

SIIA 2008 Ed Tech Business Forum – December 1-2, 2008

Afternoon Panel: The Late Afternoon Show with Ed Tech Luminaries and Leaders

In this session, industry leaders shared their impressions, forecasts and advice for succeeding in the current economic climate. The panel was moderated by Lillian Kellogg, Vice President, for Education Networks of America (ENA) (noted as LK), and panel participants included:

William G Bavin, Managing Director, FOCUS, LLC - WB
Barry Lippman, President & CEO, LearningExpress, LLC – BL
Farimah Schuerman, Founding Partner, Academic Business Advisors, LLC – FS
Lee Wilson, Principal, Headway Strategies - LW

Below is a summary of questions posed and their corresponding panel responses. “Q” indicates a question, while initials indicate the respondent. Note that not all panelists responded to all questions.

Q - What are the Best Survival Strategies for the next two years?

BL: Focus on the fundamentals of the business instead of the technology. Also focus on the people involved in the business. Look at the costs, what works, and putting money in bank. At the end of the day, the money you have in the bank should exceed your expenses. Always be reminded that you are in business. Understand what your customer needs and wants. You need to know how the product is being used.

LW: Focus on current business. Resource constraints actually produce the best designs. Now is a good time to develop new innovations, however, being resource constrained, you cannot afford to make mistakes.

FS: Be very clear about how your product solves problems and saves money. Identify the money that can be used to purchase your product, and be careful that school districts do not divert federal money toward day-to-day expenses. Communicate the vital nature of the solution that your product offers.

WB: Along with planning for the other side of the storm, make sure that you are present-oriented and realistic. Understand what it means to be part of a cash-restrained environment.

LK: We are in the business of Distressed assets: students, pupils, and buildings.

Q - How do you feel about the term, ‘Distressed Assets’ and how does that change your sales and marketing and approach to the education community?

WB: William Bavin began his career in junk bonds and is familiar with distressed assets. They present both significant opportunity and a great deal of risk.

BL: Stressing the value proposition of the product is critical. Present your product in terms of what it will contribute to the school.

LW: Preferring not to use the phrase 'distressed assets', as it is a disservice to the thousands of professionals involved in the school community, Lee Wilson suggested rather, that the school district is a *big* environment, as opposed to a *distressed* environment. There are parts that work and parts that do not.

Q - Are our customers ready for new and innovative technology?

LW: It takes approximately 25 years for a new technology to become a part of the culture. It takes roughly 25 years for a culture to adapt to a change and technology has been in schools for about 25 years.

BL: Often the teacher was not part of the purchasing of technology. Some school systems still see technology as something that does something *to* teachers rather than *for* teachers. Schools need better professional development as a tremendous amount of training is needed.

Q - What kind of change would we like to see in the industry?

FS: It would be nice if we used the technology we are selling to the schools.

LW: Why do keep investing in trade shows?

BL: Blogs and viral marketing are good marketing tools.

FS: Things have shifted from stand and greet to having specific appointments with school personnel

Q- What didn't we talk about at the conference?

FS: Post Secondary. Only for profit colleges were talked about.

LW: SES services.

BL: Schools raising their level of technology proficiency.

Q- In this down economy how could so many people make it to the conference?

FS: When times get rough people tend to gather for support, hopefully to build on the wisdom of the room.

LW: This has been a disruptive time.

BL: Inspiration comes from the work people have done.

LW: The districts that are the most resource constrained are the most efficient in their use of resources.

Summary by Jim Rosso, Director, External Relations, Project Tomorrow