



Netbooks free St Mark's from access squeeze

A visionary program to put a laptop in the hands of students was a big step for St Mark's Anglican Community School. With channel partner Bizquip Solutions, Acer Computer Australia helped make it happen.

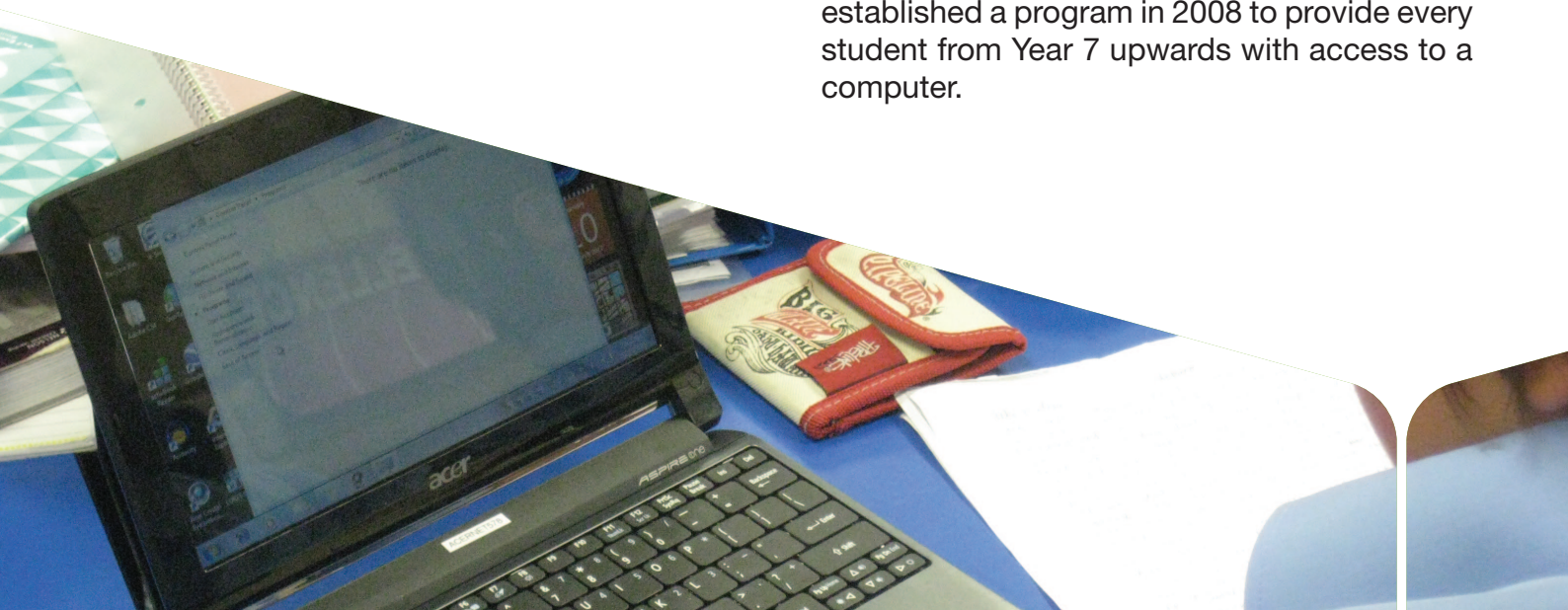


When it came to student access to IT, St Mark's in the Northern Perth suburb of Hillarys had what teacher Peter Brown calls 'quite a variety'. "We had all sorts of desktop models and styles from full cases to low profile cases and white boxes made by a local supplier," he says.

As head of IT, Mr. Brown is constantly involved in research and decision making about how best to put computer technology in the hands of Students, and was heavily involved in plans that saw the school choose Acer Computer Australia. "We needed a much more standard desktop and laptop environment than we had, as well as someone who offered a good technical support model."



Deploying standardised technology at the School was never going to be easy. As a low-fee, co-educational School from kindergarten to year 12, St Mark's is home to around 1,500 students, and despite having a high computer/student ratio for several years, the school established a program in 2008 to provide every student from Year 7 upwards with access to a computer.





“More and more classes were demanding access to our shared technology environment and it had reached capacity,” Mr. Brown says. “We needed to overcome access issues, and the proposed solution was for small size systems with long battery life for each student.”



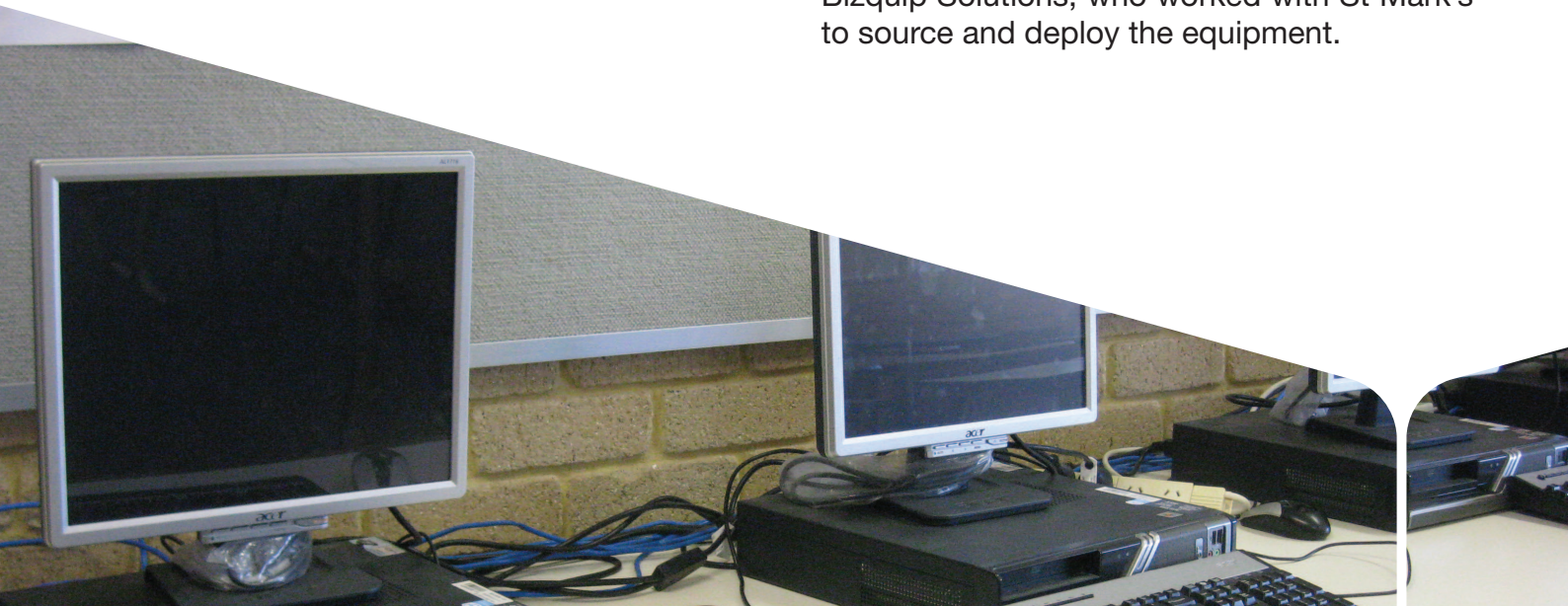
An Acer client since 2003, St Mark's started implementation in the secondary school, with a student body of around 800 students attending over 40 classes at any one time. An entirely desktop-based solution was out of the question because of the sheer physical size of the resulting equipment, one Mr. Brown

says wasn't going to happen without 'building bigger classrooms'.

Netbooks proved the best solution, and at the time of the tender Acer Computer Australia was the only provider who offered one to acceptable standards. “We already had a



history with Acer for our desktop environment,” Mr. Brown adds, “so we were aware of the technical support available. Acer offered an excellent price, three-year warranty and good ground support. We have a great avenue of communication that goes beyond our computer environment to include server support and advice.” Mr. Brown also mentioned the added convenience of a single warranty and service contact provided through Acer channel partner Bizquip Solutions, who worked with St Mark's to source and deploy the equipment.





The netbook form factor also addressed the particular needs of a school-length workday and the IT and server environment at St Mark's. User data is imaged with separate operating system and data drives, and the battery life means students can work for a full day without having to recharge their system.

One of the major challenges to keep the whole deployment at its highest possible operating standard was the comparatively rough treatment. Systems would be tossed in school bags, taken between school and home and crowded around by over-excited students and teenagers, so together St Mark's, Bizquip and Acer worked out the best support option. "With such a large quantity we have a regular turnover of damaged machines," Mr. Brown says, "so we have a large pool of replacement netbooks and the deal includes a return-to-base support model."

The program has been so successful St Mark's Anglican Community School has begun to expand downwards, putting systems in the hands of primary students as well. But despite continued success the future is never far away and tablet computing is gaining traction in Australian schools. If that happens, Acer will



still be St Mark's first port of call. "We're looking closely at a tablet environment," Mr. Brown confirms, "and we envisage devices like them to replace the netbook as a personal device in the future. But educational requirements are likely to dictate a Windows environment, so we're likely to stick with Acer throughout any transition."

(About St Mark's)

Established in 1986, St Mark's is known for a broad based education that emphasizes development of literacy and numeracy skills. In addition the school currently leads the Associated Schools in a number of interschool sports and receives regular commendations for its music program.. The school motto is 'Seek Truth and Wisdom', and students are encouraged to develop enquiring, flexible minds and the resources with which to lead a full life, which makes access to technology crucial in order to pursue knowledge both inside and outside the School.

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