

## **BETT 2015 – Circus full of High Flyers, Shows of Strength and the occasional Clown.**

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With Christmas fast approaching, my mind on seasonal telly, putting feet up and badly wrapping presents, one eye is firmly on the post-Yuletide tradition of BETT.

This year marks the 8th BETT show, 6th consecutive attendance and 5th as an exhibitor (and just to keep with the numbers, exhibiting for a 4th company in that time!), and while it seems to become more and more of a mission each and every year, which I am never sure why (surely we learn the lessons from previous years?), I really do enjoy it!

BETT is always the yardstick that companies are measured by. Do they even attend? How big is their stand? Where are they (often in relation to the main entrance, or in proximity to a stalwart like Microsoft, Intel, RM)? And above all, what new product, feature or partnership are they promoting this year. The education sector, particularly where technology is concerned, has two real windows demanding new features or updates: Summer in time for the new school year, and January in time for BETT, and in fact the summer window is often reserved to the domain of required, statutory or bug-fixing enhancements to software in particular.

So BETT is an important date in the calendar for the entire sector, and the build-up and feel of the whole event certainly adds some excitement, for some. For others, especially exhibitors, it is a month of stress preparing, followed by a week of even more stress, that often goes unnoticed by the delegate. But this is not a complaint, this is what exhibitors are here for, to sell their products! But being an exhibitor also gives me a unique insight to the other attractions at BETT: seminars, summits, workshops, discussion forums, <Insert important sounding phrase for a room full of people watching a PowerPoint here>. Reading through the pre-BETT brochure, it makes certain workshops sound like a G8 summit. Don't get me wrong, the value that the individual can get out of these and the event as a whole is fantastic, yet I do feel the pedestal at the front of the auditorium is a little higher in some people's minds.

Yet what is clear is the yearning for innovation and an expectation to be amazed – which leads full circle to the new and innovative products that will undoubtedly be showcased once again this year; what all vendors are preparing for.

With this in mind, there are often signs of what will be on offer across the board, from what has been the demand and market trend from this year, what was piloted and/or prototyped at BETT 2014, and the general feel of what schools are using. I cannot speak for all areas of the sector, but from the areas I work in:

Clearly tablets are still on the rise or mainstay, so tablet devices will still feature heavily, as will accessories, plugs ins, charging devices and trollies. With more and more schools adopting BYOD still, last year's charge-point lockers with phone and tablet charging facilities I thought was excellent.

Mobile devices still feature heavily, so apps are the name of the game, and noticing many companies developing dedicated app versions of their web based originals. This is not to say I feel I have lost my bet with a certain Capita MD on App vs Browser App, but the market is certainly taking that option currently. I expect to see apps on all three operating systems being commonplace, yet for the vendors this being one app with device specific interfaces.

Sticking with Apps, I certainly see a trend of consolidation of technologies being a theme at BETT or post BETT. Whereas before, there was an app for each product or task or sector, advances and understanding now make it much easier to control features of the same app, and so I see companies offering more services in the same product.

Collaboration – I have seen many partnerships form this year and last between software providers, each being a specialist in their own right yet offering services (whether resale only or more integrated than that) that extend the 'single product' into offering diverse services, such as messaging solutions have additional payment systems for example.

Learning Interfaces – not the traditional learning platform (although they will still be there in their even increasing numbers), but the emerging solutions of environments bringing together many applications and services, utilising single sign on and federated identities, and delivering those across the internet to student and staff.

Engagement – there will continue to be strides made into better including parents in the happenings of schools through apps, interfaces, notification and facilities open to parental use. Looking forward to innovation here!

In the MIS world, expect at least one new arrival this year. And even in this arena, we will go into Excel with these questions on our minds:

How many staff will Capita have this year? Will TeachApp be ready (and not need SLG!)? Will you STILL be flogging SLG (My personal feelings for this product are well documented)?

Will RM have a decent focus on G2, or will it all go on Unify and content?

How much progress has Progresso made? (A lot, I know already!)

What will Arbor surprise schools with this year, after their School Report last?

Will Bromcom be there (Sorry, an old joke going back to their abandoned stand space several years back!)?

Who are VSWare?

What will ScholarPack have out this year for Primary Schools?

And across the board, what will be the innovation?

Above all, while we will see the high flyers who innovate, the shows of strength from those who collaborate, I'm holding my predictions for the few clowns who will simply imitate!

Oh, and don't forget the freebies!