Showcase of technology at e-Learning Africa conference

By Zachary Ochieng

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The second International Conference on ICT for Development, Education and Training has come to a successful conclusion in Nairobi, with participating companies showcasing their latest acquisitions in e-learning.

The ICT for development conference was held under the theme 'Building Infrastructures and Capacities to Reach out to the Whole of Africa' and was organized by the Berlin-based ICWE GmbH (specialists in the fields of e-learning, higher education, language training and study abroad programmes) and Hoffman & Reif (a German consultancy firm and a partnership of international experts in the field of ICT-based human resources development, educational change management and organisational development) in collaboration with Kenya's Ministry of Education.

Upgrading nursing degrees online

The African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), currently implementing the nurses' upgrading programme, showcased a perfect example of how ICTs can improve learning. The project, which began as a pilot in 2004, aims at upgrading nurses from enrolled nurses (Certificate level) to registered nurses (Diploma level).

According to Angela Nguku, the co-ordinator of the upgrading programme, the Nursing Council of Kenya, the body charged with registering nurses, could only upgrade 100 nurses a year. But with the introduction of the e-learning programme, 1500 nurses are being upgraded every year.

"One advantage of this programme is that you can continue working while studying and also stay with your family," noted Fridah Kaitany, one of the students currently enrolled in the e-learning nurses'upgrading programme. The students only meet the teacher once a week, as the course is administered online.

The South African-based School of Technology Innovation Centre gave an overview of its distance learning programmes. According to Angela Schaerer, the school manager, the center is working with Cisco and Dell in the implementation of its programmes. Through this collaboration, digital content has been developed, with students passing through an international curriculum. In collaboration with its partners, the center has also developed an ICT-integrated teacher training programme.

Showcasing new products

SMART Technologies, one of the sponsors of the conference also showcased its products, including the SMART Board 680 interactive whiteboard, which comes with Notebook collaborative learning software and is known worldwide for its ease of use. Also showcased was the Bridgit conferencing software and SynchronEyes classroom management software 7.0.

The Bridgit conferencing software makes Web conferencing simple, whether participants are in the same building or city, or in multiple locations around the world. Participants can share desktop and webcam images, talk to each other using Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), take over applications on a participating user's computer or write notes in digital ink for everyone to see.

"SMART is committed to supporting the creation of an ICT infrastructure that provides learners equitable access to high quality education and training across Africa," said Nancy Knowlton, SMART's CEO, adding: "SMART products have been available in Africa for over 10 years and are being used to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the 21st century."

HP also showcased its learning solutions which included education consulting, project management and management of change, integration of ICT in a learning environment as well as training design and content development.

Local companies were also not left behind. Virtualsat, one of Kenya's leading provider of VSAT services launched a wide range of products including High Speed Broadband Internet Access, domain hosting and bandwidth management solutions.

The conference, the second of its kind in Africa, remains a milestone in the continent's education history. The first conference was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, last year and attracted 800 delegates.

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