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The Big Three Questions

David S. Robertson

University of West Georgia

Companies are in business to make a profit. Those who cater to the educational sector are no different. Some organizations, like the one featured in this article, are unique in that their technology can be used in business or education. Interestingly, the technology vendor in this example follows a marketing strategy that offers a no-cost gateway to their product and service that is extremely utilitarian. This article will spotlight an exclusively online product called Dropbox (www.dropbox.com), and subject the technology to “three big questions” addressing what the product really does, what problem(s) does it solve, and why is this innovation superior to what may already exist?

Question #1: What Does This Technology Really Do?

Dropbox, at its core, offers two gigabytes of free online storage space accessible from any Internet-connected device. Additional space can be purchased inexpensively. Students with Internet access can easily save and store every class paper they produce (or scan in) on Dropbox. Student work remains on their hard drive but is automatically backed up to the cloud. Dropbox is an innovative hybrid of Software as a Service (SaaS) which works in partnership with your own computer while keeping the software updated from the Internet. Students, perhaps for the first time, can safely wean themselves from carrying a USB thumb drive if they choose to use Dropbox. When used correctly, their data is always only a password-protected login away, accessible and secure. Two gigabytes is a generous amount of space for documents, spreadsheets, and presentations provided students avoid storing audio and video libraries on Dropbox. The most utilitarian function of Dropbox for students may be the shared folder feature. Dropbox makes collaboration using shared files a breeze.

Through a single email invitation, students can invite all their team members simultaneously to download Dropbox, and as an administrator, share one folder with fellow

students thus enabling real-time document sharing rights to hundreds of documents in a single folder on *their collaboration partners* desktops. Now, when any collaboration partner drag and drops a file(s) to the shared folder, it is dynamically synced with all the users on their desktops via the Internet. One does not even need to log onto Dropbox.com to access current versions of all files – they all live in the Dropbox folder on each end users’ desktop. For every friend a student invites to sign up for a free account on Dropbox, they are awarded 250 MB of bonus space up to 8 GB.

Question #2: What Specific and Necessary Problem Will This Piece of Technology Solve?

The need for instant information access of files will be a perpetual need of students. Being free from purchasing and keeping up with a USB thumb drive is one less nuisance to contend with in a student’s already busy life. Having the ability to download, edit, and upload newly edited files plus track every revision online could parlay into improved grades on certain assignments. Hard drive crashes and lost USB drives no longer are the “end of the world” and thus can reduce student stress levels if and when a catastrophic data loss situation arises from malfunctioning or missing personal storage devices.

Question #3: What Cheaper/Better/Easier/Simpler Technology Already Exists to Solve Your Problem, and, in What Way, is the Proposed Innovation an Improvement Over Other Options or the Existing Way of Doing Things?

The ever-growing, ever-aggressive Microsoft Corporation stands ready with an answer. Windows Live is a free online productivity suite available for download that provides 25 GB of free online storage for users. The Windows Live Essentials suite includes online solutions for word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, messaging, and free web sites. Many universities

have partnered with Microsoft to use these tools to replace their proprietary systems for student email and file hosting.

Conclusion

While Dropbox does not offer the wide variety of user services nor free file storage capacity that Microsoft does, the company has perfected the one thing that they do far better than nearly any other competitor – free online storage, file sharing, and syncing.