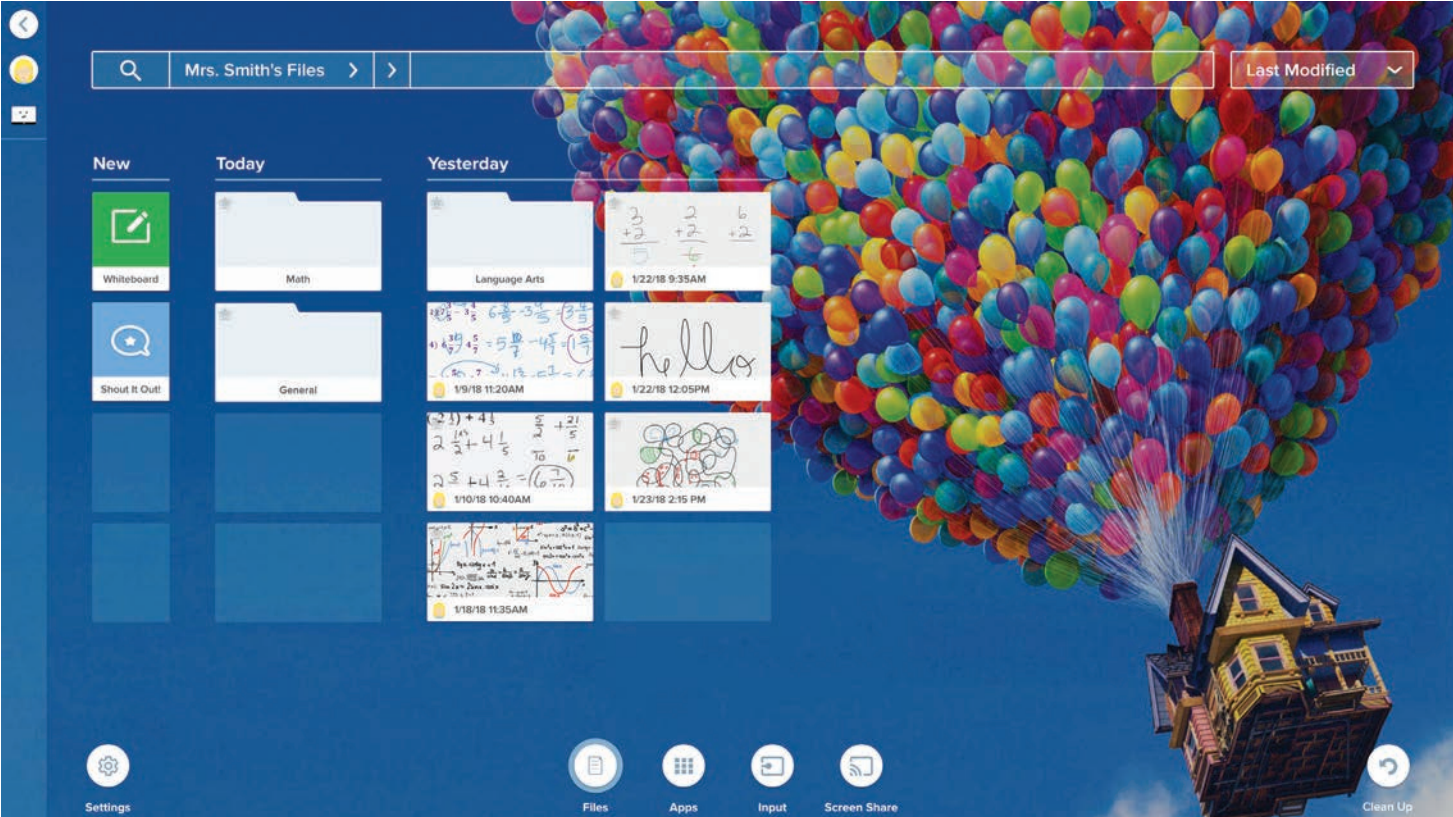
And it must be intuitive. “Making the AV solution easy to use, such as simply walking up and writing on a whiteboard or sharing a device to the display, is at the core of what the students are demanding,” says Hayes. “The important thing is that you take away the hassle for both the student and the institution.”

The installed hardware should enable students to “connect and go”, which in practice means providing platforms capable of supporting almost any end-user device.

“The technology should be open-platform for simple integration with the many different apps, programs, devices and peripherals used by individuals both now and in the future,” argues Hayes. “A collaborative space should enable people to meet and collaborate from anywhere on any device.

“Cloud services and apps are starting to make this a reality, and the future is very exciting, as we start to move into the realms of virtual reality and AI. Many students like the flexibility of cloud-based apps because they can work and collaborate on their own devices from anywhere. It’s really no different from bringing in a laptop, except that smartphones are where students are able to record, take photos and share things quickly.”

The same technology will increasingly be used to support remote learning, Hayes believes. “Interna-



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tional partnerships between universities are introducing remote learning programmes that also create remote collaboration opportunities for students. And with the rising cost of higher education, the opportunity to learn remotely while still being able to participate in and collaborate with lectures using technology will become more popular.”

This means that interactive displays originally installed in teaching spaces for in-room collaboration will increasingly be used for remote participation as well - either live, or post-lecture using cloud-based services to replay the lecture content.

Collaborative technology develops rapidly, and since students are classic “early adopters” they will always expect to see the latest kit. So rather than purchasing systems outright and risking them rapidly becoming out of date, SMART often recommends that universities take the as-a-service route.

“Providing hardware, software and integration as a service contract means universities have the flexibility to provide spaces with the lowest upfront cost and the ability to update the environment so that the

technology continually reinvents itself,” says Hayes. “It could cost less than a £1 per student per week to get the latest technology across an entire campus.”

SMART’s higher education pedigree

As a company SMART has a long and successful pedigree in higher education. Often this begins with education faculties which are keen to expose undergraduates to the kind of technology they will encounter in school classrooms, such as interactive boards. From there the technology rapidly radiates out into engineering, business and other departments.

“What we offer at SMART is an assessment service to review the whole campus and student voice and ascertain what the potential is,” explains Hayes. “We can then work with our specialist higher education installers and partners to design a service programme for the institution. We also offer orientation services, professional development and training to help universities get the most from their investment.”

Often the exchange of ideas is very much two-way. “We like to work in partnership and listen to universities and students just as much as we’re telling them what the

possibilities are,” says Hayes. “They’re some of the brightest minds out there, and we’re just as keen to learn as they are.” ■

● SMART works closely with its distribution partner Midwich. “Our interactive team at Midwich can provide customers with demos and proofs of concept, recommend best-of-breed products for each application, and work with integrators to create truly collaborative environments with the connected technologies in our portfolio,” says Richard Bovingdon, head of interactive at Midwich.

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