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From Pen to Mobile Devices: Will There Ever Be A Paperless School?

Disruptive and emerging technologies are changing the way we work and live today. This new wave of technologies is undoubtedly infiltrating the

education sector, not only in Singapore, but all over the world. As a result, our education sector is transforming – with enhanced teaching methods, as well as new ways of learning in our increasingly digital world.

Gone were the days when we used chalk and blackboards that were invented during the 18th century. Today, digital devices, learning platforms, interactive projectors are used to tailor education to suit students' needs, interests, and motivations. Education institutions also encourage online classes or webinars. The trend is obvious with students carrying less textbooks, and instead having their notebooks or tablets as their go-to notetaking method of choice.

Pen and paper are still relevant

While we acknowledge the evolution of technology and how it impacts the education sector, the old school way of pen and paper is still highly relevant today.

We often heard the term “Paperless Office”, which refers to an office where the use of paper is eliminated or greatly reduced, with documents stored in digital formats. It is not difficult to picture this for the education sector, given the digital trends that increasingly disrupt our daily lives.

However, a [study](#) conducted with university students across multiple countries revealed that while digital devices dominate the teaching and learning experience, students still find it beneficial when they read and write with paper. This is because writing by hand allows students to better express themselves through the strokes of their handwritten characters, as compared to in coded form, such as typing on a computer.

The importance of print in a highly digital education industry

As the e-learning industry gains popularity and online content become more accessible to students and teachers, printed documents still play a crucial role in the education sector due to its wide applications and uses. In fact, the education market remains one of the biggest consumers of paper products worldwide.

Paper products are often used for the most important materials, such as report cards, worksheets, examinations, and registrations. Report cards are some of the most important documents in the education sector because they keep track of students' progress and performance, representing a formal way for teachers to communicate with parents. Examinations and tests still rely heavily on paper, where students have to darken the oval on an Optical Answer Sheet (OAS), or write essays on multiple sheets of paper.

Recently, Singapore's Education Minister Ong Ye Kung shared that more examinations could go digital in the future as students provided positive feedback on computer-based writing examinations that were piloted.

However, he also noted that there is still a long way to go for examinations to be completely digital, as the education sector in Singapore might not be ready for it. Mr. Ong also cited that some students may not have as much exposure to computers as others, possibly leading to disadvantages for some.

The latter is a valid reason. Some countries still lack the required technological infrastructure, and they rely heavily on print documents. Epson Singapore for instance has collaborated with Singapore Management University (SMU) to help print paper materials for Our Lady of Grace, Children's Home (OLGH) located in the county of Meru, Kenya.

While Singapore has the infrastructure necessary to move into the next stage of the print evolution, it still begs the question whether our education sector will ever be ready for paperless schools.

Paper remains king

Attitudes to print are changing as we advance digitally and technologically, but paper remains very much at the centre of the education sector. In the same way streaming music has led to a vinyl revival, and e-books have encouraged more of us to buy traditional hard-copy books, digital's ability to send information in a targeted way reminds us all of the underlying value of the paper document.

The journey to a paperless school has already begun, but it is a slow one. Rather than cutting down on print entirely and digitalising everything, we should consider the changing relationship between print volume and impact. Technologies have transformed the way we think about print's value and role, as well as the kind of printing technology schools should invest in.

The education sector should adopt a "print what matters most" attitude instead of a "print everything" culture. Not only does this help schools use less energy, reduce waste, and become more sustainable to the environment in the long run, it prioritises the quality over the quantity of print. It is in this context that more and more organisations are choosing inkjet printing technology over laser.

As the education sector increasingly adopts new technologies that encourage interaction and collaboration between students and teachers, there is less need for mass printing. As a result, the near-paperless school will see print being increasingly used to showcase important milestones and documents, where quality matters above everything else.

Are we prepared for change?

It is promising that new technologies create new ways of learning and teaching that will result in new discoveries and ideas. However, just

because a digital classroom is more widely adopted, it does not mean the use of paper in education will be obsolete. Paper have been – and likely always will be – an important component of our education sector.

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