Vaping - it's all the rage

If you had asked me about vaping being an issue in our schools or that there are now detectors as recently as this past March/April, I may have responded with a deer in the headlight look wondering what you were talking about. Fast forward to today, our news cycles are filled with stories about vaping dangers, school districts are looking at ways to combat the situation and get students help. To make it more difficult to find and help students, vaping devices take on the appearance of USB flash drives and other common items a person may carry on a daily basis.

Our technology partner, Bytespeed computers, has arranged for BPS to demo vaping detectors in 4 of our bathrooms in the district (high school). The premise is to install the detectors where installing cameras is not permitted. The bathrooms have been selected based on getting several reports of vaping inside classrooms when teachers have their back to the classroom. The bathrooms are also away from the central area of the school where they are not easily monitored consistently during the school day. It's been reported in Cut Bank next door that students are taping vaping pens to the underside of desks for the next student to use the next class period.

The vaping detectors in addition to detecting vaping, will detect tobacco smoke and other illegal substances such as marijuana and meth - those substances that can be lit up and produce a vapor. The detectors also have a decibel sensor to detect loud noise on the premise that loud noises are an indicator of bullying or fighting going on in the bathroom.

When the detectors alert on vaping or loud noises, an alert (email and/or text) is sent to administrators or select individuals selected to receive the alerts. How we handle the situation from there is up to the district. Initially, it's hoped to use the detectors as an educational tool to work with the student, discuss the dangers of vaping and see if assistance can be sought to curb what is likely already an addiction for the student.

At the time of this meeting the detectors will have been in sensing mode for 3-4 school days and we may or may not have some data to show on what has been detected…… Or not detected whichever the case may be.

Why the MAC?

Recently, while attempting to retire the last of our 10+ year old windows computer fleet, we've had some staff members asking why are their windows computers going away. First, had the district chosen to stay with windows computers all staff would have been refreshed at some point in the past 10 years and most likely would have been refreshed with another windows box requiring to be wired to the wall

and offering minimal or no mobility in their classroom and building. The goal of any tech department, whether in the education or corporate space is twofold: getting users the tools they need to do their job and secondly to keep as homogeneous environment across the environment.

One example might be printers. No district or company wants a dozen different brands of printers (HP, Canon, Kyocera, Minolta, Riso, Lexmark, etc.) nor do they want the several different models each brand sells. While it's not practicable to replace a printer fleet due to budgets, it is practicable to select a series of printers so that when a new printer is acquired, it works well with other older printers as well as fulfill the need going forward.

On the Windows side of enterprise IT for computer systems, you often end up with multiple PC configurations. Some of the machines will have a Wi-Fi card from one vendor, while another may have a completely different one. When a Windows update comes along, you might start seeing intermittent issues. As you start troubleshooting, you'll likely be struggling to figure out what is the root cause of the problem. The solution will be to find the updated driver for your WLAN card for a subset of your machines. Unless you are going to get the exact configuration of all of your machines, you'll be left with machines in various states. As an example, when enterprise 802.11ax (Wi-Fi 6) access points came out, some Windows 10 machines were not able to even see the SSIDs to connect despite them being compatible with 802.11ac (Wi-Fi 5). The solution is to update the driver of the Wi-Fi card so it would then be able to connect.

Apple's final products aren't open-source. Apple's operating system can't run on any configuration. You can sometimes buy better specs for less money, but in the enterprise IT world, work stations that work is the only goal. For our environment and our users, we want solutions. We don't want to build PCs. We don't want to search for updated graphics card drivers. We don't want to wonder if the SSD drive has a firmware update. We know that when a Software Update is run on macOS, Apple is providing any and all updates that are needed. There are only a few configurations for Apple products, and if there are issues, we know that we can work with Apple to diagnose and fix them.
Modern IT departments are purchasing complete solutions, and while not the only reason why more and more IT departments now recommend Apple products for the enterprise and one of the many reasons why BPS chooses to continue with Apple for their hardware.