Which Ones Are Popular With Students and How Are They Using Them?

By Laura Bedenbaugh
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It's the day of the big show and you are about to leave your office for the day, possibly for the night. As you prepare to head to the venue to handle day-of-show details, you forward your office calls to your cell phone and you make sure you have the necessary accessories to be able to use your laptop during the hours until show time, all while listening to a few songs you just downloaded to your office computer.

This is not your mother's day-of-show experience.

In the college market, we rely more and more on technology to do our jobs, whether it is how we negotiate contracts, select acts or execute publicity. It even impacts how we advise student leaders. But as we admit to becoming more dependent on technology and the gadgets it spawns, which devices do student leaders like or use most often? And to what extent do they use them? The answers depend upon whom you ask.

**Which Gadgets Are Most Useful?**

Which gadget do student programmers and other student leaders feel they simply cannot live without? Students participating in the Summer Leadership Employment Program (SLEP) at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University overwhelmingly agreed they'd be lost without their cell phones.

"I would just go nuts. I have to be mobile and cannot be at a desk all the time," said LaChelle Walter, a member of the SLEP Graduate Student Assembly.

While all agreed their cell phones were must-have items, others shared that wireless technology, such as that incorporated into current laptop computers and tablets, or similar personal digital assistants (PDAs), make their lives easier.

"I use my laptop on a daily basis," said Susie Kim, a member of Virginia Polytechnic Institute's Asian American Student Union. "During down time, I am always using instant messaging or checking my online calendar."

"My meetings vary so much, there is no way I could keep up with them without my Palm Pilot," said Scott Cheatham, treasurer of Virginia Tech's Residence Hall Federation.

But it's not just students who believe such devices improve life for students; advisors agree.

"All of my students use a hand-held computer or Palm Pilot," said J. Scott Derrick, director of Student Activities and the University Center at Furman University (SC). "They use these devices to keep their schedules and to make sure they don't miss any of their many daily meetings and appointments. Everyone used to have paper calendars, but many of those have been replaced by these devices. I have found that students rarely miss meetings anymore and I think it can be attributed to being so programmed through these devices."

Students still must pay for books, housing and tuition, not to mention supplies for classes and entertainment options. So, how do students afford the cell phones, PDAs and laptops they take with them everywhere they go?

Thomas Hailey, assistant director of Student Activities at Southern Methodist University (TX), noted how cell phone use has impacted student programming.

"(Cell phones) have had so many different effects on our programs," he said. "Everything from not hav-
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How Do Students Finance Technology?

When looking at what’s on the market and determining which gadgets vie most ardently for our attention—and our dollars—it’s natural to wonder how students are paying for the gadgets they decide they must have. Students still must pay for books, housing and tuition, not to mention supplies for classes and entertainment options. So, how do students afford the cell phones, PDAs and laptops they take with them everywhere they go?

Again, it depends upon whom you ask.

“They have funded their desire to be up to date, but mostly [it’s for] [sty] hip items such as iPods and X-Box’s, mostly stuff [for] entertainment,” said Hailey. “I do not see a lot of students getting uptight because they do not have the best computer. They seem to be pretty happy with a computer that can provide them the essentials (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.).”

Some students fund their personal technology by asking for new gadgets as gifts; pointed out one SLP member. Other students mention taking part-time jobs or asking parents and other family members to pay for gadgets. Still others mentioned using the living expenses received from student loans.
Some students are very pragmatic.

"You have to think about it in another way," said Y. Zapet of the Virginia Tech Union. "As a student gets more involved, the more opportunities there are for free meals and food at events. If you save the money you otherwise would have spent, you can save enough to make those purchases."

How Does Technology Affect Student Interest in Programming?

In a trend alarming to programmers, students are increasingly more likely to use the technology available to them in their residence halls or apartments for entertainment than taking advantage of live events. Therefore, programmers are challenged to find even more creative ways to appeal to a variety of students.

Furman University has devised a strategy that works for its campus.

First, we give them events, such as our Paladin late-night program, that cater to groups, and thus, entice them out of their rooms to the programs," Derrick said. "On the other hand, we sometimes put on events such as Halo Tournaments and Dance Revolution Tournaments that reach out to our 'techie' crowd."

However, some schools take a different approach.

"We do not cater to this lifestyle because our office sees it as counterproductive to our mission, which is to get students connected with Southern Methodist University," Hailey said. "Granted, we could do this through the use of instant messaging, mp3 players and so forth, but we feel we have a responsibility to serve the whole student. We work really hard in providing quality programs that will engage our students and bring them out of the residence hall."

With programming boards and student activities departments taking varying approaches to getting students out of the dorms, students are in agreement on one thing: If you have food, they will come. When the food question came up during our interview, all SLEP students nodded in agreement.

"You have to have small lines if you are providing food at a program and [have] resident assistants promoting the events," said Kim. "It's the easiest way to grab a student's attention and increase their investment in attending the event."

Interestingly, some students use technology to determine if an event is worth attending.

"I have found that one person will check out the event, and if it looks fun, they will text message everyone else... [to] come to it," said Hailey.

Adam Kress, a member of Virginia Tech's Interfraternity Council, agreed.

"When you go to an event, you want to know others will be there," he said. "We will often have someone go check things out and call the others."

Some agents had somewhat mixed reactions to this use of technology.

"I think it's great they're communicating and giving artists a chance," Josh Wainright of Quantum Talent (SC) said. "Obviously, you'd rather they all come versus sending one to make a decision. A person can have their opinion about an artist and that will affect others attending. But in the end, the fact they are taking a chance sending one to scout it out is a good thing."

"You have to wonder, at what point are they coming into an event?" said Brooke Sims of Coleman Productions (MI). "That can affect someone's entire opinion of the show. You would hope students would take advantage of the programs their campus offers, not just send someone to check out an event and call the rest."

While there are differing opinions on technology and its use or how it advances or otherwise impacts society, one thing is certain: it has changed how colleges and entertainment agencies do business with each other.
What’s the Best Aspect/Use of Technology on Campus?

While advances in technology change how we do business and how our student leaders function, what’s the best aspect or use of technology on campus? Novelty and convenience come quickly to mind, but yet again, the answer to this question depends on who’s speaking.

“We have the University Network plasma screen on campus and it has really worked in getting the word out to students about campus events,” said Derrick. “It is amazing how students will stop in their tracks when a large plasma screen is staring them in the face.”

For others, technology’s value on campus is tied to the ability of programming boards and student leaders to quickly adapt it to their own needs. Carmen Sanders, parliamentarian for Virginia Tech’s National Pan-Hellenic Council, emphasized students’ use of Facebook as an example. An online directory that connects students through friends and interests, Facebook has grown in popularity on many campuses.

“We use Facebook for advertising, as a way of contacting other organization members and networking.” said Sanders. “Many even use it just to find a ride home!”

Some schools have been able to utilize Facebook as a marketing tool, getting the students out of their rooms and apartments for events.

“Facebook has been very popular and many student groups have used this technology to help promote student organizations,” said Hailey.

“We use your standard technology items, such as e-mail and our Web site,” he added. “Again, we use these tools for marketing, but we are trying to get the students to connect to the university. We need to get them out of their rooms to do this, so we try not to use IM (instant messaging) and various other technologies.”

How Has Technology Changed How We Do Business?

While there are differing opinions on technology and its use or how it advances or otherwise impacts society, one thing is certain: it has changed how colleges and entertainment agencies do business with each other.

“Also, we can go to an NACA conference and come back with a lot of media we can show during our meetings and it is more helpful than just looking at a photo and press kit. Agents enjoy the perks of quick decisions and almost instant business, too,” he added.

“There’s no doubt technology has increased business overall,” said Sims. “[Student programmers] want everything immediately—e-mailed contracts, online video clips—you name it. That’s what they are looking for. It helps get the date done and decisions made quickly.”

About the Author

Laura Bedenbaugh is assistant director of Student Programming at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. She previously served as coordinator of Student Activities at Savannah College of Art and Design (CA). She earned a bachelor’s degree in mass communication at Winthrop University (SC), where she was a member of the Dinkins Student Union. She earned a master’s degree in student affairs at Clemson University (SC), where she served as a graduate assistant for the Union Programs and the Activities Council. In 2002, she was an NACA National Convention Graduate Intern.