



IT/Software: ClassLink, Inc.

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Innovation has played a key role for ClassLink, Inc., a firm devoted exclusively to the K-12 education technology market. Since its inception, ClassLink has found new approaches and developed new products to serve K-12 school districts. From an innovation standpoint, four key areas deserve mention: Market, Clients, Product Delivery, and Products.

Market -- Why would any company target a market subject to fluctuating budgets? Because this market needs instructional technology efficiency, reliability, and serves some very important users, schoolchildren. K-12 school districts deal with technology challenges unheard of in the private sector: non-standardized and very out-of-date hardware; a mix of PCs, laptops, Mac computers, and more; and users who may intentionally try to undermine the system. Only by looking at these issues in a new way (it's not a problem, it's an opportunity!) could ClassLink realize the K-12 market's potential. The company captured the market by identifying education technology directors' most pressing issues then developing products that resolve those issues elegantly and in a scalable manner.

Clients -- How do you sell proprietary software leveraging server-based computing to an industry standardized on PCs? You find the innovators within the market who see beyond the needs of today and are looking ahead to their needs tomorrow. ClassLink helps technology directors understand that the long term benefits of the ClassLink Universal Learning Suite are greater in many measures including improved IT staff productivity, security, and financial return on investment than the traditional approach of continually replacing PCs.

Product Delivery -- ClassLink's current software package, the Universal Learning Suite, leverages server-based or thin-client computing. This technology approach reminds nostalgic technophiles of the mainframes of the 1980's because of their centralized computing power. The similarities end there, however. Today, thin-client technology is booming by offering the many benefits of a centrally hosted application system including high security, easy usage tracking, improved use of legacy equipment, and simplified management and maintenance. ClassLink identified the need for a reliable instructional technology platform for K-12 then provided customized software solutions for delivery of that platform.

Products -- First, listen to the customers, then create the products. Some consider it a radical idea to develop products in response to customer needs. For ClassLink, customer input is crucial in creating its patent-pending software to meet the unique needs of the K-12 customer. The newest product, ClassLink OnTrack, benefited from longtime client input in every step of its development. This focus on the customer has paid off. Dramatic business success has earned the company three consecutive Deloitte and Touche Fast 50 and Fast 500 awards. Innovative software design has been acknowledged with CODIE Finalist status in 2005 and 2006.

ClassLink 's focus provides the company with an edge in the marketplace as it expands nationally and internationally. Plans for the foreseeable future include continuing to lead with its market approach and tailored software.