

# MAKING THE MOST OF NETWORKED CLASSROOMS

By S. Turner Dean

**Y**our network crashes daily? Your teachers ignore expensive software, finding it too difficult to master? Classroom chaos reigns as pupils surf the Internet instead of staying tuned in to the day's lesson? You have difficulty loading new software titles onto your network?

These are just a few of the scenarios that reveal the real value of your school's investments in networked classroom technology. Real-world uses of these technology investments, not price tags, are the true measure of the assets in your school's instructional toolbox.

Two practical matters underlie all successes in networked classrooms. First, you must be able to keep the network up and running and find tools that will let you maximize instructional uptime. Then, you need to have mechanisms that prevent cumbersome technology from becoming an intrusion on the teaching process. Two inexpensive tools that can help you meet these objectives are remote control software and classroom management software. School districts that successfully combine these two applications are the ones that make the most of their budgets for networked classrooms.

## Remote Control Software

Remote control software allows a school technology coordinator to answer calls for technical help from anywhere in a network without leaving his or her office. This means dramatically less delays while waiting for technical assistance. The efficiencies that result from such capabilities provide a significant return-on-investment within weeks, not months. Since remote control software allows technical experts to troubleshoot and diagnose problems by dialing into the school network from their offices, wherever they are working at the time,



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their bills for on-site service calls are minimal.

Not all remote control software offerings are equally suited to every school environment. When evaluating remote control software, make sure you find applications that were originally created for network administration. Speed, stability, and security are the most important considerations in choosing remote control applications.

## Classroom Management Software

Since the inception of networked classrooms, instructors have been in search of tools that allow them to manage networks instead of having unwieldy network technology overtake the classroom. The Cadillac versions of these first networked classrooms required very expensive hardware that accompanied each PC workstation. Now, classroom management software is offered at 1/10 to 1/20 of the cost of these early hardware solutions.

The most important management features for classroom management software include:

- Allowing teachers to keep an eye on the entire classroom while simultane-

ously moving into one-on-one or small group instruction setups.

- Keeping students on-task usually requires monitoring for web surfing and e-mail.
- Filing transfers allow teachers to disseminate and collect exams.
- Enabling teachers to call students to attention via their PC screens.

Jean Wilmarth, Computer Teacher at Germantown Hills Middle School, District #69 of Central Illinois, teaches computer skills to 5th - 8th graders. She uses classroom management software. She reports, "Before, I spent most of my day repeating the same thing over and over to individual students as necessary. Now, I can help students remotely, with neither student nor myself having to constantly leave our seats. If several students have the same question, I can stop everything, demonstrate the skill for them all, and effectively teach the class a new skill all at once rather than one at a time."

When evaluating options in classroom management software, it is important to look "under the hood." Look for applications that use the least network resources and that do not change video drivers. Software that hogs network resources or has proprietary video drivers usually crash networks, especially when combined with the graphically rich applications that are often so helpful to instruction.

Even technology-phobic teachers find networked classrooms preferable if they minimize technical glitches and access tools to keep students on task. The investments it takes to keep networks up and running are minimal. It is easy to compare the benefits that result from installing remote control and classroom management software. ➤

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