

ISTE 2010 (June 27-30, 2010; Denver, CO)

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ISTE (the International Society for Technology in Education) debuted its renamed conference, known in previous years as the National Educational Computing Conference, June 27-30, 2010. ISTE 2010 drew 12,792 attendees and 456 exhibiting companies to the Colorado Convention Center.

While many others have documented the educator-focused conference sessions in the education trade press and on ISTE's own social network (www.iste2010.org), below are some brief highlights and apparent trends gleaned from more than two days walking the ISTE exhibition show floor.

Traffic on the show floor generally appeared good, if not spectacular. As seems to be typical, the larger booths near the entrance of the exhibit hall were consistently much busier than the smaller booths in the back. Interactive whiteboard booths were packed, as were the booths of many large software and publishing companies. Despite all the conference sessions, traffic seemed steady until late afternoon.

Overall, there were signs that consumer and education technology are merging at an accelerated rate, with teachers at the center. It also seemed as though anyone who could program a database was promoting a student information system or learning management system. Both were mentioned frequently in booths big and small. And interactive whiteboards ... well, they ruled supreme.

Some of these observations were live-tweeted from @FrankCatalano (and ISTE attendees were quite active on Twitter using the hash tag #ISTE10).

Interactive Whiteboards

- Interactive whiteboards were, by far and away, the single-most dominant category in terms of booth space and presence. The category inexplicably keeps growing year after year and even drew new entrants at ISTE, such as eInstruction with its Interwrite DualBoard. A stunning 64 ISTE exhibitors self-identified as being in the "interactive white board" product category and – even allowing for those who check every category – that's still roughly 14% of all exhibits, made more prominent by the fact that the interactive white board companies tended to have huge booths. It led one exec to quip that next year, his company would alleviate the proliferation of interactive whiteboard booths by making its booth 2500 x 5000 feet.
- One reason for the prevalence of interactive whiteboards is that they aren't all about just the whiteboard anymore. Interactive whiteboard exhibitors all appeared to have student response devices – from traditional "clickers" (with or without displays) to full tablets – all tied to the interactive whiteboard. SMART Technologies and some others also were showing how iPhones and iPads could be used as student response devices with their systems instead of a dedicated, proprietary tablet.
- Interactive whiteboards are adding 3D features. SMART, Promethean and others showed interactive whiteboards with projector-embedded 3D technology (and yes, with required 3D

glasses, similar to those used in 3D theaters and – also similarly – not necessarily compatible with each other). Texas Instruments, which provides underlying 3D DLP technology, said over twelve manufacturers and 100 products are using TI tech inside.

- There is interactive whiteboard technology that doesn't require an interactive whiteboard. Long-timer Mimio, which started in the corporate market a decade ago, showed MimioTeach (<http://mimio.dymo.com>), a small bar that magnetically attaches to any whiteboard to wirelessly capture whiteboard activity to a computer and projector. Its relatively low \$799 price tag gave it some buzz factor on the floor with presumably cash-strapped schools.
- Another approach seen on the show floor was to put all the technology into the projector and none on the whiteboard to make the whiteboard interactive. Epson America was one exhibitor taking this tack with its IU-01. The technology, which attaches to a personal computer via USB, simply senses and tracks activity from the projector itself and communicates that activity to the computer. It has the potential to completely displace dedicated interactive whiteboards.

Social Networks

- Dedicated social networks for students (and educators) were a mini-trend at ISTE, with at least three companies showing new products or new features. These were in addition to Pearson's announcement just before the start of ISTE that it would underwrite educator communities on the general-purpose social network Ning (news release, <http://bit.ly/dbwp68>). Perhaps not unexpectedly, the education-specific social networks have Facebook-like looks and feels.
- Edmodo (www.edmodo.com) launched in September 2008 as a social learning network and has a free edition for teachers and students. New at ISTE was an iPod application and an Android app will be added this fall. Edmodo features education applications and a library of educational content populated by teachers which they can share with each other; content partners will be announced by this fall. Edmodo says more than 20% of their users visit every day.
- Schoology (www.schoology.com), founded in May 2009, also has free editions for teachers and students. It was highlighting its difference at ISTE: a Web-based learning management system built under, and into, the social networking platform.
- Th(i)ngEd (www.thinged.com) was the newest entrant with its Journ(i)e student-centered learning social network. Th(i)ngEd used ISTE not just to launch Journ(i)e, but to announce the company name change from SchoolCenter to Th(i)ngEd. Journ(i)e has iPhone and Android apps, as well as a full set of social network features including threaded messaging, blogs, feeds, wikis and workspaces for projects and groups. It likely will also give spell-checkers fits.
- Not on the show floor were teacher-focused social networks where educators alone mingle, such as edWeb.net, TeachAde.com and WeAreTeachers.com, apparently ceding the spotlight this ISTE to social networks where students and teachers both participate.

Other Observations

- The cool, fast Web research tool YoLink (<http://yolink.com>) announced a new API – which is how parent TigerLogic hopes to make money on the service – but the buzz was about YoLink’s free browser plug in to enhance and preview search results (without having to click through links).
- Beamz (www.thebeamz.com) showed laser hardware that allows anyone to “play” music by breaking one of four red laser beams with his or her hands in the U-shaped device. Software indicates what note was played. Cost? \$199 for both hardware and software, combined. Think Guitar Hero with education chops (or, for those in the industry long enough, think Broderbund’s Jam Session with hardware).
- Vocabulary builder site Learn That Word (<http://learnthatword.org>) is worth noting primarily because of its unusual business model. It doesn’t charge schools for all vocabulary words the schools use from the site, but only for the words it turns out students don’t know and have to learn. More detail on the model is on the (beta) website.
- Cengage Learning had the dubious distinction of having what seemed to be the only booth with a large display of actual books. Mostly about technology. It seemed so very retro.
- Most prevalent giveaways? Still t-shirts. Best giveaways? eChalk’s yummy cupcakes.

ISTE 2011 will be June 26-29, 2011 in Philadelphia.

Contact information or additional details on any of the above exhibitors is available on the ISTE site at http://center.uoregon.edu/ISTE/2010/exposition/exhibitor_search.php.

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