



## Freedom through management, potential through mobility

A Case Study

*A self-managed environment that aligned with their own systems and increased mobility made Acer the first choice for this progressive Anglican school.*

St Mark's Anglican Community School in the Perth suburb of Hillarys provides a unique and caring environment that stimulates students and promotes their spiritual, cultural, intellectual and physical development. Teachers and staff encourage self-confidence and self-discipline, and several forward-thinking resources programs at the school support their efforts.

Just one is the provision of technology, so St Mark's partnership with Acer Computer Australia and Acer Gold Partner Bizquip Solutions is crucial. So far in 2013, the school has deployed a fleet of around 550 Acer devices, and students in years seven, 10 and 11 will enjoy the latest in tablet technology for the next few years.

As computers are becoming more important in education, many schools are launching Parent-purchasing models, but as teacher and head of ICT Peter Brown explains, St Mark's found purchasing the systems on behalf of students currently offers the best possible management over their education.

"We use the Adobe suite, which costs up to \$3,000 when it's bought by a single user, whereas the school can load it for \$30," Mr Brown says, "Who actually owns the software can have an impact when the device is Parent-owned." Buying and owning the fleet also gives Mr Brown and his staff the means to make sure every device has identical specs and capabilities, making maintenance and updates easy.

The other aspect to school-ownership he finds Parents appreciate is the often mind-boggling security landscape. "We use a filtering system at school, and it has a software agent that gives the same level of protection at home," Mr Brown says. "Parents are often concerned that their child has a wi-fi device because it makes it harder to control what the child is doing. The agent we load onto each machine gives them the same security they have at school, and parents are happier because the computer their child's using is protected.

### The next level of touch

When St Mark's three-year product cycle was coming to a close and it was time to look for a new device, one thing the school knew was on the horizon was touch technology. "We decided to move to a touchscreen a few years ago, especially for staff," Mr Brown explains. "We wanted students to have a level of control in things like drawing."

The tipping point for the school was Windows 8, built from the ground up for touch. After finding Windows 7 serviceable but more suited to pen than finger control, Mr Brown says touch optimisation and the app environment made Windows 8 the final step.



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“We’re very embedded with Windows software in our school’s administration system and we use Adobe, Office, Schoolkit and Clickview in class, so we wanted to maintain our way of working.”

Mr Brown adds that St Mark’s trialled touch screen devices last year but didn’t really find one that suited its purposes. The school tested some alternatives but when the Acer Iconia W510 was presented as a possible solution, the features and adaptability to the school’s system made it an obvious choice. Mr Brown calls Windows 8 a fast operating system that loads efficiently and has the apps environment the students are starting to use more and more.

## Freedom as form factor

The Acer Iconia tablet range comes with detachable keyboard, which has proven a popular choice with both students and staff. “The students all wanted a touchscreen device,” Mr Brown says. “We’ve been rolling touchscreens out to staff for a couple of years and have been looking for the opportunity to do it with students.”

Since doing so, he says St Mark’s students have taken to the Iconia W510 with gusto. “Students use the keyboard for data entry and typing, but they tend to use the screen rather than the touchpad or a separate mouse for navigation.”

Staff have also noticed students increasingly using the devices as tablets, detached from the keyboard outside or during break times when they’re away from the more formalised environment of the classroom.





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That leads to the other big advantage for St Mark's – mobility. Previous notebooks were lasting between two and a half and three hours on one charge, greatly restricting movement in class. Mr Brown reports that the battery life of the tablet is about six hours, and the secondary battery in the keyboard extends the life of the whole device to between 16 and 17 hours.

"We don't need power supplies in the classroom anymore," he says. "We also used to have a stock of hot-swappable batteries but if a tablet is running low on power the student will just attach their keyboard or borrow one from their classmates."

The tablet form factor also reduces downtime in the classroom. Where older notebook fleets might mean five to 10 minutes of waiting for every system to boot up and be ready for work, Mr Brown calls the Iconia 'nearly instant-on'.

"It's very convenient for the student to grab the device and use it," he says. "They'll be midway through a task and realise they need to type something up, get a document off the school portal or look something up on Google. It's just becoming a very convenient tool."

All of which seems to add up to one thing – St Mark's students have a device that's quickly becoming one of their most important educational assets. "It's heading that way more and more," Mr Brown agrees. "It's been six months so it's still a work in progress, but they're more efficient, we have fewer issues with them than older fleets and both the students and teachers are more interested in using them."





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## Service and support

St Mark's enjoys a close relationship with Bizquip Solutions, but the build quality and additional covers provided with the Iconia W510 fleet means the school hasn't had much opportunity to put the service agreement to the test. It allows for the packaging and delivery of any damaged systems to Bizquip Solutions, while the student works on one of the reserve stock held at the school until return of their repaired unit.

Mr Brown says that based on the school's past experience both with Acer and Bizquip Solutions he has no doubt the current fleet will last the three-year warranty term St Mark's opted for.

"They're more mobile because of the solid state drive," he says. "Obviously with standard hard drives we had to try and stop the students walking around with them while they were on, but we've overcome that issue. If they want to pick it up and show their classmates or teachers their work that's now possible."

He adds that the Iconia has also been very durable, saying how drops and accidents might dislodge a key but that the hinge and clamp make the chassis very strong. "I've spoken to a school who are using a competitor's product and they're having a lot of trouble with breaking hinges. Ours are standing up to the wear and tear the students are putting on them."



Acer Iconia W510 Tablet

## Sticking with the Best

"We looked at devices from other manufacturers when we were ready to choose a new one," Mr Brown says, "we always do. We looked at every vendor who was launching a tablet and Acer was very quick to supply one. The features it offered were good enough for us to want to test it, and it did everything we needed."

Mr Brown and his staff knew they could count on Acer's guarantee of support and with the impressive performance of the Iconia range, the W510 came out on top in its own right. "We have a considerable history with Acer and Bizquip Solutions so we're always keen on picking them as a supplier, but the quality of the product and the support agreement made it easy."