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New IWB check list
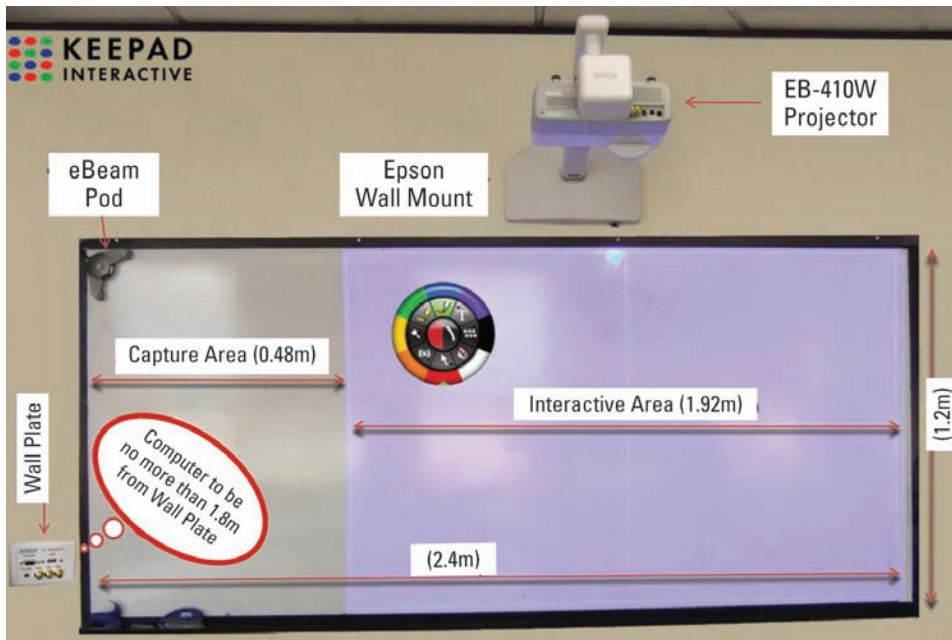
On a 2.4m whiteboard, eBeam leaves an 0.48 m writing space

Making a success of installing a new IWB is all about the getting the details right, according to Ed Hone technical services manager at Keepad Interactive. The process should start with a close look at the classroom and making a list of what's already in place; what's missing; and what needs to be installed or repaired.

First up, where is the IWB to go and is the wall strong enough to take the weight without pulling away? Solid brick or concrete block walls are ideal, but if the wall is plasterboard make sure that the mountings are securely anchored into the timber studs. And while you are at it, check out the power supply. Don't rely on the IWB's supplier to "run an extra power point or two". Insist that a licensed electrician does the work or engage your own electrician to do the job, there is no compromise when it comes to safety.

Next, consider the physical layout of the classroom. If you are planning a permanent ceiling or wall-mounted projector, check that there are no fans, beams or anything else that will interfere with the images on the whiteboard. Ask yourself if gaps in blinds, glass along the top of classroom walls or permanently switched on lights are likely to create flares on the whiteboard.

Does the teacher's desk need to be moved? Hone recommends that it be close to and to one side of the whiteboard, within easy reach of the wall plate where the LAN terminates, to facilitate connection the teacher's laptop or PC. Choosing 3RCA cable over separate cables for the various devices that need to be connected will future proof the installation. Remembering that USB signal quality degrades after 5 metres is another reason to keep the desk close by.

While many IWB systems come with a dedicated whiteboard, others including eBeam, which is distributed by Keepad Interactive, simply fix on to the side of any existing standard whiteboard. This approach does away with the need for a second board side by side with the IWB on the classroom wall. Generally, a low gloss surface is preferred for image quality, an efficient cleaning solution overcoming the small amount of extra effort required to wipe off writing and diagrams.

Installing a 2.4m or 3m wide whiteboard is the best of both worlds, Hone suggests, projecting an image (up to 1.9m in the case of eBeam on a 2.4m board) while leaving the remaining area for the teacher to write on.

With the classroom sorted, and the choice of IWB decided, think carefully about the accompanying sound system. For 95 per cent of classrooms 10W power from the projector will be sufficient. However, self-powered speakers may be called for if the classroom is in a noisy location and should be mixed through the projector, with sound volume controlled through the remote. In larger classrooms, ceiling mounted speakers and a separate amplifier may be needed, in which case a JED controller is a good option for simplicity and economy.

Looking to the not very distant future, LCD and LED interactive screens up to 55" wide will deliver brilliant images while doing away with the need for a projector and TV in the classroom.