

SIIA Ed Tech Industry Summit (May 23-25, 2010; San Francisco)

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Called by the Software and Information Industry Association the best attended (and highest revenue) Ed Tech Industry Summit in SIIA's 25 year history, the 2010 ETIS at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco attracted roughly 300 education and technology company executives over two days. The theme for 2010: Going mobile and global. (The ETIS also was where the SIIA CODiE Awards for education were presented; for the winners, see <http://bit.ly/dui5Y3>.)

These notes represent highlights and brief analysis/commentary. They're based on the live-tweeting of the conference by @FrankCatalano and additional notes, and only represent sessions attended (all keynotes and several breakout sessions). Any analysis, commentary or errors are his alone.

Innovation Incubator Program

For the second year, the ETIS hosted an Innovation Incubator competition highlighting products or services that could make an impact on education through technology, generally from startups or smaller companies. Ten were selected, had tables at an opening reception, and made brief presentations during the conference. However, only a handful appeared to be truly innovative.

edTech Systems' **buildmytest** is an online assessment engine optimized for laptops. Its sole innovation appeared to be what the company described as "Facebook style-reports" (with, one trusts, better privacy controls). The company said it had been in development for two years. Buildmytest has no test content; the company was at ETIS looking for content and distribution partners. While it's hard to believe that education needs yet another test creation and delivery engine, it may be an attractive partner or acquisition target for a company that needs one.

Follett Software Company's **Cognite** is an online research and collaboration tool that can build upon Follett's digital library of publications. One nice touch: an iPhone app for parents to check on a student's grades, homework, and more.

ConnectYard gives non-tech savvy professors in higher education a single tool they can use to communicate with students who, on the their end, may use txt messaging, Facebook, Twitter or other tools – all without the prof having to know how to use any of the tools individually. Uptake has been good in higher education where, according to the company, for every tech-savvy staffer there may be nine others who don't want to deal with either the learning or administration curve of dealing with multiple services. While some may say ConnectYard is a service that will eventually be integrated into an LMS, it meets a need now – and may also be useful in the upper grades of K-12 for teachers to communicate not just with students, but parents.

DynamicBooks publishes digital textbooks, with a twist – professors in higher education can edit them and add their own digital content to the textbooks (not just text, but multimedia), essentially creating a custom version of the textbook for their students, at what the company claims is a lower textbook purchase cost for students than physical textbooks. Students "own" the textbook; there is no

subscription. The added content is clearly identified in the book as being separate from the original content, and professors have the option of keeping their version “private” or sharing their additions with both the publisher and other professors who are customizing the same textbook for their students. While Macmillan is backing DynamicBooks, the company swears they are looking to license the platform to other major publishers – and DynamicBooks’ general manager says no one at Macmillan will have to review or touch other publishers’ content for them to use the platform.

Livemocha’s **Livemocha Active English** is not as much something revolutionary – since Livemocha has already been in the business of providing online communities of native language speakers to help tutor others in a new language – as it is something more structured. Partnering with Pearson’s Longman, the product adds extensive Web video and content with detailed ELL feedback from native speakers (already on Livemocha) to help English language learners learn.

Whizz Education’s **Math-Whizz Tutoring Plus** is an online supplemental K-8 math tutoring program whose primary differentiator appears to be it rewards students with a virtual currency, with which they can buy virtual plants and pets. It’s used primarily in the UK now and is looking to expand into the US. The company claims it has been proven effective in as little as 90 minutes of use per week.

Emantras’ **Mobl21** is a student or teacher authoring system for mobile devices. The company claims customers can make and push out content for a variety of mobile devices, including applications such as flash cards (and supports audio, video and other multimedia data types).

Lightspeed’s **My Big Campus** is an interesting twist on content filtering combined with educational resources. The company says a major headache for technology coordinators is the inability for content filters to allow access to student-created and teacher-created content on the open Web and allow online collaboration among students, while shutting out problem sites. The company says its product can do that, selectively and intelligently. Still, this seems to be an incremental improvement versus something dramatically new.

Turning Technologies **Progress Monitoring Bundle** combines clickers (which the company is known for) with a specially developed bundle of assessment software and digital professional development developed by Performance Matters. The key, according to the company, is that this is designed for use – without school or district support – by individual teachers. On the surface and on the whole, there didn’t seem to be anything significantly new here that many other companies don’t already provide, either with partners or in a software/hardware package.

Impact Education’s **SkillsTutor Mobile** was a slick little iPad and iPhone application with diagnostic testing plus math instruction for grades 6-12, plus access for teachers and parents. The app seemed very well thought out to take maximum advantage of the graphics and screen real estate of the smaller devices.

The most impressive of the ten, upon first look? **SkillsTutor Mobile**, **ConnectYard** and **DynamicBooks**, all for different reasons: **SkillsTutor Mobile** for its thoughtful approach to mobile devices; **ConnectYard** for an elegant way to connect professors with the social media and communications technology students

actually use now; and **DynamicBooks** for attempting to take digital textbook publishing to a new level while keeping copyright and flexibility in mind.

ETIS attendees weighed in with their own favorites; balloting was topped by **SkillsTutor Mobile** and **Mobl21**; **Livemocha Active English** was the runner-up (full voting results at <http://bit.ly/91m0Pp>).

Keynote: Margaret Johnson, EVP for the Americas and India, Qualcomm

In a nod to the mobile/global emphasis of ETIS, the opening keynote was Qualcomm executive Dr. Margaret Johnson, an engineer by training. The keynote was focused on education and didn't appear to be the typical big-name-speaker-canned-PowerPoint presentation. Among the data points and highlights:

- Project K-Nect in North Carolina (underwritten by Qualcomm), in which smartphones are given to every student to use with curricula, increased math proficiency (as measured via test scores) by 30%.
- There are now 1 billion 3G wireless subscribers worldwide, estimated to grow to 2.8 billion 3G wireless subscribers worldwide by 2014.
- By 2011, emerging regions of the world will represent 50% of 3G handset shipments.
- Emerging markets use the 3G broadband speeds in mobile handsets from the start for sharing education and health information to change lives (not just, as we use them in the U.S., for sharing fun photos).
- India now actually has \$20 cell phones with 3G broadband capabilities.
- Qualcomm plans to release a new color, reflective cell phone display soon called Mirasol; it uses less battery power and can be seen in bright sunlight (with the exception of adding color, Mirasol seems similar in functionality to the Amazon Kindle display, which she did not mention) so cell phones can run longer before recharging and be used more outdoors for data applications.
- Mobile phone/smartphone displays, data speed, and battery life need to be more on par with the laptop/desktop personal computer experience for them to be used widely in education.
- Qualcomm is also experimenting with augmented reality, using information overlays that appear over real-life images when, apparently, the smartphone camera is on. Currently, it's being tried with students who visit Balboa Park in San Diego. It's another example of how smartphones might be applied to education.
- In summary, Johnson said that when it comes to technologies being cool enough, and good enough, to reach the education market, "Apple will be the bar we all have to hop over."

Session: Mobile Learning Trends

Based on the upcoming SIIA Mobile Computing Trends Report, this panel session provided a snapshot of information in the report and some analysis of the current state of mobile devices in education. Data points and highlights:

- Thomas Greaves, Chairman, The Greaves Group: The K-12 school survey shows schools have, at the time of the survey, 55% desktop personal computers, 37% laptops, 5% netbooks (the growth leader), and 2% tablet computers. (The survey was taken before the introduction of the iPad.)
- Greaves: For education, the “game-changer is the device (and its connectivity) are always on.”
- Eight years later, Maine remains the only statewide one-to-one educational computing program.
- Regarding the lag time for K-12 technology adoption, Bruce Wilcox, panel moderator and VP mobile learning for the Digital Millennial Consulting group, noted: "The best thing about working in education is we get to see the tech horse race, see who wins, and THEN place our bets."
- Greaves: The variety of mobile device operating systems (and Apple’s refusal to put Flash on the iPhone and iPad) will continue to be a challenge for educational software publishers. The solution may be a pure browser application with HTML5 to tame the multiple mobile OS problem.

Session: Global Trends in Education

While the global panels didn’t seem to be as significant from a technology standpoint, several sessions focused on general or region-specific global issues. The “Global Trends That Will Affect Your Business” panel session was one. Data points and highlights:

- James Kourmadas, VP Strategic Marketing, McGraw-Hill Higher Education: Internationally, McGraw-Hill is moving from exporting U.S. books to international digital mass customization, and from selling products to services. McGraw-Hill is also doing professional development internationally in places that don’t even have names, “just GPS coordinates.”
- Professor Elliot Soloway, University of Michigan, says the present and future in education internationally is not laptops, but smartphones. Soloway may be biased in that he’s been involved in high-profile smartphone implementations in education. But he made the point that, just as some countries leapfrogged landlines to cell phones for telephone service, some countries now are leapfrogging laptops to smartphones for educational purposes.

Keynote: Eric Lauzon, Chief Information Officer, International Baccalaureate

Lauzon, speaking on “Education and Technology in a Global Economy,” provided a fast-paced look at how technology is changing education globally, and how the global economy is changing demands on education. While the presentation (using a fascinating post-PowerPoint tool from Prezi.com, which is free to schools) is virtually impossible to summarize due to its fragmented, info-nugget nature, there were key points worth highlighting:

- Issues commonly blamed for low technology adoption in schools are teacher technophobia, institutional conservatism, and lack of resources.
- However, Lauzon says the real reasons for low technology adoption are that information technology is not consistently applied to assessment, curriculum and teacher practice. There are too many disconnects in how technology is used. It shouldn't be "tech for tech's sake."
- Technology will never replace teachers. Technology must enable teachers with changed assessment and curriculum.
- When pressed about which of the three "levers" – assessment, curriculum or teacher practice – he'd change first with technology, if he could change only one, Lauzon chose curriculum. He said if that's changed, assessment and teacher practice would naturally follow.

Session: Competing with Free

With government agencies, universities and foundations becoming publishers – and many free resources available on the Web – this panel session looked at how for-profit publishers can compete with "free" in K-20 (leading, again, to the off-quoted open source comment that free content is "free like a puppy, not free like a beer"). The panelists provided an interesting variety of perspectives, mostly based on their own company's experience. Data points and highlights:

- Arjan Khalsa, CEO, Conceptua Math: Anyone starting a math company today is already competing with free, notably the free National Library of Virtual Manipulatives online (<http://bit.ly/dAQVAj>). One strategy is to communicate to customers, "You already own this. Let me show you how to use it," with additional content, tutorials and services that tie it together.
- William Kelly, CEO and founder, Learning.com: Teachers are attracted to "free" when they need to grab something quickly to use right away. While free may be easy to find, it can be hard to use in a classroom. But fee-based products may be closed and hard to customize. There's a place in between for companies: bridge solutions that allow use of fee and free, flexibly and more easily integrated into classrooms. "Free is not a good or bad. Free is just free," Kelly noted. If there's a demand for it, you have to deal with it.
- Conceptua Math, Learning.com and DynamicBooks (the third company on the panel) all will allow teachers and professors who add content to share that with other teachers through their respective platforms.

Session: Mobile Devices in Classrooms, Enablers or Distracters?

The main thrust of this panel session was the blowback, both in K-12 districts and Higher Ed institutions, against student-owned mobile devices such as laptops and smartphones. Some have begun banning student devices: in K-12, blaming mobile phones for enabling cheating, sexting, and texting to organize fights; in Higher Ed, blaming laptops and mobile devices for adding distractions.

While notes for this session weren't taken (Frank Catalano was the moderator), a number of bans that have been enacted recently and what prompted them were described.

The two panelists – Professor Elliot Soloway of the University of Michigan, and Shawn Gross, managing director of Digital Millennial Consulting – both have been involved in pilots that brought smartphones into school for education, under controlled conditions.

The summary: If educators think student smartphones are distracters, make them part of instruction – that way, kids can't use them badly because they have to use them to keep up with what's being taught.

Keynote: Joanne Weiss, director, Race to the Top Fund, U.S. Department of Education

R2T Director Weiss is a former e-technology executive. Weiss covered much familiar ground in how R2T works, but shared several significant observations:

- States trying to land R2T grant funds need to understand that “100% is not a magic number;” yet states are putting it into their applications as a proficiency goal, assuming that's what this ED wants to see. It's not.
- R2T competition prompted states to act on education issues: 30 have taken legislative action, 47 now have comprehensive statewide education agendas.
- R2T competition's requirement that new assessment be delivered with technology will bring more tech to K-12 schools. And using technology is the only real way to do more with less in schools when the economy is bad.

Additional thoughts

This Ed Tech Industry Summit was probably among the most focused, and best-attended, ETIS events since the SIIA began holding them. The theme “going mobile and global” was well represented, and there seemed to be fewer sessions that were just canned PowerPoints which could have been presented at any conference. (It did seem digital videos were replacing PowerPoints for some panelists, which is not necessarily good if it's a trend – while videos are more entertaining, they are even more canned, have the same discussion-deadening effect, and require the panelist have zero interaction with the audience.)

There were a number of iPads among attendees, leading some to opine openly that it was a sign of “acceptance” of the iPad in education. Those who expressed that opinion were making a classic mistake: assuming the industry reflected the target customer. It's always dangerous to confuse the early adopter with the mass market; cost and timing do matter, and iPad bright-shiny blindness needs to wear off first. Others said it would be better to judge iPad acceptance by the number seen carried by attendees at ISTE in Denver this June. Another important consideration will be how much educators see the need for a keyboard with the iPad, and whether international growth of smartphones for education trumps iPads and similar tablet devices in some geographic markets.

Presentations and videos are expected to appear on the conference Web site (www.edtechindustrysummit.net) over the next several weeks. Additional resources may be at the sites of those who live-tweeted ETIS: In addition to @FrankCatalano, they included @KnowledgeUnltd, @sukanti, @Mikeydc65, @CharleneBlohm, @snordmark, @seshem, @rthorprichard, and @sandy5coat.

The next SIIA Ed Tech Industry Summit is in May 2011, also in San Francisco.

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