

Interactive Products Division Numonics Corporation **Case Studies**



Numonics' Free Web-Based Training Improves Interactive Whiteboard Skills

By Ellen Kollie

“We were probably making idiots of ourselves, because we kept saying, ‘Wow! I didn’t know you could do that,’” says Terri Ballew, Math Department Chair at Permian High School (PHS) in Odessa, Texas. She’s referring to the real-time, Web-based training she and her staff received from Numonics on their award-winning whiteboard.

The Numonics interactive whiteboard is a powerful teaching tool, which Permian High’s math teachers are discovering as they implement eight of them in math classrooms. For example, by touching the whiteboard surface with an electronic pen, the teacher controls the computer environment in real time. All program functions are transferred to the pen, thus enabling the teacher to stay in front of the class without touching the computer. Plus, it is equipped with 17 user-definable Softkeys, located on both sides, that teachers can define to launch web sites, applications, files, keyboard commands and 14 different Presentation Tools.

The interactive whiteboard is manufactured by Montgomeryville, Pa.-based Numonics Corp., which pioneered free, Web-based training for its customers. “Interactivity is provided through a web platform that allows trainees to see via the computer and hear via a telephone conference,” says Karen Allen, Numonics’ Professional Development Manager. “From my office in Pennsylvania, I share control of the computer with trainees across the country so that they can try some of the whiteboard’s features for a truly interactive experience.”

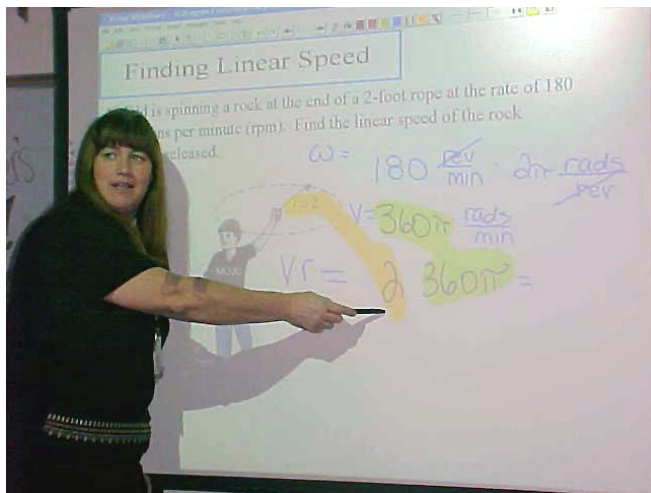
“The teachers loved learning how to maximize the whiteboard’s potential”

“It was as though Karen was standing up in front of the classroom,” Ballew enthusiastically recalls. “It wasn’t a dull lecture with the trainer saying, ‘refer to page so and so and look at the example.’ Instead, my board was doing exactly what she was demonstrating! In addition, we could ask her to explain in depth the things we didn’t understand.”

An added benefit is that teachers who desire training can choose from a published schedule of training times or request a customized training time for specific groups – like math teachers in one session and science teachers in another, or high school teachers in one session and elementary school teachers in another. “Plus, teachers are welcome to sign up as often as they like because it’s free,” Allen notes.

The forward-thinking Ballew opted for customized training for all 16 math teachers, even though right now her department has just eight Numonics Interactive Whiteboards. Amazingly, the teachers who had been using the whiteboard for awhile – and thought they knew everything – learned almost as much as the teachers who were new to the product!

This doesn’t surprise Allen, who often sees veteran users discover that they’re only touching the tip of the iceberg with regard to the interactive whiteboard’s capabilities. “There’s always an opportunity to learn something new,” she says. “It’s common to have an experienced user proctor the training and make sure the technology end goes well. Invariably, that person says, as Ballew’s teachers did: ‘Wow! I didn’t know you could do that!’”



To illustrate, Ballew notes that the teachers did not know that, when they cut and paste items, they could move, edit and resize them. Similarly, they didn’t know that they could create custom backgrounds. These tools can keep a board lively and readable and, therefore, keep students engaged in learning.

The PHS teachers also learned that they can use the electronic pen to annotate directly on projected images. This improves student retention of the material being taught, and is especially useful for showing the steps needed to complete a math equation.

Another tool the teachers learned is that note-taking software automatically saves written notations or illustrations for distribution during or after the session, in print or electronically.

Clearly, the Numonics interactive whiteboard thoroughly engages students in learning any subject. But, the math teachers at PHS are pulling out all the stops. “Students can see real-life pictures on the whiteboard,” says Ballew excitedly. “I can animate images. For example, if I draw an angle and the class misses how I extended a ray, I can hit Replay so they can see it again.

“The students need things to be constantly moving, so the interactive whiteboard helps to imitate the real world,” Ballew continues. “It used to be challenging to get students to come to a plain whiteboard to work out math equations. Now they’re eager to take a turn on the interactive whiteboard!”

That eagerness tells the folks at Numonics that they’re meeting their professional development goals. “We want users who are well versed in the technology and can use it thoroughly,” Allen says succinctly, “because that adds value to the classroom and helps students learn.”

Ballew agrees, noting: “The teachers loved learning how to maximize the whiteboard’s potential. The ones who don’t have the interactive whiteboards yet can’t wait to get their hands on them to better engage the students in learning math!”