

Case Study: Australia's School of Air

The School of the Air provides an educational service for children living on properties or settlements across Central Australia – an area that covers about a million square kilometers. The core of Australia's distance education service, School of the Air was established in the 1920s and included educational instruction via radio or telephone to children in the outlying region.

These children grow and develop in a situation that is different than what most know as traditional schooling. They are isolated in a unique environment and their formal education out of necessity revolves solely around distance learning.

Overcoming the barriers of distance teaching is nothing new to the school's teachers. However, the "voice only" aspect of the radio system limited the learning outcomes of the students. The schools questioned its' ability to truly transfer knowledge in a way that was fully comprehended by students. School of the Air teachers had to be resourceful when it came to instructing students via radio. Explaining how to draw a geometric shape or how to conduct a science experiment is difficult over radio—for both the teacher and the students.

Overcoming barriers to learning

In 2002, the Australian Federal Government awarded SingTel Optus and OneTouch a contract to assist in the delivery of interactive distance learning (IDL) and satellite infrastructure to the school as part of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) and Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (NTDEET). The project includes the deployment of the OneTouch distance learning solution allowing each

of the respective education departments to deliver interactive, measurable education to primary, secondary and vocational students. This state-of-the-art broadband system delivers lessons over the School of the Air allowing visual learning for the first-time as well as greatly enhanced interaction between teachers and students.

Using this network, the school will be able to take advantage of the high level of interactivity built into the OneTouch solution. Broadcasts are enriched with video, two-way audio, email between students and teachers, an interactive whiteboard, WorldWide Web access, and measurement capabilities including testing and quizzing.

Using a video camera and an electronic whiteboard, teachers at the studio sites give lessons by satellite to students on the network who can watch and respond in real-time using their home computer.

This solution is considered an incredible leap in the delivery of high-quality education—giving students access to the social and cultural aspects of learning in a class-room environment. Many students will be able to see as well as hear their teacher for the first time. They will also be able to hear classmates' interactions and participate in group discussions.

“It is important for students living in remote areas to have a sense of belonging, and there is huge potential with visual, audio and online communication to enhance this.”

Christine Mason
Principal of Dubbo School of
Distance Education



The goal of the new distance-learning paradigm is to enrich the learning experience for those students who are without access to a traditional face-to-face classroom. The principal of Dubbo School of Distance Education, Christine Mason, says satellite delivery will reduce delays and help alleviate the isolation students can experience in remote homesteads. She added that it is important for students living in remote areas to have a sense of belonging, and there is huge potential with visual, audio and online communication to enhance this.

Building on the success

Upgrading the Schools of the Air to the new system is just the first stage of a three-year project. The next stage of the project involves bringing the new technology to hundreds of small schools across NSW and the NT to give them the same IDL facilities. Eventually it will be opened to the community for adult education courses, and for remote indigenous communities.



40 Airport Parkway
San Jose, CA 95110
408-436-4600

www.onetouch.com