



EDUCATION

New Kid on the Block

OEM manufacturer introduces the biggest, baddest, most capable interactive whiteboard ever.

There's a new player in the interactive whiteboard market. MaxPad, from Starton, Inc., is a best-seller in Asia and Europe and is now building a dealer network in the United States.

MaxPad, which combines a tough ceramic-coated steel board with a built-in Windows 10 computer, optical infrared sensor technology, high-definition camera, microphone, and a complete set of wired and wireless ports, is definitely a premium product – but it's a bargain compared to anything else that can do what it does.

"The way I describe the product is a tablet computer on steroids, because it's enormous," says Sheryl Aganon, Starton USA's Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing. "It's an all-in-one solution with a giant touch screen powered by an i5 or i7 processor, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and every kind of connector, from VGA to USB3 and HDMI. It has everything you need to make a great presentation or hold a great video conference. And now, because of our relationship with Casio, it pairs with solid-state laser/LED projection technology.

"IT managers don't want to buy bulb-based projectors anymore," she explains. "They want something reliable, affordable, and

maintenance-free; something they can install once and forget about. They do like interactive flat-panels, but they're learning that they're either astronomically expensive or far too small to be useful in a classroom.

"The MaxPad, together with a Casio LampFree ultra short throw projector, provides an image from 75" to 165" diagonal. It's big, responsive and remarkably useful – the ideal presentation and communication tool for any classroom or conference room."

Four Years of Development

Although few Americans have heard of Starton, the company has been building a sterling reputation as an OEM manufacturer since the 1990s. Among its products are the optronic design and module panels used in Apple and HTC smart phones, the backup cameras in BMW and Audi vehicles, and the cameras and optical sensors in Dell, Lenovo, Acer, Toshiba, and Panasonic laptops.

"Six years ago, we started looking at the presentation market and realized there was tremendous opportunity for a large, interactive classroom device," Aganon explains. "We spent two years in market and technology research and two years of development and testing." The product, introduced in Asia in 2015, holds 29 international patents, eight approved so far in the United States and others pending.

Aganon says a way to think about the MaxPad is to compare it to the Microsoft Surface Hub. "Like the Surface, it's a complete solution that can do video conferencing, whiteboarding and collaboration – but the 90" MaxPad costs less than a quarter of the price of the 86" Surface."

Starton research, she says, suggests that there's a huge market for interactive displays, but they have to be big. "It's been shown, for example, that if you put a 75" display into a room with 30 or 40 students, only the first two rows will be engaged. Beyond that the kids just can't see. In Asia –and in America– parents are very worried about their children watching too much TV, but in school they'll get six to eight hours squinting at a screen that, in many cases, is far too small."

For those reasons, she says, today in Chinese schools you cannot install an Interactive whiteboard or display less than 90" diagonal. "We have orders there now for 2,000, 3,000, even 5,000 units at a time. The schools are going crazy for our technology because of that rule."

The MaxPad's oversized screen and capabilities are driving sales around the world, and Starton now has offices in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam, Belgium, Canada, Africa, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Dubai, with others soon to open in the United Kingdom and Germany.

While the product has found its strongest appeal with K-12 and university customers –for example Oceanside Unified School District and the University of San Diego in California– Aganon says they're seeing significant interest from corporations, including Hewlett Packard.

LampFree Projectors

As great as the product is, it requires a projector, and over the last two years Aganon says she became increasingly frustrated with the manufacturer she originally partnered with.

"The problem was, we kept running into people who hate changing lamps, and when that happened," she says, "there was nowhere to go. Our people are not pushy, and they don't want to irritate customers. We needed an answer to that problem, because there was no way to change their minds."

In her search for a better projector, she contacted John Andersen, a technology manager at Casio, and he asked Mike Demyanovich from their San Diego office to go out with a demo unit. "Mike was amazingly helpful," Aganon recalls. "He not only helped us with local sales and support, but asked Casio to put our products into their booths at InfoComm and ISTE, which they did."

In the year or so Starton has been using and selling Casio ultra short

throw projectors, Aganon says they've had zero maintenance or service issues. "We also like the LampFree projectors because, like the MaxPad, they're very eco friendly. They're mercury-free and very sustainable – a great fit for us."

More than that, however, she knows her clients' IT managers like them as well. "The IT staff are the ones who are called in when a bulb-based projector goes down, which is constantly. They're tired of hearing it: 'Why is the projector so dim? Why doesn't it work? Why does it keep breaking?'"

"The Casio just keeps working, year after year. It makes their lives – and our lives here – that much easier."



Casio's LampFree Ultra Short Throw projectors are available in 3100 and 3500 lumens