



By Antonio Civitella

The Mobile World Is at Hand



As we prepare for the 2012-2013 school year, those of us in K-12 education and transportation are keenly aware that mobile technology is driving the proliferation of smart devices that can easily be carried around. How we live, learn, work and connect is now deeply affected by the mobile world and the applications that sustain it. Very simply, we are moving away from “using a computer” to having a constant companion device.

FROM PAPER TO CLOUD COMPUTING

Apple has led the evolution into the hand-held mobile world, and numerous other companies are following suit. Cloud computing is making data and applications easily accessible wherever we are. As a result, students are moving beyond the “I” (Internet) generation. They are becoming the AO generation — “Always On,” a term coined by Elon University professor Janna Quitney Anderson for the generation born between 2000 and 2020. Anderson said, “They are growing up in a world that offers them instant access nearly everywhere to nearly the entirety of human knowledge, with incredible opportunities to connect, create and collaborate...”

Parents and educators know this intuitively as they have already witnessed children as young as toddlers navigating touch screens on mobile devices with ease and confidence. They know how to start them up and navigate to apps that appeal to them. They handle the cameras on smartphones with ease and confidence, and they expect immediate feedback from their interactions with these devices.

New learning experiences at such an early age change how the AO generation thinks and learns. They expect to access their lessons online through a touch screen or keyboard. The work they produce is no longer housed in notebooks or in three-ring binders. It is stored on the Cloud and accessible any time. A treasured fourth-grade story written today remains available for as long as a student or a parent wishes. It no longer fades on paper or is hidden in the attic under a pile of books.

THE ‘AO’ STUDENT TRANSPORTER

Those of us in student transportation are responding to these technological advances. We are developing applications for mobile devices that will enable district personnel involved in student transportation to have data at their fingertips. This means they can keep

track of buses and student riders wherever they are. This data, now stored on their computers in the garage, needs to be accessible wherever they are in the district so they can respond to questions and address the concerns of district administrators and board members.

The same is true for parents. They want to see on their mobile devices where their children's buses are, and when and where their children were picked up and dropped off at home or at other designated sites.

As districts prepare for the opening of school, it is highly advisable to consider the value of mobile technology, not only for lesson plans in the classroom, but also for students traveling to and from school. This technology is critical for running a transparent transportation operation where data answers questions and eases concerns.

The development of mobile apps is helping districts to better stay abreast of their operations on-the-fly and in real-time. With RFID tags alerting districts if students were picked up by the right bus, this data will not only verify student ridership, it also will enable districts using routing software to analyze trends in ridership so they can achieve greater efficiencies and cost savings.

The confluence of cloud computing and mobile technology advances is making the average consumer very tech-savvy. This, in turn, has created high expectations for immediate access to all kinds of information wherever we are, from school and work to healthcare and entertainment. Acknowledging these expectations and creating new opportunities to share data using mobile devices will benefit K-12 education and student transportation.

It is an exciting time that all of us involved in education and student transportation should embrace as we anticipate the opening of school. ■

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What is your bus being faced with this year?



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