



CAPTURE IDEAS NOT NOTES



Tools
of the
trade

3M Meeting Network

It happens millions of times every day around the world. Your meeting is over and every corner of your whiteboard is covered with intricate diagrams and notes. Now the drudgery begins. You copy the contents of the board into your notepad, then walk to your desk to replicate the data once again in your PC so you can print and e-mail the information.

Today, however, there is a way to combine the fluidity and comfort of the whiteboard with the convenience of digital storage. A digital whiteboard uses the interface you are familiar with — a board, a pen and an eraser — and stores your every word, line and color on your PC automatically. And that's just the beginning. Used in conjunction with an electronic projection system (EPS), you can use this new device like an electronic flipchart and flip back and forth between “pages” to edit in real time.

The real beauty of the digital whiteboard? It's just about as easy to use as the “low-tech” variety. Just pick up your dry erase markers and write away. Make a mistake? An eraser is at your disposal.

But unlike a traditional whiteboard, the digital version saves everything you write automatically on your PC. In fact, it even remembers what you have erased, so you never lose a beat in your meeting. The board captures a complete record of the evolution of your ideas, indispensable for brainstorming and planning sessions, for example.

Here's how it works. Some boards have a pressure-sensitive surface that you write on. Others use marker pens that look familiar, but are actually embedded with a tracking device. When you write on either kind of board, sensors that are in or around the board pick up and track the position, movement and even the color of the pen. This data is then transferred and displayed on your computer.

Set-up is simple and most can be done before the meeting. Every board-full of information that you create is saved as a "page" on your PC, ready for you to edit, print, e-mail and cut-and-paste into other applications. You can create as many "pages" as you need as your meeting progresses and as your board begins to look cluttered. And, this automatic capture of your meeting notes allows the participants to focus on the meeting, not on note-taking.

Capturing and storing your work is the most basic use of a digital whiteboard. Now add an electronic projection system and explore your new options.

Put your markers aside and pick up a stylus, an "electronic pen" which paints projected ink onto the board. Simply choose your color on the stylus and write on the board just as you would with the dry erase pens. Here's the difference: you are no longer writing on the board in the traditional sense; this is a pen that will never run out of ink. You are electronically projecting on the board, which offers important advantages.

For one, since you are projecting, not actually writing on the board, you can edit multiple board-fulls of information in real time by going back and forth between the stored pages and revising your work. The board becomes, in effect, an electronic flipchart.

For another, you can now use your whiteboard to open and run Windows applications. For example, you may want to explore your budget in the course of your meeting. Just open your spreadsheet in your PC and project it on the whiteboard. Using your electronic stylus as a mouse and the pens to annotate on the board, you are able to keep yourself in front of your audience and away from the keyboard. Your flow is unbroken, and the meeting remains interactive.

All the while, your PC is continuing to capture your group's output. Printing your final documents takes only moments. In short, a digital whiteboard lets you and the other participants focus on the meeting, not on keeping notes.

Make the meeting.

Related Reading
Cyber Meeting: How to Link People and Technology in Your Organization, James L. Creighton and James W. R. Adams, AMACOM, New York, 1998.

No More Teams!: Mastering the Dynamics of Creative Collaboration, Michael Schrage, Doubleday, 1995.

Helpful Hints

Set-up is simple, but have it all working before your meeting begins.

Cover the digital whiteboard with Post-it® Easel Pad sheets before writing. Instead of erasing the board after saving a page, peel the easel pad sheets off it and stick them to the wall. That way, you can always see what you wrote, and it has been digitally stored!

Print and distribute a complete record of your group's results at the end of the meeting.

E-mail the captured notes to stakeholders who couldn't make it to the meeting.

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78-6970-7760-6 (10775.0)CSI

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