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BEYOND SUPPLY:

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY
VENDORS IN EDUCATION

 Windows 10



INTRODUCTION

In a technology-forward world, collaboration is key. This is especially salient for the education sector, where fast-paced technological change has posed an ongoing challenge for schools as they develop their digital learning models. With the pandemic further fast-tracking the need for online and remote learning programmes, educators have relied on the support of technology providers to succeed. It has also highlighted the role that technology vendors can and arguably should play within the greater Australian school community.

This white paper discusses how Acer Computer Australia has evolved from a traditional hardware supplier into a holistic technology collaborator that works directly with schools to improve student learning. It scrutinises the importance of an Australian-centric supply, distribution and technical support network when it comes to meeting an individual school's computing needs and provides real examples of how Acer Computer Australia has accomplished this. It also examines the importance of communication and collaboration between educators, parents, governments, and technology providers in delivering adequate cybersecurity to schools and in promoting student e-safety.



WHAT SHOULD SCHOOLS EXPECT FROM VENDORS?

There was a time when a vendor such as Acer Computer Australia simply made and supplied computer hardware to schools. However, just as the technology itself is in perpetual development, the role of Acer in the Australian education sector has changed and continues to progress. In an 'Acer for Education' video panel discussion, Mr Rod Bassi, the Oceanic Sales Director for Acer Computer Australia articulated that Acer's function at schools had evolved from a basic supplier-model to one of a facilitator and partner¹.

"We take this matter extremely seriously and delicately. The education sector of Australia has been kind to Acer in excess of 25 years and it's safe to say that we've learned along that journey together with the sector," Rod said. "We have refined ourselves and lifted our offering by having an honest dialogue with schools. This collaboration approach we take with schools is essential in order to profile and tailor a solution that is suitable. While there is a lot of commonality and overlaps in the education sector, there are also subtleties and differences between each school and educator."

According to Rod, a lot of the growth that has occurred with Acer in the education sector is organic and comes from having a direct communication line with schools around Australia. It also goes hand-in-hand with the evolution of the products themselves and advancing student expectations.



“It is important that our products, from a technology point of view, are able to achieve and meet the needs of learning today. They need a certain level of power to drive a machine, which means they have to have adequate battery life so students and teachers can execute all day computing,” he expanded. “In recent years we have gravitated towards laptops and notebooks, and weight is an important factor, particularly with growing students. Remember the days when your backpack was filled with heavy textbooks? And a laptop 15-20 years ago was well in excess of 3kg. For an average weight of 1.2 kg, a contemporary Acer laptop can give you all-day computing. It has a significant amount of power to multitask and meet all the curriculum needs of today’s classroom.”

Additionally, Rod pointed out that all of Acer’s education laptops come with the latest Microsoft Windows operating systems, which is currently Windows 10, and include built-in features that protect student privacy and data.

“There are significant features in the latest operating system with virus threat protection, account protection, firewall and network protection as well as application browser control and device security,” he explained, in a video panel discussion on E-Safety. “That’s stock standard and any customer that purchases an Acer product with Windows 10 will get those features straight out of the box.²”

From the perspective of Mr Paul Murrin, Director of Technology at Ipswich Girls’ Grammar School, a technology vendor must have a mature understanding of what educators need to provide students in order to address their learning needs.

“Our staff and our students are using their devices day in and day out – for every class, as well as homework or lesson planning. Working with our



vendors, they need to understand how education works and Acer do that fantastically with us, they understand the product we need to put in the hands of our students,” he explained in the same Acer video panel discussion³. “So, technology for us is not the difficult part, it blends into the background and just works as a tool to provide quality education.”

For John Salceda, Head of IT at Loreto College Coorparoo, the expectation from his side is that a technology vendor is both dependable and anticipatory – points he also put forth in the ‘Acer for Education’ panel discussion on Vendor Support⁴.

“We have a reliance on technology and as Acer are providing our laptops, we need them to be proactive and reliable. Acer provided 10 spare laptops to us before we requested or needed these, so the proactiveness is there,” he said. “A vendor also needs to be a supportive, local partner. We’ve been happy with the support we get from Acer. Having spare parts available is important – that they are located locally, not coming from overseas, which is the case with Acer. Ideally, we would have these delivered to us the next day after we log the request.”

LOCAL SUPPLY AND SUPPORT



The importance of having computing devices and parts available in Australia has never been more apparent than during the coronavirus crisis.

According to an IDC estimate, the Australian PC market grew by 35.2% in quarter two of 2020 from demand as all sectors, education included, moved to working from home or online learning⁵. Contrariwise, Gartner reported a worldwide shipment decline for PCs in the first quarter – the worst seen since 2013 – due to the pandemic’s disruptions on supply and demand of PCs⁶.

For Rod Bassi, Acer Computer Australia’s local presence has been a key point of difference to the education sector during this time. In an ‘Acer for Education’ video panel discussion on the topic of Online Learning, Rod expounded on how the hardware vendor catered to demand caused by the pandemic⁷.

“At the outset of COVID-19, which in Australia was back in March at the end of the school term one, going into term two, there was an unprecedented demand across the eastern seaboard for laptops,” he said. “Fortunately, we assemble all our commercial products for Australia in Homebush, Sydney. For that reason, we plan the raw materials that go into making these devices 4-6 months in advance. It’s an acquired discipline to be able to do that with supply chain management, but one we’ve become adept in after many years. It just so happened when this pandemic hit – and it hit

hard and quickly – we had scalability. We had enough raw materials to scale up quickly and take us through to mid-year. All it meant was that we borrowed from the future and had to build those requirements for future months, faster.”

Rod explained that the Australian education sector consumed 4 months’ worth of equipment in about 4 weeks during the early coronavirus onset. But besides being able to rapidly supply laptops – of which there was a particularly huge demand from the public sector – being in a position to offer local support was equally important.

“As much as the demand was commercially healthy for Acer, from a personal point of view, it’s more that we were here and available,” he said, noting the issues surrounding air freight during the pandemic did not affect Acer due to their in-country assembly of product and stock. “It was refreshing and pleasing to be able to cater to so many in education during this time.”

His comments were echoed by John Salceda in a video panel discussion on Vendor Support, where he revealed that Loreto College relied on Acer’s ability to provide local technical support swiftly and skillfully⁸.

“Having highly skilled technical support available is essential. We won’t work without this. We’re in regular contact with the local Acer partner up here in Queensland and trust they will be available to us whenever we need them.”



COLLABORATING ON CYBERSECURITY AND E-SAFETY

According to Rod, being invested in schools on an individual level, and all year round, is another key point of difference when it comes to what Acer provides. And Acer's evolving role as supplier turned collaborative partner is apropos to the relationship the company has with various schools around the country. It is also further exemplified by Acer's perspective on issues such as e-safety and cybersecurity.

"If you look at the history of Acer, our function in the ecosystem was to make and deliver hardware and originally that's where it stopped. As we've evolved organically and made products more robust and fit for purpose in the education sector, it's only natural in the world we live in today that we help and address the security aspect," he explained in the video panel discussion on Vendor Support⁹. "Not to say schools aren't doing in this their own right but it's a point of difference to Acer. We're not just that laptop that arrives once a year, we

have a holistic relationship with our schools that lasts 12 months a year, and this allows us to address some of these larger issues head on and come up with solutions that we can all benefit and grow from as a community."

Rod cited Acer Computer Australia's relationship with technology provider Acurus as an example where Acer had gone beyond the supplier-model and into the bounds of a facilitator who collaborates with other parties to the benefit of schools.

CEO and co-founder of Acurus, Marshall Thompson, explained that Acurus provides Acer with a free CIS (Computer Information System) benchmark tool to run security scans for schools on their operating environment.

"Acer and Acurus are both passionate about the safety of end users, and the safety of end user devices such as the Acer laptop fleets,"

he said in the 'Acer for Education' video panel discussion on Vendor Support¹⁰. "So, if a school is about to purchase an Acer fleet, we'll take their standard operating environment and run a scan on that, and provide them with a score. We'll then provide recommendations to improve their security based on that score. It's a proactive step in securing the environment from the start when they roll out the devices to students."

Furthermore, Rod said the collaboration with Acurus meant that schools could benefit from the cybersecurity learnings of private enterprise.

"It's certainly energising as a vendor to educate ourselves on some of the solutions and techniques out there and available for corporate enterprise. Through our relationship with Acurus we've been able to take some of those key learnings and collaborate jointly with schools to bring them to the foreground." Additionally, Acer can work with schools to customise their fleet of devices with pre-loaded security software. Rod expanded on this in an E-Safety video panel discussion in the 'Acer for Education' video series¹¹.

"A significant number of schools that Acer supplies to, such as Loreto College Coorparoo



and Ipswich Girls Grammar School, will have their own layers of security and uniquely customised operating environment which Acer loads in-country on their behalf," Rod explained. "There are other products we can load into our devices as well. For example, the Department of Education in Queensland goes down the pathway of Computrace, a propriety laptop theft software. This includes features such as the ability to remote lock a device if it's stolen or lost, or being able to remotely delete files or locate a device. So that's something that department has embraced and has been running for years now to increase their security."





SUMMARY

As educators continue to navigate the digitalised learning pathway, collaboration with technology partners such as Acer is essential to their success. Acer Computer Australia has evolved from a supplier of hardware technology into a holistic facilitator and partner to schools. By collaborating together on common goals, such as student safety and improved online learning, educators and technology providers can bring about positive change and significant benefit to entire schooling communities.



For educators interested in a technology consultation with Acer or to learn more about the latest products or vendor support, please email: education.aca@acer.com

www.acer.com.au

REFERENCES

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11. [Acer for Education Video Series – Panel Discussion of Key Issues in Education: E-Safety](#)