HP workstations help put Full Sail students on the fast track

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HP customer case study: Full Sail University trains students on professional-grade applications using HP workstations

Industry: Education

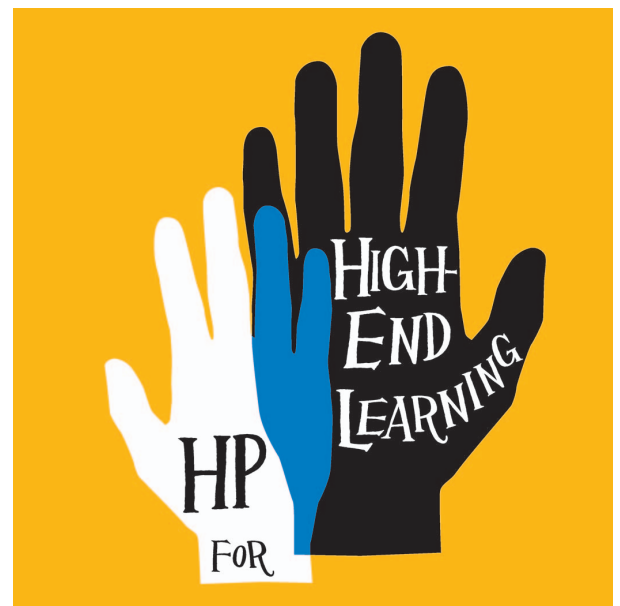HP recommends Windows Vista® Business.

Objective:
Provide real-world skills to students seeking careers in areas such as: audio recording, computer animation, entertainment and music business, film and gaming

Approach:
Deploy HP workstations, including models xw9300, xw8400, xw6400 and xw4300. Feature real world design programs on HP 8710w Mobile Workstations run on HP ProLiant servers.

Educational benefits:
- High placement rate of graduates
- Fast workstations and notebook PCs provide fast rendering of student work, allowing more time for creative expression and fine-tuning
- Reliable workstations and notebook PCs support school's commitment to 1-to-1 student-to-computer ratio

For students serious about a career in computer animation, digital arts and design, film, game development or the entertainment business, Full Sail in Winter Park, Fla., offers accelerated degree programs, an unmatched dose of real-world education and a job placement record sure to please students and their parents.

"We are not a school where you sit around and think about what you want to do next with your life," says Erik Noteboom, Vice President, Education Operations. "If you know what you want to do, Full Sail is a great place to get an education. We equip our students to be ready to enter the industry of their choice the minute they graduate."

Providing a real-world education for 6,000 students yearly requires professional-grade technology at every level. Full Sail graduates are recruited to work at major film, recording and gaming companies around the world, and knowledge of the latest hardware and software is essential to their success.

"We try to make sure that the technology the student touches here is current—current hardware, current software," Noteboom explains. "That's not as easy as it sounds, especially considering that we have a new group of students every month."

Relationships matter

In the late 1990s, when Full Sail faced another expensive upgrade from its workstation vendor, Noteboom's team evaluated HP workstations. "We were looking at a costly upgrade to our current system versus much lower costs and better performance from three HP workstations. That's how we started our relationship with HP."

"Relationship" is a word that Noteboom uses a lot. "One of the great things about the relationship with HP is that they tell us what they're developing and they ask our opinion," he says. "As a team, HP brings in people who believe in us, know what they're talking about and want to further the relationship with Full Sail."

"With HP, there's an understanding of and commitment to what we're doing," adds Scott Dansby, Full Sail Industry Relations.

"We want to stay ahead of the curve in education, and that requires companies that can understand us and help us. HP helps us make the right technology decisions so we can continue to grow and develop the new programs that industry needs and students want."
Scott Dansby, Industry Relations, Full Sail University

And what Full Sail is doing is very fast-track education. Students in the Master of Science Degree Programs graduate with their degree in 12 to 14 months, Bachelor of Science program get a four-year degree in 21 months, and Associates degree students finish what is typically a two-year program in also just 12 to 14 months.

"We run 24 x 7 and have labs going around the clock," explains Dansby. "We can't afford for a workstation to go down. We tell our students that we have a 1-to-1 student-to-computer ratio, and we mean it."

A fundamental requirement for high-end graphics work, in particular, is to have workstations used by the

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industries that recruit Full Sail students. A school advisory committee that includes members from industry leaders informs Full Sail what hardware and software their artists, animators and programmers are using.

HP workstations are used extensively in Full Sail's labs. Most students doing 3D animation use HP xw6400 Workstations, while the HP xw4300 Workstation is the primary machine for Web and interactive-media developers. HP xw8400 Workstations get heavy use among students doing post-production work, while HP xw9300 Workstations are being used in a new motion-capture studio incorporating real-time rendering.

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Hardware compatibility with the sophisticated software that Full Sail teaches is mandatory. "There probably are 20 pieces of software being taught here every day, with each one having as many as two revisions a year," Noteboom says. "We have a philosophy that the minute new software becomes available we install it immediately. HP's work with so many independent software vendors gives us the confidence to do that."

"Workstation reliability has been phenomenal," he adds. "I have an HP xw6200 Workstation on my desk with dual HP 23-inch monitors. It never has been turned off and has never gone down. The only time it reboots is when there's a system update."

HP 8710w Mobile Workstations also play an important role at Full Sail. The school's 500 game-development students run Visual Studio .NET and other applications on HP Mobile Workstations, to develop, produce, and test their games.

"We need a machine that not only will work as a development environment but also will handle students' game playing," says Rob Catto, program director for Game Development. "HP notebooks give students a lot of freedom to work away from school, and they provide the school flexibility in scheduling classroom space. The 17-inch screen on the notebooks is a big "wow" factor for the students."

HP monitors, printers, plotters and HP ProLiant servers at Full Sail qualify HP as the school's lead technology partner.

When hardware support is necessary, Noteboom and others at Full Sail count on the relationship with HP to help solve issues. "We have one person, one department that we can go to for help. That person knows who we are, understands the relationship and can grasp the urgency."

Urgency is a common theme at Full Sail. Students choose the school for its quality but also because of its accelerated programs. That's helped put Full Sail on its own fast track.

"We want to stay ahead of the curve in education, and that requires companies that can understand us and help us," Dansby says. "HP helps us make the right technology decisions so we can continue to grow and develop the new programs that industry needs and students want."

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