

Omantel launches innovative Education-as-a-Service solution



HP Elite x2 laptops are the cornerstone of a digital revolution in Omani schools

Industry

Telecommunications/Education

Objective

Provide a solution to improve digital learning in schools

Approach

Sought a partner company that had education specialists and the appropriate IT solutions

IT matters

- Delivers robust laptops for use by younger children
- Provides more powerful and sophisticated machines for older children and teachers
- Includes classroom management software for streamlined learning

Business matters

- Supports Omantel in its innovative educational project
- Assists in the country's wider vision for improving educational standards
- Raises Omantel's national profile



“HP’s educational expertise and its robust HP Elite x2 laptops made it the obvious partner for our Education-as-a-Service project which aims to increase digitised learning and communication in Omani schools.”

– Muhammad Tasleem, ICT manager, Omantel



Furthering the digital agenda

Educational development is a cornerstone of the Omani government’s future vision for the sultanate. In support, the country’s leading telecom provider Omantel has launched an innovative turnkey solution for schools. HP’s educational expertise made it the ideal partner for this Education-as-a-Service project and HP Elite x2 laptops are a central component of the digital offering.



Challenge

Advancement in education

Located on the South-East coast of the Arabian Gulf; Oman has a total population of nearly 4.6 million. The government's future vision for the sultanate is set out in its Oman 2020 plan and high priority is given to education, which is seen as a vital factor in the country's economic and social progress.

Education and training have developed at a staggering pace since the accession of Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1970. At that time, there were only three basic schools in the entire country with a total of 900 pupils. Now, with some 724,000 pupils, the sultanate has over 1,600 schools of which 90% are government run and the remainder private.

Connectivity and digitisation are two fundamental elements of Oman's vision and the country's flagship telecommunications company, Omantel, is playing a pivotal role. Founded in 1996 and headquartered in Muscat, Omantel is 51% government-owned and offers the full spectrum of telecom solutions. Already holding the majority market share, its goal is to increase this to 95% by 2020.

In 2014, Omantel's directors approved a new corporate strategy called Omantel 3.0 and in line with the country's national aims, increasing connectivity and digitisation in schools is an important part of the plan.

"We call the project Education-as-a-Service," says Omantel's project manager, Muhammad Tasleem. "The idea was created by the Omantel transformation team and realised by Omantel ICT department, a department established as part of Omantel's 3.0 strategy. We decided to approach public and private schools with an offering that could meet their needs, and when this idea was under discussion, HP was included because it was a leading vendor in the education sector in Oman.

"An education specialist from HP had already been in contact with the Minister of Education in Oman and had some prior knowledge of the educational needs and the kind of services that the public schools would be looking for. The Education-as-a-Service offering was created as a result of this collaboration."

This is a turnkey composite education pack for schools with components from several vendors. These include high speed internet (up to 300 Mbps), school wide Wi-Fi coverage, Microsoft® 365 and smart interactive whiteboards but the most important single requirement was for the provision of appropriate tablets and laptop computers.



Solution

Turnkey schools offering

Omantel needed computers that would be suitable for both students and teachers and HP's suggestion was the x2 range. Chosen models are the HP x2 210 for students and the HP Elite x2 1012 for teachers.

"When we were choosing these devices we had to consider the users," says Tasleem. "For students who are six to eight years-old, or younger, you don't need very high performance but you want ones that are rugged and hard to break. For 10,11 and 12 year-old students and teachers we looked more at the performance side instead of ruggedness. The HP x2 210 was a good solid device that students liked and the Elite x2 1012 delivered the increased performance required by teachers."

HP 2-in-1 devices like the Elite x2 1012 are popular because they offer features such as a backlit keyboard, detachable screen, kickstand, touchscreen display with HP Active Pen, fingerprint reader and front and rear cameras. There are also options for an HP Travel Keyboard and an HP Advanced Keyboard which comes with built-in NFC data protection and a smart card slot.

With a clear 1920x1280 display and sturdy keyboard, the 1012 is powered by Intel® Core™ processors with vPro support and runs Windows®10. Its suitability for education is increased by dust and water resistance, rugged design and 10-hour battery life.

Another reason for HP's involvement in the project was its commitment to education through the HP School Pack. This is an out-of-the box solution of digital tools and content designed for collaborative, standards-aligned, and personalised learning.

Omantel ICT has launched Education-as-a-Service as pilot projects at two private schools, the American-British Academy (ABA) and Knowledge Gate International School (KGIS). HP has provided 260 student devices and 60 teacher devices for these pilots and as part of the launch it also took part in an Education Transformation Workshop for teachers.

"Our aim was to get a 1:1 ratio of devices to pupils and to try and make effective use of technology in the classroom," says principal of KGIS, Margie Hawthorn. "We hope to continue as we feel the students benefit from the use of the devices because they are able to work independently and can access lesson work from anywhere, via the internet, so if they are off sick they can access the work from home and thus stay up to date. We are also hoping this year to spread this initiative throughout the school."

Customer at a glance

Hardware

- HP x2 210
- HP Elite x2 1012

Software

- HP Classroom Manager

HP services

- Educational services and ongoing support

“The Transformation Workshop was one of the most appreciated events of the pilots and was led by the HP education specialist,” says Tasleem. “Omantel’s objective was not to just deliver some devices but to deliver value to the public and private schools. We wanted to guide them on how they can implement a digital transformation and that was the main objective of the workshop. Feedback from the teachers was great.”

HP Classroom Manager was also part of the schools offering. This classroom control, management and collaboration solution enables teachers to take control of student desktops to deliver content; restrict applications, hardware and Web access and to chat one-on-one or in groups.

Benefits

Cost-effective development

Schools taking part in the pilot projects have been provided with the Education-as-a-Service package free of charge by Omantel for a year, followed by payment on a pro-rata basis according to the number of devices and pupils.

“Ultimately, all these schools need infrastructure and they need to buy devices,” says Tasleem. “For computers, smartboards and software, they would need to go to each and every different vendor. Omantel’s idea is to be a one-stop-shop for all the educational services in terms of solution development, delivery and operation.

“We can also offer an OPEX based model so schools don’t have to spend money up front and can pay on a monthly basis.”

The two initial pilot projects have been run in private schools and a third one is currently in the pipeline with a public school. However, while this may be more focussed on software and training rather than hardware, it is hoped to extend Education-as-a-Service into public schools. Omantel’s business plan forecasts 10,000 classrooms in five years.

“Omantel’s initiative is a very good one and I am delighted that we got to be part of it,” adds Hawthorn. “We liked the HP devices because they could be used as a laptop or a tablet and the students could easily carry them anywhere. Also, they enabled pupils to participate in class at their own pace and to become independent learners. I had a few champion teachers who really ran with it, embraced it and used the devices, software, and smart boards effectively. I think we have all learned from the experience. Having all that Omantel offered for one year was a wonderful experience and much appreciated but the problem now is sustainability.”

HP’s involvement has been critical to the success of the Omantel project which is the first of its kind in Oman and is leading the way for the sultanate’s digital learning development.

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4AA7-1661EEE, December 2017

