

## Seamless ICT

Creating a seamless ICT system is the ultimate objective within the education technology sector. Infinite UK has risen to the challenge.

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In today's fragmented technology climate any company capable of offering a genuine 'one-stop shop' ICT solution to schools and further education establishments will find the world beating a path to its door.

Hardly surprising, then, that Infinite (UK) is the centre of considerable attention for its innovative solutions to the problem of making educational software 'interoperable' throughout the UK.

The creation of a seamless ICT 'quilt' from a patchwork of different applications is the holy grail of the technology sector, and an objective towards which Warwick-based Infinite – under the guiding hand of managing director Oscar Vickerman – has been constantly striving since its creation last May when it emerged from the umbrella of Becta as a stand-alone business.

A variety of government and education sector initiatives were brought together, such as Total Cost of Ownership (TCO, designed to help schools and colleges develop, manage and control their entire IT strategies); Inclusion, aimed at keeping children within the education system and part of the National Grid for Learning; the Communication Aids Project funded by the DfES to assist children with learning difficulties; and ICT Advice directed at classroom practitioners.

Infinite rose to the challenge by embarking on a 'buy and build' strategy aimed at creating world-class communications and ICT outsourcing business which offers full-service support to any educational establishment that needs it.

"Any school, college or university with an IT need can come to us and we will work with them – at any level they wish – to meet it," said Mr Vickerman.

First stage of Infinite's expansion plan is the newly-completed acquisition of IT hardware provider Prism, which is also based in Warwickshire and brings with it the specialist know-how of Tony Rawlins who has developed considerable expertise in the solutions available from providers like Cisco, Extreme, 3Com and Nortel.

A bonus from the transaction was that it brought Malcolm Hayes into the fold - a respected figure in the industry who joined as non-executive chairman.

Mr Vickerman added: "Infinite can now offer a single combined solution - from strategy and approach, through to systems and infrastructure.

"The market transformation to on-demand applications is a fast emerging trend in the technology industry. Clients no longer need multiple software products to address all their communication and integration challenges. Whether connecting departments, partners or third party service providers, Infinite solves integration problems."

Mr Vickerman says his company has selected the 'best of breed' application providers in each of the key operational areas – and the result is that integration, once a time-consuming and expensive activity, can be achieved simply and at a reduced risk.

It also provides clients with a collaborative partnership and a single point of contact, and a level of service which many mistakenly believe is beyond their reach financially.

As an outsourced communications and technology service provider, specialising in organisational transformation, offers the prospect of success through effective communication and technical solutions – in particular in identifying, designing and deploying the applications and infrastructure that support the education sector.

“Our approach involves understanding how an organisation or education establishment operates, what its vision and objectives are and therefore what relationships and processes are needed,” Mr Vickerman explained.

“We are then able to determine how technology can best be utilised to support essential processes and relationships in order to deliver the desired objectives.”

Underpinning the whole ethos of the business is a thorough understanding of what makes some projects fly and others fail - from scoping an ICT Vision for schools or evaluating the possibilities of implementing open source operating systems through to wireless networks and technical support.

“We make things work – and we provide the coaching necessary to ensure that organisations are able to manage their own technical futures in a fully informed and flexible way,” Mr Vickerman added.

Typical of the way in which Infinite operates is the case of Communications Aid Project (CAP), a web resource funded by the DfES which seeks to help pupils with communication difficulties access the curriculum and interact with others. It supports student transition to post-school provision through the medium of ICT.

Infinite continues to maintain and extend the CAP website's backend administration, financial, and database reporting systems, as well as handling its on-line applications, assessment systems and providing general ongoing advice and consultation.

There are numerous other examples of the firm's expertise in action which demonstrate the added value it brings to classroom practitioners, ICT co-ordinators, leadership teams, SENCOs and other professionals, through years of experience at the cutting edge of the education sector.

Mr Vickerman explained: “The skills and experience we have gathered over the years allows us to identify best practice in ICT at a very early stage and advise clients on how they should be responding.

”Knowing what works and what doesn't saves time and increases efficiency – both of which are high on our list of priorities.”

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