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Educating Generation Z

How do you reach this always-online generation?

For UC-Wireless by **Alison Job**
Johannesburg, 5 Jul 2017

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Quentin Daffarn, MD, UC Wireless.

Typified by widespread usage of the Internet from a young age, Generation Z are comfortable with technology and live their lives on social media. They regard connectivity as essential as water or electricity, and expect it to be as ubiquitous. They expect to do everything online and so to ensure uninterrupted connectivity, a high bandwidth, stable Internet connection is non-negotiable if you want to engage this generation of learners.

While access to WiFi might be a contributing factor for a learner in deciding which institution to attend, its role in education is undeniable. It allows immediate access to updated learning material, assignments can be submitted online, marks can be collated and made available instantly, and tutors are available to provide support and assistance where required. In fact, one could go so far as to say that learners who don't have access to WiFi could be missing out because they don't have 24/7 access to the latest learning materials regardless of the learner's location.

It's clear that as technology advances, so does the learning environment for students. Access to the Internet is already changing the way that education is working in South Africa. The government has launched many initiatives to implement e-learning at schools, including WiFi access, interactive whiteboards, e-books, tablets and e-learning initiatives to connect students and teachers.

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However, educational institutions might find themselves struggling to keep up with growing capacity, coverage and performance demands. Campuses are seeing a dramatic increase in the number of WiFi-enabled mobile devices, and a growing student community now armed with multiple smart mobile devices, making the deployment of consistent WiFi across the campus a non-negotiable requirement.

The demand is for advanced WiFi technology that can provide carrier grade reliability under all conditions and across a myriad of environments, including lecture theatres, student accommodation, sports complexes, libraries, as well as in green spaces around campus. In fact, wherever staff and students are present.

A fast and reliable WiFi infrastructure has become a foundational utility for higher education environments around the world, and it's particularly important in South Africa, which has its own set of challenges: access to learning materials has traditionally been an issue, as has the leaking of examination papers, and then there are often issues around delays in issuing examination results for learners waiting to discover whether they've earnt university places.

The challenge is how to onboard and manage thousands of diverse devices easily and seamlessly while maintaining consistent performance across an entire campus while at the same time, maintaining security.

Quentin Daffarn, MD, UC Wireless, says: "The traditional 'chalk and talk' approach to education is becoming outdated in developed countries, with the focus increasingly on creative thinking and problem-solving skills, in order to develop the entrepreneurs of the future. The only way that this can be delivered is through e-learning, giving the learners access to rich and engaging learning resources 24/7."

However, Daffarn points out that learner access to mobile WiFi connected devices isn't sufficient, "Teaching methods have to be adapted to this new way of learning, as do learning materials, while exam and assignment results have to be recorded and available digitally on a single centralised database. The entire institution of learning needs to embrace digital transformation, not just the learners.

To this end, educational institutions need a WiFi solution that offers seamless integration with existing infrastructure, widespread WiFi coverage across the entire campus and secure mobile access for different user groups – such as learners, teachers, administration staff and guests, for instance. The ability to easily add new users and devices is a non-negotiable."

Educational institutions should expect the following from their on-campus WiFi:

* High-speed stable WiFi services;
* Seamless integration with existing network and authentication infrastructure;
* Ubiquitous WiFi coverage;
* Centralised WLAN management;
* Secure mobile access for different user groups;

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* Ability to support simple guest access;

* Easy administration and management;

* Future-proofed expansion; and

* Eliminated user complaints about dropped connections.

Read this article about the ten common myths around WiFi in higher education:

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