

Networked projectors offer easy access

How often do you want to access the internet but can't because your device is connected via Wi-Fi to the classroom projector? It's one or the other ... but not both. St Andrew's College has worked with Epson to find a way to do things differently.

"Epson gave us some sample units, and we trialed some existing units in our preparatory school before we did a major upgrade," said the College's Director of ICT Sam McNeill, noting the units were in place for six months. "We wanted proof of the concept."

By Term 4 last year, the College had rolled out 35-40 Epson EB-535W short-throw projectors.

"One of the key drivers for upgrading to networked projectors was our use of OneNote," explained McNeill. "We're gradually becoming a compulsory BYOD school and the majority of teachers now choose a Microsoft Surface Pro 3 or 4. Because we use OneNote, everything that goes up onto a projector screen also gets automatically saved for later in the students' notebooks."

Two underlying needs for a projector upgrade were also present, the first being teachers wanting not to be tethered to a projector by a VGA or HDMI cable. The second, more importantly, was St Andrew's experiences with other technologies.

"We've played around with WiDi and Miracast devices, and had varied results.

"The Netgear Push2TV worked okay but still had interference issues because we had 30-40 devices in a classroom," recalled McNeill. "The ScreenBeam dropped out from time to time, and had some security issues. Also, the pairing process between Miracast and a Windows 8.1 or 10 device was challenging for some teachers."

Own IP address

Epson's EB-535W projectors are networked and have their own IP address which is displayed on the projector's screen, and a signal is received from a teacher's Surface Pro via the school's wireless network. Rather than going from one device to another (point-to-point), this allows for a highly stable connection, not unlike live internet streaming.

St Andrew's separates all projector traffic on to a separate VLAN (with a dedicated switch), meaning it was isolated and would never affect general school-wide Wi-Fi speeds. All installation of the projectors was done by the in-house ICT team.

Enticingly, Epson's projectors did not require a network upgrade, they could be used on the existing wireless infrastructure.



"We wanted to be able to use them for the internet and project the teacher's screens at the same time. What we like about the Epson is, you don't have to fiddle around with the Windows configuration. It has its own standalone software (EasyMP), and it just works.

Central management software

Just one downside has come with the roll-out of Epson's projectors.

"The trade-off in all of this is that video frame rate is reduced," added McNeill. "If a teacher wants to play a movie, they'll need to connect through HDMI for an optimal experience."

St Andrew's is using Epson's advanced networking solutions with its projectors in various ways.

"We have the central management software, which allows us to see how the projectors are running, when bulbs blow, and see how teachers are connecting, all from our ICT office. We even have a scheduled off function, in case teachers forget to turn theirs off."

Currently, the projector network is only accessible by teachers, not by students.

"It is possible, under moderator control from the teacher, but we haven't had the teacher demand for it at this stage. Perhaps when they become more fluent and familiar with using wireless projectors, they'll see the value in students' BYOD devices projecting to it." >

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