

Integrated, Modular, Evolving

by Nancy Knowlton

Today's 21st-century classroom is just that – it's today's version of a technology-enabled learning environment. Tomorrow, classrooms will be home to different tools and technologies, many of which have not yet been imagined. As educators invest in the 21st-century classroom, they need to make sure that what they do today works with the tools and technologies that will emerge tomorrow.

At SMART we use three words to characterize the solutions we provide today – integrated, modular and evolving. These words guide our actions, helping to ensure that we understand our customers' long-term horizon for using technology that engages young learners. Here's what these words mean to us as we design and offer products to our customers.



Integrated

Easy to say but hard to do, integration is all about the user's experience, or usability. A positive experience means using a variety of technology products that work together seamlessly. Integration is about more than hiding wires and building things into a wall or table. It's about making products work well together.

Take, for example, our interactive whiteboard and interactive response system. SMART Notebook software, which ships with both these products, offers whiteboarding functionality, with an unlimited number of Notebook pages, and assessment functionality that is accessible from every Notebook page at the click of an icon.

Assessment functionality was introduced after careful consultation with an advisor group of prospects and customers. Our advisors indicated that they would be frustrated if, while using the interactive whiteboard, they had to open another application to ask students a simple set of questions that they could answer with their clickers. That drove us to build the assessment functionality, including instant tallying of results, into the Notebook application itself. Assessment, either planned or *ad hoc*, could only then be seamless, and avoid awkward and time-consuming transitions between applications.

Also, consider the projector that we integrate with our interactive whiteboards. Although any projector can be used with our boards, our own projector has a number of optimized features. For example, the projector can be controlled from the interactive whiteboard, meaning that the remote control can be eliminated.

On the software and content side, Adobe Flash has become invaluable for engaging visual learners with vivid animation. When this new creation platform became available, we worked hard to understand its application in and appeal to education and made sure that SMART Notebook software could support its full use.

Modular

A PC or Macintosh computer is by definition an open system. Users can easily add a printer, scanner, projector or other peripheral that easily connects to any of the available connection points on the computer (e.g., USB, serial, VGA, wireless, etc.). Peripherals can be easily added or taken away from the system to suit the varying needs of different users.

We do not know today what other peripherals will be available in the future, but the design of our hardware and software includes careful consideration for adding new hardware and software in the future.

Evolving

While we cannot say for sure what tomorrow will bring, it is inevitable that our customers will want new tools and technologies for their classrooms. Some of those products will come from SMART, and others will come from other innovative companies. We are committed to ensuring that we not only stay on top of developing technologies, but that our products take advantage of all that the new tools offer.

A Commitment from SMART

When we developed our first product, we knew we were jumping onto a treadmill that would accelerate and develop a life of its own. Now we also know that no product or group of products can exist on its own over the long term. We are committed to making our customer experience the best that it can be, not just today but over time. We don't know what is ahead, but our customers have our commitment that we will stay on top of new technologies and make sure that they work with SMART products in the best possible way.

Nancy Knowlton is the co-founder and CEO of SMART Technologies, the world's leading supplier of interactive whiteboards. Nancy's husband and SMART co-founder, David Martin, is the inventor of the interactive whiteboard product category. Together they have built a company that is focused on delivering easy-to-use, yet feature-rich collaboration tools, including the SMART Board interactive whiteboard. Nancy can be reached at CEO@smarttech.com.