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The Big Three Questions: SmartBoard Technology Review

Carlene Bailey

University of West Georgia

MEDT 8463

Dr. J. Huett

The SmartBoard: What Does It Do?

The SmartBoard is an interactive whiteboard that improves the way teachers meet, train, teach, and present. It is a combination of a whiteboard and a computer. You can run multimedia materials, print notes, and collaborate on electronic documents. It can be used in conjunction with an LCD projector to operate all functions on a computer. It is also the only device that automatically "senses" the color of a dry erase pen without asking you to press buttons or use special pens. When you lift a pen out of a tray, the board automatically senses the correct color.

The SmartBoard's software displays thumbnails of each saved screen, which makes it easy to go back to display individual screens. It also allows you to "type" text onto the screen by using a virtual onscreen keyboard, which comes with a spell checker. The SmartBoard is powered by a connector that intercepts the keyboard cable from a computer. The software also allows you to print a slide; however you cannot save a screen image. Screen size options are 47", 60", and 72".

The SmartBoard uses resistive technology, meaning there is a small air gap between two sheets of resistive material inside the board. When you press on the board with your finger or a dry erase marker, a contact point is registered and its coordinates correspond to the same area on the computer screen. Because of resistive technology, it does not require a special pen or stylus to perform mouse or pen functions at the Board, only pressure on the surface. (Chad Criswell, 2008)

The SmartBoard allows for class interactivity, and frees a teacher from the podium. Teachers can write on it and change applications easily. It is great for visual learners and it is great for explaining progressive clicks on database web interfaces.

With a SmartBoard, you can write, draw or type over any Windows application with a magnetic pen. Your finger is the mouse-you can use it to click on web links and close documents. The SmartBoard is also useful for preparing lectures. You can burn them to a CD, and then use it for substitute lesson plans when you are out.

Opening and closing documents while standing by a screen saves time. You are not tied to your keyboard. Demonstrations are clearer. You do not tell the students what you are clicking on, you show them and they see the link and follow along. Another advantage is that your computer keyboard remains fully functional and can still be used with the SmartBoard. Many instructors go back and forth between standing by the board to do touch demonstrations and standing by the keyboard.

Specifications such as size, rear or front projection and whether it is mobile or permanently mounted all determine the price of a SmartBoard. Current prices range from $1,400 to $10,500, depending on various options.

There are a couple of factors to consider when purchasing a SmartBoard. First of all, look at the design of the room it will be used in. Visibility in long narrow labs is not as good as in smaller facilities. Also, consider whether it will be used for demonstrations only, or in a networked laboratory. It seems to be a more cost-effective purchase for hands-on electronic classrooms.

At times a SmartBoard is off target; you just have to set the targets like you would on a palm pilot stylus driven device. Be careful that students and other teachers do not use regular markers on the board or knock the projector out of alignment.

What Specific Problems Will The SmartBoard Solve?

The SmartBoard solves the problem of not being able to save notes and sketches made on a traditional whiteboard. It solves the problem of an instructor having to walk from the board back to the computer any time an image needs to be changed on the screen. With a SmartBoard, you control the computer by touching the screen.

What Technology Already Exists?

The cheaper and better alternative to the SmartBoard is a flipchart which can be used to make notes and saved and displayed around the room. A cheaper and simpler way to control the computer from the front of the room would be a PC remote control or a wireless mouse. Neither one of these simpler, cheaper methods come close to matching the functionality and uses of a SmartBoard. The SmartBoard not only saves information digitally, but the information can be posted to a website for all to use at any time. Being able to control the PC while at the board is advantageous and allows for more continuity while delivering instruction.

References

Chad Criswell. (2008, September 30). *What is a SmartBoard? Smartboards in Education and Business Increase Learning*. Retrieved June 25, 2009, from http://computer-monitors.suite101.com Web site: http://computer-monitors.suite101.com/article.cfm/what_is_a_smartboard