

Google winning race to capture education market

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After six years targeting the education sector, Google says it has more than 20 million students, faculty and staff around the world using Google Apps for Education.

The search engine giant made the announcement in a blog post overnight, adding it had 72 of the top US universities using Apps for Education, and more than 400 universities posting lectures or courses online using YouTube Edu.

It's all part of a growing push by the tech giants, including [Apple](#) and Microsoft, to keep customers in one place, said Mark Gregory, senior lecturer in electrical and computer engineering at RMIT University.

"It's all ultimately about building ecosystems where they can keep customers within their ecosystem," Dr Gregory said.

He added that the universities flocking to use [Google](#) Apps were trading off [upfront costs](#) for downstream costs, with students and staff being tracked, identified and sent targeted marketing.

"They're giving up the privacy of users in exchange for a free platform."

Google is locked in a battle with Apple and Microsoft to capture the education sector, with Microsoft already boasting 22 million users of its Office 365 for Education, and Apple targeting more universities with [iTunes U](#), its online course application that has received more than 600

million downloads since it was launched in 2007.

"They're trying to build apps and tools that students and academics and teachers will find useful and therefore there will be a desire to stay within their ecosystem, not just as a student but also as a home user," Dr Gregory said

The education sector is viewed by the [software industry](#) as one of the biggest markets to target, said Dror Ben-Naim, adjunct lecturer in the Computer Science and Engineering School at the University of New South Wales.

"I think education represents a tremendous untapped market right now," Dr Ben-Naim said.

He said competition between Google, Apple and Microsoft was growing because of the big "winner takes all effect" in the internet economy.

As the process of learning is changing, Dr Ben-Naim said the major players were selling lots of devices and creating lots of data.

"The companies will start fighting about where this data is stored – once you have the data you have the customer."

Both Dr Gregory and Dr Ben-Naim said the push by Google, Apple and Microsoft into the education sector would impact Massive Open Online Course providers like Coursera.

"They need to be keeping their eye on Google, Apple and Microsoft because, especially Google, has shown the dynamic ability to move quickly to address something that someone else has got that they don't have and to pull together a solution which can be equivalent or even better," Dr Gregory said.

Dr Ben-Naim said basic email clients such as that offered via Google Apps for Education were at one end of a spectrum with organisations delivering an entire online education experience at the other end.

"I see huge value all over the spectrum. Different companies are employing different strategies, going after users and their data."

He added that it was an early market, with uncharted territory, and many players running in to create an area of their own. In the longer term, Dr Ben-Naim is expecting a more dominant player to emerge.

"I think we will see the emergence of a Facebook-type company in the edtech space in the next five years."

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