

The Essendon North Primary School story

1. The software was developed initially as an in-house solution to a teaching and learning problem: getting students to create digital learning portfolios.
2. It was visitors to the school who drove the commercialization of the product: "How can we get this software?" Visitors understood that this software's primary intention was for Primary and Early Secondary students to create a digital learning portfolio.

The software has always been closely connected with teaching and learning and solves a curriculum problem. Its focus is to enable students to publish digital content in a manner that supports students of lesser ability, without crippling more-able students from displaying their capabilities. Where the artifact generated, the digital learning portfolio, is understood to be defined as:

"A portfolio is a collection of student work over a period of time. A portfolio is an authentic performance based assessment tool. It is used for evaluation by demonstrating how and what the student is learning. A digital portfolio simply means that the portfolio is technology based."
(Yolanda Abrenica - <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/courses/edtec596r/students/Abrenica/Abrenica.html>)

In terms of teaching and learning a digital learning portfolio is fundamentally no different to a more traditional "paper-based" portfolio, with the imperative that any child that uses technology within the context of the curriculum should be engaged with the generation of a "digital" portfolio. And this was the nub of the original problem, and the EdCube's great strength - it is software that all children in this space can use to generate a teaching and learning oriented artifact that is their representation of their learning journey.

Because of this focus features such as the automatic file conversion are not just a "nicety", they are essential. The bulk of students in this age group do not understand file type or file size, so the tool must handle the variations quietly and seamlessly as possible.

Ditto the interface. For students in this group, if you can't see it then it doesn't exist. So the interface is designed to prevent objects being clipped or pushed off screen. Similarly the core editing controls are presented on screen in an "edit bar", and by this the functions persist as a continually present meta-cognitive prompt of the tool's capabilities.

The tool does not link to external artifacts (such as files), it always embeds them. Students in this group generally cannot sustain the abstract notion of a "link" between two discreet objects for any length of time (and indeed, this is one of the chief reasons why traditional web publishing fails in this arena). The object must be incorporated into the tool (embedded), because if it isn't students will delete, move or rename the linked file and then wonder why the files in the portfolio "no longer work".

In short, it is not a set of features that differentiates the EdCube it is its design philosophy. The EdCube is built to support the integrated use of ICT in the curriculum by enabling students to showcase their learning journey for themselves. The EdCube is not focused on producing a "year book". The EdCube does not produce websites. It produces digital learning portfolios.

And this classroom-centric philosophy is also deeply embedded in the EdCube company itself. We all understand that real value in teaching and learning comes from the classroom - not through the dictates of bureaucrats, or the latest "gee wiz" piece of technology. From our different perspectives, of software development, education management, and marketing and sales, we are committed to the principal that it is what kids do that makes the difference in education. It is this focus on the classroom, at both the software and staff level, that makes what we do unique.

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