

SHIFT

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HAPPENS

The six companies selected for the **2014 Technology Innovation Showcase** provide examples to start those ‘what if’ conversations in every district



Beloit College has released its annual Mindset List each fall since 1998 as a reminder to the institution’s faculty about making dated references to things that simply will not resonate with members of the entering freshman class. The eagerly awaited list, often influenced by technology trends that became mainstream prior to their birth, serve as cultural touchstones for the rest of society as well.

The Class of 2017 has never attended a concert in a smoke-filled arena, never needed anything more than an address when a GPS can provide directions, and always has been able to plug into a USB

port or sell their used toys on eBay.

Another reminder of just how much things are changing as a result of technology comes from an infographic compiled by Mozy that identifies 50 things we have left behind for new alternatives. Individually, the shift represented by each item may not seem impressive. Viewed as a group, however, they offer a clear picture of how quickly the familiar can disappear from the landscape.

For example, owning a set of encyclopedias, going to the actual bank building to do business, searching through the fine print of newspaper classified ads, or remembering to carry sufficient change

to make a call from a public pay phone, have been replaced with online options and personal devices.

With administrators’ attention drawn from one crisis to the next at a time where the daily mantra in many districts has become “do more with less,” it’s understandable that keeping up with technological advances might not be a top priority. But make no mistake: Those technology innovations are transforming past practices in K-12 education just as surely as public pay phones have vanished.

To help school board members and district leaders keep abreast of emerging ideas, NSBA’s Technology

Leadership Network (TLN) created the Technology Innovation Showcase in 2013.

The six companies selected for the 2014 Technology Innovation Showcase provide worthy examples across both curricular practices and administrative operations to start those “what if” conversations that need to take place in every district.

New approaches to differentiated reading, emergency situations, robotic kits, teacher evaluations, mobile hotspots, and personalized yearbooks offer a tiny glimpse of the possibilities that exist to start re-thinking those old practices.

TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION SHOWCASE COMPANIES

Today’s districts face a variety of emergency situations, from active shooters and weather disasters to neighborhood events that necessitate placing a school in a “lockdown” mode. As these situations become increasingly common, districts search for ways to ensure the safety of their faculty, staff, and students.

One powerful solution for dealing with a crisis situation is a good communication tool, and that is exactly what **Share911** offers. Developed by former first responders, this solution is designed to change how administrators, teachers, and emergency personnel react and communicate during a crisis by leveraging technology already in place through the ease of real-time texting.

Another of this year’s honorees, **TreeRing**, transforms the traditional mass-produced yearbook into a personalized collection of memories while also saving districts money. By capitalizing on technology that allows each student to upload pictures to create a unique set of pages, those personalized pages are added to the ones developed by the yearbook staff to chronicle the school’s overall memories in a print book just waiting for the signatures and clever comments from friends. Unlike VHS yearbooks of the past, this solution will not require graduates to find an obsolete device before they can reminisce about the memories, and the individualized nature means each book ordered is already pre-paid, avoiding costly inventory.

Saturday morning cartoons introduced children of the 1960s to the futuristic world of robots through the Jetsons. Today, **BirdBrain Technologies**, with its Hummingbird Kit, offers a more practical and fun introduction to the art of coding with robots created using common craft materials. The beauty of BirdBrain’s solution is in its ease of use, allowing teachers to incorporate it across the curriculum, and in the engaging approach that inspires students to learn more about how things work.

The founder of **Standard for Success**, Todd Whitlock, was honored as one of NSBA’s “20 to Watch” educators in 2008. Now his new company has been named to the 2014 Innovation Showcase. Whitlock applied his knowledge as a working educator to the creation of a Web-based portal that eases the burden of teacher evaluations by allowing them

to be completed on a variety of devices and by providing a selection of research-based rubrics for evaluators.

One of the most challenging problems teachers face is how to help struggling and advanced students read and learn together. The adaptive reading platform created by **Books That Grow** allows books to “grow” in difficulty as students become better readers. This Innovation Showcase solution provides the differentiation so teachers can focus their time on teaching.

The explosion of flipped classrooms, e-textbooks, and homework assignments that require Internet research is causing school leaders to question exactly what equity means in the digital age. Home access to a broadband Internet connection is a critical component of that definition, and Innovation Showcase company **Kajeet, Inc.** has created its Smartspot™—a portable, cost-effective solution that provides off-campus education broadband access with a Wi-Fi hotspot, any time, anywhere.

Past “20 to Watch” educators served as the review team that identified these solutions in order to spark district conversations; that is to challenge thinking about how past issues have been addressed and to consider how technology can offer new alternatives.

For more information about the 2014 Technology Innovation Showcase and the winning companies, go to www.nsba.org/newsroom/press-releases/nsba-announces-2014-education-technology-innovation-showcase.

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