

St Luke's offers a leading light in application of technology

Outsource Success: leading grammar acknowledged by peers as offering a cutting edge environment

St Lukes Grammar Schools integration of technology into their curriculum has earned the recognition of the NSW Association of Independent Schools (AIS). In a report provided to the school by the AIS, St Lukes was identified as a Lighthouse school, highlighting the way forward for other educational institutions in its use of cutting edge technology. The recognition of the school as a successful IT learning environment has been driven in no small part by a close and trusted relationship with Sydney based IT services provider, Total PC. The outsourced arrangement has seen Total PC become truly part of the school according to St Lukes Technology and Communications Coordinator, Mrs. Julia Bale. St Lukes has migrated from having a modest network with a heavy reliance on standalone PCs to being considered one of the leading examples within the NSW education community, all within a short space of time. With computing skills and technical literacy a growing must for students and teachers alike, the arrangement between St Lukes and Total PC is ensuring the school stays one step ahead in the quest to produce the most confident and astute users of technology in NSW. Prior to outsourcing their PC and network support, St Lukes was furnished with a variety of computers and increasing demands on the time of the classroom IT teachers. Access, connectivity and the stability of systems were all problematic and challenging. Although a technical committee was well established, the expertise within it was limited to the experiences of the individuals, all of whom had other significant duties within the school. Staff, students and parents alike were keen to be at the leading edge of NSW state standards, both in quality of class work and computing proficiency. To achieve his goal, the School Council and Headmaster identified the need for a unilateral, rigorous commitment to upgrading and managing the computing systems. Total PC was brought in to devise a strategy for upgrading and managing the entire environment to a leading edge degree, whilst maintaining an affordable level of expenditure, a future proofed upgrade path and benefits such as on-site training and support throughout the year. The ability for Total PC to design, plan, deliver and support all the elements needed by an independent non-profit organisation like St Lukes has assisted with a fundamental shift planned for the teaching/learning paradigm for the school. The co-educational Grammar school now runs two hundred and fifty Novell networked and standardized high specification PCs serving a community of almost one thousand students and teachers. Students actively research coursework using the Internet, create their own websites, compose music and edit videos using multimedia packages. Management Reports are no longer hand written, and lesson plans can also be stored and updated electronically to take into consideration new research or syllabus changes each time the lesson is run. Internet access and the use of multimedia CD-ROMS heighten the quality and relevance of the subjects in planning lessons. The school now has a viable Intranet, and the weekly newsletter is now sent electronically to hundreds of parents. Across the campus, all desktops are equipped with Windows 2000 operating systems and Microsoft Office, with access to 60 additional applications facilitating activities such as presentations, word processing and multimedia usage. The multiple licenses include Adobe Photodeluxe, SonicFoundry editing tools, Photoshop and Macromedia Studio giving students a breadth of experience using the multimedia tools most likely to enhance their coursework and assist their career once leaving school. To accommodate these resource hungry packages, the standard build is currently 512MB RAM running Intel 2.4GHz Pentium 4 processors fitted with Dlink 10/100 network cards displayed to 17 Acer monitors. In areas where there is extensive use of multimedia software, the specifications are ramped up to include zip drives, burner drives and a removable 40gig IDE drive for audio/visual data allowing the students to take their large files home. High bandwidth is required for the multimedia functions so these dedicated PCs have direct connection to the 1000Mbit Student Network backbone. Access to these applications is controlled by Novell Zenworks Application Launcher, which additionally allows the administrators to restrict functions within the workstation according to security requirements. Understanding that threats to network integrity often come from within an organization, security is a day-to-day issue in an environment where students have free access to computers and an Internet enabled network. To alleviate concerns and protect against any over-zealous experimentation of students, two separate networks were created, one serving the students and the other the administration and teaching community. This ensures network usage by students does not affect the running of the school by the administration. Also important to securing the networks was the careful selection of products less prone to attack than those with well-known and highly publicized vulnerabilities. The Director of Public Relations at the school, Dr. Peter Downey, pinpoints a number of the benefits emerging from the transition, saying there are fundamental and outstanding benefits for both the student and teaching community following the integration of technology at our school. Multimedia, the Internet, project management and word processing have increased the quality of student work, and this familiarity with technology is giving them distinct advantages when seeking further education or employment. Following the implementation, St Lukes is meeting and surpassing computing curriculum needs right across the board from Kindergarten to Year 12. Total PC is involved in every aspect of the schools technology activities, mapped out at the start of each year when the school allocates the budget. Upgrades are carefully planned out during and after the discussion of the technology budget with around six months set aside for major upgrade preparation. Some initial concern as to the impact of a technology led transformation effort upon teaching staff continues to be alleviated by ongoing seminars supported by Total PC in liaison with the school Technology and Communications Coordinator. Teachers and administration staff have been primed with tools such as publishing software and Powerpoint, providing them with toolsets that can enhance and make easier their own workloads. Dr Downey creates school newsletters, magazines and advertisements quickly and easily straight from his laptop. With the main

implementation phase complete, Total PC is providing the ongoing onsite support, actively maintaining the network and its computers, constantly evaluating St Lukes position and requirements for updates or changes. A technician is based on site each weekday, responding to technical queries and diagnosing problems, providing swift resolution of issues as they arise. A single technician is often sufficient for an installation of this scale due to Total PCs business practice - each member of Total PCs staff is trained in a range of services from laying cables to desktop support, meaning the school supports costs associated with a single-source provider and not the hefty overheads associated with engaging a string of specialists. Dr. Downey confirms the approach taken by Total PC to the needs of St Lukes has been instrumental in achieving critical business objectives. St Lukes wanted to be ahead of the game, setting the standard for Information Technology within schools, not following in the wake of it, says Dr. Downey. In short, we needed experts to implement and support an IT Strategy and to use their expertise in steering the schools technology in the future to maintain this position. The IT support service is critical to our school. The ramifications of computer hardware or software failure can be anywhere from annoying to disastrous. Total PC is aware of our concerns and capable of responding with the relevant urgency for rapid resolution of real time issues. Shortly after the implementation, we had a problem with the reporting software, and a Total PC technician worked 20 hours straight to fix the problem - a prime example. Total PC is a professional, trustworthy and competent provider. We are continually impressed by their commitment to service. We consider the company to be our partners and they are truly part of the school. Outsourcing our IT requirements has opened doors that would otherwise be shut. Commitment to IT doesnt necessarily mean technology is the end goal, as Dr. Downey concludes: The school maintains a healthy and balanced perspective on the use of technology. Technical literacy is part of our modern school day, enhancing the education of our students and the continuing professional development of our staff. Total PC founder and Managing Director, Mr. Adrian Bartholomeusz is proud to have been part of the transformation effort at St Lukes and feels strongly the uptake of new technology in SME environments and education is often hindered by businesses short of scruples and high on price. Total PC, he says, aims for proving its worth over the long term and becoming an extension of the ICT resource base for businesses and organizations that can not justify or gain return from paying for permanent IT staff. The situation at St Lukes was little different to many small businesses all over Australia. There was a need for a cohesive, planned approach to IT implementation, a need for a flexible solution around finance and an absolute requirement for on the ground support and training. We have really enjoyed becoming part of the school community and watching the results that the strategy has created for teachers and students. Its been very rewarding.