Campus
COMPUTER NEWS

D&H Unveils

D&H will host its first Virtual Back to School (BTS) Expo on Thursday, April 22, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. EDT.
(PHOTO COURTESY OF D&H)

Virtual Back-to-School Event

D&H Distributing recently announced it is leveraging its new virtual event format for the college bookstore market.

The Virtual Back to School (BTS) Expo, hosted by D&H, takes place online on Thursday, April 22, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. EDT. The event is free for D&H customers selling into the education marketplace, and interested participants may register for the expo at www.dandh.com/BTSExpo2010.

Larry Staub, director of D&H's Education Division, said that the virtual BTS show would fill the time slot previously used when the Campus Computer Resellers Alliance (CCRA) held its annual conference before merging its show with the Campus Market Expo (CAMEX) this year.

"That's the time of year, in April, when a lot of schools are planning the notebooks and the netbooks they are going to stock for back to school," he explained. "Luckily, that is right around the time when manufacturers announce to us the products they are going to ship in June. During the virtual BTS show, manufacturers will be prepared to talk about the next revolution of product that's coming for June, and be able to start talking specs and price points, so the buyers can plan ahead."

Staub projected an estimated 500 stores for the virtual event. Once participants register, they will receive a URL link, along with a log-in and password to join the virtual event. Just like a traditional trade show, participants can go from booth to booth, listen to presentations and have one-on-one chats. If they miss any presentation, they can log on to the site at a later date to view it.

Specific timeframes for the virtual BTS events were not announced as of press time.

FORMAT

There will be five main vendor booths, along with approximately 10 vendors congregating in what Staub called a "networking lounge," in which buyers can chat with vendors and ask about their products.

Vendors in the main booths will primarily feature computers and printers, with Hewlett-Packard, Lenovo and Epson lined up thus far. Peripheral vendors will also be on hand, as well as at least one digital camera and networking vendor. In addition to video seminars, participating manufacturers will offer materials for downloading.

The Virtual Back to School event will begin with a keynote address from Staub, and will feature interactive seminars on topics such as mobile computing, storage solutions, printers, portable entertainment devices and the latest accessories.

Each seminar will be followed by a question-and-answer session, and a separate "networking lounge" forum will allow attendees and company reps to chat as peers. Customers will be privy to one-day-only sales promotions as an additional incentive, just as they would on the floor of a live D&H trade expo.

The BTS Expo will offer several other perks of a live event, with prizes such as sweepstakes packages worth more than $1,000 each, and 10 $100 American Express gift cards. This Virtual Expo is a precursor to D&H's Back-to-School technology trade show, which takes place June 16-18 at the Radisson Penn Harris Hotel and Convention Center in Camp Hill, Pa.

D&H has hosted a number of content-rich virtual seminar events. Its series of Web-based programs in 2009 gave hundreds of customers an accessible, affordable venue to gain product knowledge and communicate with vendor representatives, without the time and expense of travel. Staub hopes the success of these virtual events will translate over to the college bookstore market.

"What this allows stores to do is plan for their back-to-school season," Staub said. "We've asked these manufacturers to really focus on products that are going to be available throughout the whole back-to-school selling season. If it's launching in June, we're asking them to focus on products that will stay in their lineup through September."

For vendors, the virtual expo offers a unique setting that allows them to engage directly with D&H customers — bookstores and campus and education resellers. They will have the opportunity to showcase their product offerings via conference sessions, presentations, videos, one-on-one chats and more.

"We're bringing instructional presentations, vendor experts and networking opportunities right to our customers' desktops. It's a great way for college bookstore owners to ramp themselves up for the back-to-school buying season," Staub said. "This is D&H's way of extending its informative offerings in the most convenient way. It's free, it's easy and the material is clearly valuable, based on our most up-to-date sales trends."

—CSE

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D&H EDUCATION

Convenience Sparks Netbook Growth

Netbook sales have "gone through the roof" in college bookstores, and according to Larry Staub, director of D&H's Education Division, the category has unlimited growth potential.

Staub noted that netbooks generated a 2,000-3,000 percent sales growth in college bookstores during the winter rush period from November 2009 through the first two weeks of February. "The volume of netbooks we sold was just unheard of," he added.

When they were first introduced, netbooks were expected to focus on the business traveler, as well as those who had the money for a second computer and did not want to travel with a full-size laptop.

"We've actually seen that that's also become true with the college student," Staub said. "You buy them either for economic reasons, because it's around the $299-349 price range, or you buy it because you have a nice notebook that you don't want to worry about getting lost, stolen or damaged carrying it from class to class and around campus.

"So you buy a $299 netbook instead that you carry to classes and sit with at the library. They only weigh a few pounds, as opposed to the six or eight pounds that a laptop weighs. We actually are seeing the college student become just like the business traveler, in that they have a notebook [laptop] and a netbook.

Netbooks have several advantages to the laptop. "It's price-point driven," Staub pointed out. "With the size and weight, it's a convenience factor. You don't have a seven- or eight-pound laptop in your backpack that you're lugging around that you're worried about damaging. It does what you need for your day-in and day-out needs. You can surf the Web with it and you can take notes. If you want to transfer that information to your laptop with the use of flash drives or external hard drives, it's very easy to move that data back and forth now."

Among D&H's top-selling notebooks are Hewlett-Packard, Acer, Lenovo, ASUS, Toshiba and Samsung. "We really have a broad offering across the board," Staub said. "The success of these manufacturers is tied into the focus on the college-age consumer. Some companies have stepped to the plate and put together academic programs that are able to offer the bookstores everything a big-box reseller gets, including pass-through price protection and discounted demo units."

Manufacturers are ramping up their quantities of netbooks for the fall back-to-school season. "We are forecasting big numbers on their behalf, so that we will have stock," he said. "Winter rush caught everyone off guard,

Manufacturers of netbooks, such as Lenovo, are expected to ramp up their quantities for the fall back-to-school season.
(PHOTO COURTESY OF LENOVO)

as far as how fast the increase happened, just explosive growth. Manufacturers and distributors had not forecast that kind of increase.

"Everyone has made very large, critical adjustments to make sure the inventory is there to support the bookstores for the fall rush."

Of course, laptops have their own advantages over netbooks. "With a netbook, you're getting a small processor and a lot of times you're getting 1GB of RAM," Staub explained. "You're not going to get an optical drive — CD

or DVD drive. A lot of people don't want to sit and do all their work every day on a 10-inch screen. Everything about it is small, compact and really meant to be a convenience item."

In addition, the average sale price for laptops has come down so much in the past couple of years that, according to Staub, "you can get a pretty nice notebook in a price range from $499-699. Netbooks are $299-399, depending on the features, and laptops range from $499 to as much as $1,899."

For winter rush, the average price range for netbooks was $299-349, and the average sale price of notebooks ranged from $499-699.

Netbooks have become more of a fashion piece, and thus are available in a variety of colors. However, Staub projected that manufacturers may not stress color as much as presenting a sleek, sexy look, featuring a polished finish with rounded edges.

One of the "hot" new netbook items that will be available for fall back to school is the tablet. "That's going to be driven more by the Apple iPad announcement," Staub said. "You really are going to see netbooks morph into all-in-one devices. It can be an e-book reader. It can be a computer. We really are starting to see that people are looking for that all-in-one device."

Apple Retains Top Spot in Customer Experience Index

A study published by Forrester Research, Inc. in February revealed that Apple retained the top spot among the six PC manufacturers represented in the research firm's third annual Customer Experience Index (CxPi).

Forrester asked more than 4,600 U.S. consumers about their interactions with a variety of companies, scoring those experiences in three areas: meets needs, easy to work with and enjoyability. The CxPi was calculated based on these responses, ranking 133 firms in 14 different industries.

RESULTS

Among PC manufacturers, Apple topped the CxPi with a score of 78 percent, with Hewlett-Packard ranked second at 71 percent and Toshiba third at 68 percent. Acer (66 percent) ranked fourth, followed by Compaq (64 percent) and Dell, which placed at the bottom of the list with a rating of 61 percent.

Forrester examined the three components that make up the CxPi. Apple ranked first in the "Meets Needs" component at 80 percent, followed by Hewlett-Packard (75 percent), Toshiba (73 percent), Acer (71 percent), Compaq (70 percent) and Dell (68 percent).

Apple was also the "Easiest to Work With" at 79 percent, followed by Toshiba (73 percent), Hewlett-Packard (72 percent), Acer (64 percent) and Compaq and Dell (both at 62 percent).
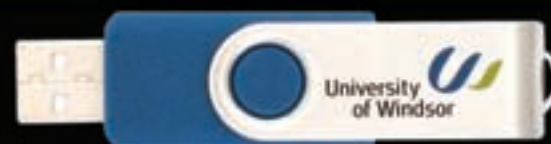
The largest gap in the index came in the enjoyability component, in which Apple ranked highest at 74 percent and Hewlett-Packard a distant second at 64 percent. Acer ranked third at 62 percent, followed by Compaq (60 percent), Toshiba (57 percent) and Dell (55 percent).