Next Generation Language Labs.
An evaluation of functionality, deployment and support*

Next Generation Language Labs Key ACADEMIC checklist		SONY Virtuoso
1	Differentiation, Pair work and Group work (Live and Reflective)	✔ Live ✔ Reflective
2	Continuous assessment and monitoring (Live and Reflective)	✔ Live ✔ Reflective
3	One to one support (Live and Reflective)	✔ Live ✔ Reflective
4	Peer assessment and Self-assessment (Live and Reflective)	✔ Live ✔ Reflective
5	Control of students' progress and achievement	✔
6	Differentiation in a teaching group	✔
7	Reinforcement activity, Extension work, Gifted and Talented	✔
8	Self- discipline, Higher motivation	✔
9	Direct access to variety of materials from any networked PC (videos, audio, internet and previous exams etc)	✔
10	Cohesive multimedia teacher training	✔

Next Generation Language Labs Key FUNCTIONALITY checklist		SONY Virtuoso
1	Sends multiple video and sound files from teacher desktop to students	✔
2	Students can easily open play and record from these files and a teacher can easily collect them	✔
3	Teacher can see across the class a list of opened student files and monitor and assess their students' individual progression	✔
4	Teacher to be able to select designated student pairs and share mouse and keyboard between the pair	✔
5	Students to be able to use an automatic comparative recorder, to be able to listen to a designated audio file and 'gap fill' in a recorded response	✔
6	Teacher can listen 'live' and synchronously to the student recordings, individually or in pairs	✔
7	Teacher can interject and instruct 'live' and synchronously to the student recordings, individually or in pairs	✔
8	Teacher can watch 'live' and synchronously to the student video player, individually or in pairs	✔
9	Teacher to be able to send and manage a multiple choice test / 'quiz' to all / selected students	✔
10	Teacher to be able to send multiple audio and video files to desktop to 'stack' for students who complete set tasks quickly	✔

Next Generation Language Labs Key TECHNICAL checklist		SONY Virtuoso
1	Industrial standard installation package leading to an easy install	✔
2	Networkable software accessible from any PC.	✔
3	No proprietary PC or networking hardware required	✔
4	Windows 7 compliant	✔
5	Uses Windows standard security. No additional server product required	✔
6	An inclusive IT support and upgrade programme within the purchase price	✔
7	Reliability of product and ease of support	✔
8	Low management and maintenance costs	✔
9	Complimented with quality headsets	✔
10	Works on wireless (but network dependent)	✔
11	It's SONY it works!	✔

* When evaluating language lab solutions we invite you to examine if they fulfil against the academic, functional and technical criteria illustrated here. Recently the University of Portsmouth individually assessed the benefits of all major language lab vendors on all areas of functionality, deployment and support before choosing to install SONY Virtuoso.

'Next Gen' Language Labs

There have been no universally accepted standards to establish the academic and technical functionality of a 'next generation' language lab; until now. SONY Virtuoso language lab software benchmarks the way ahead.

Empirical evidence from the University of Portsmouth

In July 2010 '*we carried out an extensive and exhaustive tender programme with all the major suppliers and came to the conclusion that investing in SONY Virtuoso would meet all our needs for the foreseeable future*,' says Rob Hobbs Senior Technician University of Portsmouth School of Languages and Area Studies. Based upon this empirical evidence from the University of Portsmouth we have created a benchmark chart (see overleaf) for language labs in the 21st Century.

'Software only' compared to the old 'hybrid' solutions

SONY Virtuoso language lab software can be installed and used on any networked PC anywhere on a school, college or university campus. So students can access language learning resources in one room, from room to room or from campus to campus. SONY Virtuoso has a higher level of teacher synchronous and 'live' student control. In comparison the old 'hybrid' digital labs move audio, video and internet files from teacher to student via a combination of a proprietary network and by additional hardware such as expensive soundcards. This makes these 'hybrid' labs very dated. They provide less access for students and have expensive on-going annual maintenance fees. Finally these 'hybrid' also have a lower level of functionality compared to the 'next gen' software solution that is SONY Virtuoso.

Teacher training

There needs to be a focus on how your language lab software 'manages' richer and more interactive media; as students are now used to seeing on their PlayStation games consoles, via YouTube and Facebook. Students are now very 'technology savvy', in response teachers need to be conversant in accessing, managing, using and creating relevant language resources. The importance of using contemporary news footage and how to access this for a class is important, as is the ability to dub over videos, create subtitles and allow students the ability to research digital resources both in the lab, at home and onto their mobile devices. It is therefore important that any language lab needs to be supported with an immersive, yet simple and effective staff training programme in the use and deployment of multimedia skills. Any investment in a new lab without a substantive teacher training programme will not provide an appropriate return on investment in student engagement or full teacher use of the new language lab software.

"The Language Lab of the Future"

Times Educational Supplement

Purchasing Checklist*

When evaluating language lab solutions for your institution you may find the following checklist helpful:

1. Can you use the language lab in any location or it is fixed to one room?
2. Are you adding any additional hardware or sound cards?
3. Will there be any additional hardware or maintenance costs?
4. Does the solution allow a teacher to listen, interject and work with students as the students are recording and working on multimedia files – live? How well does your solution work with video material?
5. Does the language lab come with an immersive staff multimedia training programme? Is this included within the price of purchase or is this extra?

*See detailed benchmarking chart overleaf for more details.

University of Portsmouth

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The Language Lab of the Future

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LEARNING WITHOUT BARRIERS