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A **CENTER FOR DIGITAL EDUCATION** THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PAPER

Beyond Technology: How Strategic Partnerships Deliver Long-Term Value

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From printers to communication platforms and cybersecurity initiatives, the technology deployed by colleges and universities shapes the experience for students and staff.

Technology decisions are no longer just about IT; they're investments that help create a smooth learning environment.

With many solutions to choose from, institutions must evaluate technology vendors as strategic partners who contribute to their broader goals and align with their organizational values.

Not Just Another Vendor

Instead of simply fulfilling contracts and following checklists, a strategic partner works alongside an institution to find what works best for their culture, size, current goals and future needs. These partnerships extend beyond procurement and emphasize mutual value creation.

A strategic partner brings specialized expertise that can help attract students and improve retention. They're also experienced in workforce development initiatives that can reduce burnout and improve employee satisfaction.

"The right partner is not looking just at the transaction," says Mark Sinanian, vice president of marketing, sales training and enablement at Canon. "They're looking to enrich the students, the institution and the community. They want to contribute to the health and longevity of the organization."

Colleges and universities should seek out a collaborator that measures success through outcomes that are unique to the organization, whether that's a streamlined student registration process or improved accessibility.

"A true partner looks ahead to drive long-term value, where a supplier is focused on the present," Sinanian says.

"When a university aligns with a partner committed to the common good, the contract becomes more than an operational expense. It becomes a long-term investment in the next generation."

— **Mark Sinanian**, Vice President of Marketing, Sales Training and Enablement, Canon

How Partnerships Drive Success

1. Financial insights

A strategic partner helps provide insight into expected and unforeseen costs. They can help forecast device refreshes, estimate ongoing maintenance costs based on historical patterns and work with an institution to better align its technology needs to near-term growth. For strategic partners, budgeting means planning far into the future rather than just a few years.

2. Change management

With support from a strategic partner, universities and colleges can more effectively manage cross-campus communications and stakeholder alignment to help ensure students, faculty and staff regularly use the tools their school has invested in.

3. Proactive planning

Quarterly business reviews help colleges and universities make more informed decisions about how they manage their tech stack, supporting consolidation that reduces tool and supplier complexity, along with costs.

4. Sustainability

A strategic partner embraces a sustainable design framework for its products and offers solutions that fit the goal. This intentional approach works to enhance a university's sustainability profile by integrating eco-certified hardware and green procurement protocols, optimizing lifecycle management and executing zero-waste corporate strategies.

Sustainability is about more than reducing waste. These solutions often make for smarter long-term investments and simplify tech environments.

5. Community value

A true partner may bring opportunities to support customized programs that address student experience, advancement and equity. For example, a partner may invest in a university's community engagement and social impact programs or provide funding support through mentorships or scholarships.

Finding the Perfect Fit

Institutions must consider the following when choosing a strategic partner:

Higher education experience

Colleges and universities face unique challenges related to governance, funding, enrollment, compliance, cybersecurity and campus operations. Partners with deep experience in higher education are better equipped to navigate these complexities and provide relevant guidance.

Capacity for innovation

Higher education is evolving rapidly. Strategic partners should bring new ideas, emerging technologies and industry insights that help institutions stay ahead of changing student expectations, workforce demands and operational challenges.

Measurable outcomes

A strong partner should be able to demonstrate how their work contributes to meaningful results. This may include improving operational efficiency, strengthening cybersecurity, increasing student engagement, supporting research initiatives or advancing sustainability goals.

Cultural fit

Institutions should consider whether a prospective partner's culture, approach and commitment to service align with their own. Shared values can strengthen communication and trust.

Community impact

Beyond delivering services, strategic partners can help institutions create broader value. This may include supporting workforce development initiatives, research programs, scholarships and community engagement efforts.

Eyes to the Future

As higher education continues to evolve, institutions need partners that can adapt alongside them. Taking a strategic approach to partner selection helps colleges and universities build the relationships, capabilities and support systems needed to advance their mission.

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This piece was written and produced by the Center for Digital Education Content Studio, with information and input from Canon.

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Produced by the Center for Digital Education
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