

The trailblazing role of multi-academy trusts

As the following case studies show, the ability to spread the cost of technology upgrades is often a key success factor when selling to education's multi-academy trusts (MATs). A major project can also grow from an individual 'trailblazer'. Midwiche is there to help you.

Great oaks from little acorns grow, says the old adage, and it still holds true, as Roche Audio Visual discovered when a school's order for a couple of SMART interactive screens snowballed into the reseller's largest ever installation of SMART Boards.

The initial installation was at Leeds East Academy, part of the White Rose Academies Trust. The trust liked it so much that it decided on an extensive upgrade of the interactive teaching facilities across all three of its academies, Leeds East, Leeds West and Leeds City. All were ultimately supplied by Roche.

Multi-academy trusts (MATs) such as White Rose are an increasingly common feature of the educational landscape, accounting for around half of all England's academies (self-managing state schools that are independent of local authority control).

The group purchasing power of MATs and their ability to drive efficiencies centrally make them a

lucrative potential market for the AV channel, says Jane Ashworth, managing director at SMART Technologies.

"It's not just about centralised procurement," she explains. "MATs can replicate a standardised approach, not just to ICT but also to teaching and learning, across all schools in their group. This 'school in a box' approach brings great efficiencies and benefits for member schools. For vendors and resellers the big opportunity is working to provide a standardised platform that's affordable and helps to reduce operational inefficiency through centralisation."

Trailblazing role

Sometimes one of the schools within a MAT will act as a trailblazer, as at Sharlston Community School, one of 10 primary schools operated by Waterton Academy Trust in Wakefield, West Yorkshire.

Sharlston's leaders were looking for a way to manage the cost of a desperately needed, school-wide

technology upgrade while avoiding a piecemeal implementation that would have left some classes temporarily disadvantaged.

With help from specialist consultancy Elementary Technology the solution chosen was to sign up for the SMART ClaaS subscription service, enabling the whole school to be upgraded at once while spreading the cost over several years.

"This meant that all classes and all children were having access to the latest technology, and more importantly the teachers were given the equipment they needed to teach really dynamic, engaging lessons," says head teacher, Julie Dunderdale-Smith.

Sharlston now has a SMART Board interactive display in every class, along with tablets and an IT suite that children are scheduled to use regularly. The ClaaS subscription also includes the latest software in the form of SMART Notebook 17, plus Elementary Technology's extensive teacher training services.

"One of the reasons we work together as a group of schools in an academy trust is to try to find the best solutions, at the best possible value," says Glynn Bishop, senior school improvement officer for Waterton Academy Trust. As a host school, Sharlston is now leading the way for Waterton schools with technology, he adds.

Waterton's forward-looking approach is by no means universal – at least not yet.



Giving all classrooms and therefore all children access to the latest technology allowed the teachers to create dynamic and engaging lessons



SMART Board 7000 series



"ICT spending on AV is often not budgeted for as a recurring item," says Ashworth. "In the absence of any large capital funding most trusts are replacing AV on a needs basis per room. This brings the challenge of having to support a variety of different solutions that they've inherited across schools that join their trust at different times, creating severe operational inefficiency and costs without the budget to address this."

Same set-up across all the schools

However, within MATs the financing of school- and trust-wide standardisation of AV is becoming more common, Ashworth believes. "This not only helps to reduce operational costs but fits well with the ideal of each school having a shared identity as part of the trust, in that each teacher has the same set up in every classroom – in other words, equity."

A good example is Rodillian Multi-Academy Trust, comprising five Yorkshire secondary schools, which believes strongly in developing a common methodology to improve standards across its partner schools. Technology is critical to this, so the trust was keen to replace the mixed bag of classroom technologies it had acquired as individual schools joined with something more standardised and up-to-date.

Rodillian's students were increasingly interested in having mobile devices in the classroom, so SMART recommended its top of the range interactive SMART Board 6075, combined with the SMART Learning Suite (SLS) which comprises a number of software solutions to equip teachers with instructional, assessment and gamification techniques to create engaging lessons. SMART Boards

have now been installed across 200 classrooms, with very encouraging results.

"Working with SMART we've been able to create classrooms for the future across all our schools," said Andy Percival, a deputy head teacher within the Rodillian MAT. "This interactive approach has resulted in a more collaborative approach to teaching, leading to greater engagement from our students and stronger learning outcomes. This is reflected in our move up the league tables to become a high performing academy."

The ability to spread the cost of technology upgrades is often a key success factor when selling to MATs, says Ashworth. In the case of Rodillian, SMART offered a flexible, subscription-based model with payment spread over three years, with an annual health check of the SMART technology and the option to extend and update as required.

For White Rose Academies Trust leasing provided the best solution, consisting of a four year lease with an optional fifth year. The 6000 series SMART Boards selected by the trust are also extremely durable, featuring 50,000-hour commercial grade panels, heat tempered glass and a five year warranty. These features fitted perfectly with White Rose's budget and need for a high quality product with a long lifespan.

Selling to MATs is no picnic, Ashworth confides. "Resellers may feel they're locked out of larger MATs if these already have an incumbent in the group, and a long-term school customer may suddenly join a MAT and be forced to buy through a new partner. Framework procurement is also more prevalent in MATs, so if you aren't on the framework it could restrict your opportunity to sell."

On the other hand, Ashworth adds, there are hundreds of new, smaller MATs with big potential to grow and these are often looking for new partnerships.

"It's about a service-led sale," he advises. "MATs will see major advantages in centralising and standardising with finance as a mechanism. Creating a service model that includes finance, CPD (continuing professional development), hardware, software and ongoing support ticks a lot of boxes."

Richard Bovingdon, Head of Interactive at Midwiche commented: "Our Interactive team at Midwiche can provide customers with demos and proof of concepts, recommend best-of-breed products for each application, and work with integrators to bring any environment to life with the connected technologies we have available."

CONTACTS



*Midwiche
 *Tel: 01379 649200
 *Email: interactive@midwiche.com
 *Web: www.midwiche.com