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Ten Reasons Not to Lump Together K-12, Higher Ed Integration Markets

Let's start by acknowledging that it's flawed to lump the K-12 and higher education integration markets together. Other than both markets using technology to help them educate students, they don't have much in common.

Objectives are different. Product deployment is different. Purchasing processes are different. Budgets are very different. And integrators that work in K-12 aren't more prone to also work in higher education than other vertical markets, and vice versa.

Both InfoComm and NSCA, however, group the two education markets together in their 2014 AV Definition and Strategy Study and 2014 NSCA Electronic Systems Outlook, respectively.

Meanwhile, both point out key differences between the two markets:

Higher Education

1. Cash, if flowing, and universities' focus on technology spending provide potential growth opportunities for integrators.
2. Most integration opportunities stem from new construction.
3. Focus is shifting away from projectors (to save on maintenance updates) toward large monitors, according to InfoComm.
4. InfoComm sees it shifting away from classrooms in favor of increased spend-ing on virtualized technology, video collaboration and distance learning.
5. Trend toward universities handling more integration in-house.

K-12

1. Stingy funding remains a big challenge for integrators serving K-12 schools.
2. Most integration opportunities stem from renovation.
3. It's very focused on interactivity via whiteboards or other video display solutions.
4. Solutions are very classroom oriented.
5. Market still relies on integrators and consultants.

Market Chatter

We asked some folks with first-hand knowledge of what it takes to succeed in education integration market the following…

Who makes decisions about what technology solutions to integrate into a typical K-12 school and classroom?

Gregor Freund, CEO of Versal, an online learning company: "From our perspective the teacher is really the key to success for technology. What we see increasingly is that administrators would not even deploy technologies without having support from the teachers there and that could be informal support.

"Maybe the company marketed directly to teachers and so what administrators see is little pockets of teachers using a particular product with success (which often leads to a larger investment).

"It can also be formal support where a panel of teachers evaluate technologies and help administrators make smart decisions. This is particularly true if the technology is something the students have to interact with."

Who makes decisions about what technology solutions to integrate into a typical university?

Bill McIntosh, co-founder and president, Synergy Media Group, Pittsburgh: "The majority of universities have a department responsible for classroom technology where the director of the group is the decision maker for all new audiovisual projects. This key individual has in-depth knowledge on campus technology standards along with unique technology needs required by each department.

"For smaller projects, the director is often the only person involved in the direction of the space. When larger projects arise, we find it ben-eficial to include not just the director of class-room technology, but department heads and key faculty in the design decision.

"The ability to present technology trends in higher educa-tion, understand the department's pedagogy strategy, and recommend new technology solutions that complement and enhance the school's vision allows an integrator to create a technology design that satisfies all stake-holders.

Key Takeaways

- While university spending is poised to grow, according to InfoComm, NSCA warns that universities are likely to think twice about raising tuitions to support campus growth due to the already spiraling student loan situation.
- That student loan dilemma is likely to lead to more online class participation and more distance learning opportunities.
- Mass notification emergency communication is a critical category in both markets.
- K-12 classroom trend is toward more flexibility and better use of natural light, according to NSCA.
- Digital signage is increasingly important for higher-ed clients.