

The new frontier of teacher DIY

Build-it-yourself Office 365 virtual classrooms with Mosaic



Drag and drop education app LiveTiles Mosaic was still in beta when it hit the stands at EduTECH 2014. The teacher-friendly tool, available for free to any prep to 12 school with an Office 365 tenant, was a month away from rolling out as 'V1', following in the footsteps of its commercial big brother LiveTiles for SharePoint.

Fast-forward 12 months, 2.2k registered schools and over two million users and schools around the world are discovering something of a teacher-led revolution in learning design. Originally aimed to help schools respond to growing technology demands and bridge the gap in teacher skills, LiveTiles Mosaic has now shown it has legs as an easy to use and highly customisable Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

At the heart of LiveTiles Mosaic's effectiveness is its simplicity. The drag and drop design editor, which simply installs into Office 365 and functions like a 'presentation layer' over the technology, is easy to navigate and loaded with pre-configured apps and tiles that are simply placed on to, and moved around, a blank canvas. These include a range of document, calendar and task tiles, news and image carousels, Yammer and discussion feeds, and the ability to embed video, PowerPoint and Sway presentations. Every tile and app can be easily customised by changing its colour, size and font characteristics and its behaviour. With the introduction of OneNote Classroom Creator teachers can also rapidly create a personal workspace for every student, plus content libraries and collaboration areas, and seamlessly integrate this with a LiveTiles Mosaic classroom page.

A close second, is LiveTiles Mosaic's flexibility to be moulded and shaped in a variety of virtual contexts. Since signing up as an early adopter last June, Chris Laycock, Director of Information, Services and Learning Design at Launceston Church Grammar, has discovered how LiveTiles Mosaic can be successfully applied across a range of school needs.

"LiveTiles Mosaic is such a simple idea; however the way it's executed

is brilliant. The drag and drop functionality within LiveTiles Mosaic's design view is the element missing from Microsoft's SharePoint platform. It transforms the user interface with a contemporary design. It is user-oriented rather than content focused and can be customised for multiple audiences across a school's population," he said.

Selling teachers on Office 365's many productivity and collaboration capabilities without an easy way to supplement their technical competency has been a challenge for school administrators. That LiveTiles Mosaic empowers them to feel confident enough to take advantage of it as an educational tool is a significant drawback.

But for Laycock, he sees the real opportunity in the way LiveTiles Mosaic allows teachers to blend learning and engage students with real time access – anywhere, anytime, on any device.

"I'm ready for a 'shift' in the way I perceive what we need in schools to assist with 'flexible delivery' and learning design. The great thing about Office365 is that it offers all the advantages of a personal learning environment (PLE). Services are user-based; focused on the student as a learner rather than the course centric – or teacher directed – approach taken by most of the commercial LMS products. Give a teacher Office365 with LiveTiles Mosaic as their interface design tool, combined with Microsoft OneNote, Office Mix and Sway and they have the complete solution," he said.

"LiveTiles Mosaic is the ultimate tool in making flexible learning possible, because it allows the focus to move back to the learner. It's a graphic, user-friendly interface over what is a fairly sterile environment."

At Launceston Grammar, LiveTiles Mosaic has been used to create a range of rich, visual pages, from the school's intranet landing page to professional development and extra-curricular group pages, a staff e-manual and a range of teacher-designed classroom and topic pages. It's the latter that Laycock believes to be the most powerful.

"The ability for a teacher, within two minutes, to create a topic page

by simply dragging and dropping tiles of content, being able to set up hot links, embed video content, include a Yammer feed – literally within minutes and have it go live onto a tablet, a PC or a mobile device – means they have a platform they can truly deliver on, and can start experimenting with content in a blended environment,” Laycock said.

LiveTiles Chief Product Officer, Simon Tyrrell, who has been central to the development of LiveTiles Mosaic, reports that, while there are unique circumstances within schools, this current paradigm shift is reflected in what is occurring outside the classroom.

“The ability to create engaging, evolving and fit-for-purpose experiences is in line with what we’re seeing in other industries – a move away from traditional, ‘top down’ collaboration systems to one of sharing, self-interest, following and discussion,” Tyrrell said.

“What’s also significant is this idea of empowering end users by giving them the freedom to manage their technology experience. In an education setting this is particularly exciting. Offering a platform for educators to fuel their own creativity, engage with students and potentially drive better learning outcomes becomes pretty compelling.”

So too is the holistic way the Office 365/LiveTiles Mosaic combination helps schools rationalise different learning and collaboration

tools, streamlining technology consumption across their user groups.

As Laycock explains, “When you actually audit the number of systems, sites and services used you will be amazed at the proliferation of content, usernames, passwords and confusion. Edmodo, WordPress, Student Café, Fronter, EduCreations, YouTube Channels to name just a few. We’ve branded Office 365 as GO247 – one service, one login with access to the collaboration, content and delivery services we need, and design in LiveTiles Mosaic to provide a great user experience.”

Positively, for Tyrrell, Launceston Grammar’s use of LiveTiles Mosaic and Office 365 shows that the original vision for LiveTiles Mosaic is on track.

“In recent years we’ve seen a big push by major vendors to extend the breadth of their capabilities, and grow it in schools. But what hasn’t necessarily occurred is schools being able to properly leverage this. Often there’s simply too much demand for detailed knowledge and technical skills, or for additional budget to call in outside help. Our aim was always to try to alleviate some of these technical barriers for schools, so it’s pleasing to see it having an effect,” Tyrrell said.

Tyrrell further explains that LiveTiles Mosaic benefits from the same quarterly upgrade cycle as LiveTiles for SharePoint, with one key difference:

“The LiveTiles Mosaic Yammer community started as a way for us to provide resources

and support, however it has proven to play an important role in the evolution of the tool. We see teachers from all over the world not just discussing ideas and sharing their experiences, but also offering feedback around the improvements and additions they would like to see. So we have effectively been crowd-sourcing ideas through this community and have already implemented some of the more popular suggestions.”

With LiveTiles V3 having recently been released in the enterprise, the upgrade to LiveTiles Mosaic V3 is set to follow in the latter half of Term 3.

What teachers are saying...

“I use LiveTiles Mosaic to bring together the various elements of my Maths course; for reference notes or links to content in EduCreations. It’s for communication; for example an exit poll following a class informs me the need to review during the next lesson. I know that students appreciate having quick and easy access to one central topic page.” Jane Rogers, Senior Maths Teacher, Launceston Church Grammar School. **ET**

To download your free Mosaic app and install guidelines visit www.go.livetiles.nyc/edutodaydownload.

Join the educator-only Mosaic Yammer network for all support, resources and inspiration: www.yammer.com/mosaicedu.



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