

Interview

An Information Platform

An Interview with Peter C. Davis,
President, McGraw-Hill Education, The McGraw-Hill Companies



Peter C. Davis

EDITORS' NOTE Peter Davis joined The McGraw-Hill Companies in 2006 as Executive Vice President of Global Strategy. Earlier in his career, he was a managing director at Novantas LLC and was senior partner at Booz Allen Hamilton. Davis holds a bachelor's degree from Rutgers College in New Brunswick, N.J., where he was a Henry Rutgers Scholar, and earned his Master's degree in business administration from the Johnson School of Management at Cornell University.

COMPANY BRIEF McGraw-Hill Education (www.mheducation.com), a division of The McGraw-Hill Companies, is a leading global provider of print and digital instructional, assessment, and reference solutions that empower professionals and students of all ages. McGraw-Hill Education has offices in 33 countries and publishes in more than 65 languages.

What initiatives have you launched to maintain McGraw-Hill Education's leadership position?

That business has a large presence in the United States in the K through 12, higher education, and professional markets, and an increasing global presence. The business is undergoing a lot of change, from being one with published products to an information and services business that delivers digital teaching and learning solutions to our clients. In addition to managing our significant existing business, I've been shaping a movement to transform the business to an information platform,

not unlike what is going on in other industries. For instance, our own business, Capital IQ, delivers specific information to a set of constituents to produce an outcome. In the case of McGraw-Hill Education, this outcome is to help students learn.

We need to build an industrial-strength systems platform because we need to deliver information over the Web with anytime-anywhere access on a global basis – and we need to do that well. That effort involves software development, and it has been a big initiative. We branded that under the name McGraw-Hill Connect, which was launched recently at the New York Stock Exchange.

Secondly, I've been leading a move into a new business for the education group – educational services, particularly in emerging markets like China and India, our first two big markets. There, we're interested in helping train workers for the key job gaps that exist. Our role is not necessarily to own the schools, but to partner with people who own the schools and educational centers that deliver the materials needed to train these folks. As an example, in India, we're partnered closely with Tata around delivering post-college training in different vocations. Initially, we're focusing on service industries like retail and on IT.

In these markets, do you need to partner?

We see ourselves as the content partner in these markets, so we look for an infrastructure partner with local distribution and relationships and we provide the content and learning and instructional design expertise. With Tata, we entered the Indian vocational training market; they provided the outlets for the training, but we provided the instructional design and content. It's a complementary combination of skills.

Can the traditional publishing industry be sustained long term?

It's not like somebody throws a switch and the market goes from being driven by textbooks to being driven by information-based products. Different segments of the market are converting at different paces. The higher education market tends to convert fastest because students are wired – they're faster at using computers and handheld devices – and colleges have the bandwidth to handle that technology. This situation provides fertile ground for new classroom and learning techniques, technologies, and tools, and the delivery of content still involves a lot of the traditional aspects of publishing, like editing and so on. But editors are now editing for an online environment, rather than a textbook or published product. The product is more continuously

used and ancillary learning tools – like tutorials and cognitive or adaptive learning technologies – are attached to it.

In addition, the traditional educational publishing industry has been focused on the teacher or professor. So we have spent a lot of time studying students and developing products, like Connect, that are focused on their workflow.

What can be done to repair the United States' damaged K through 12 educational system?

The only way you can break it down is one issue at a time. The policy, as well as the funding, that has come about under the Obama administration is encouraging. The focus on accountability is a good thing, but it needs to change in the classroom and with the students and teachers themselves. We have plenty of solutions that address these issues and improve student performance, so the rhetoric needs to go to the sidelines and the focus needs to be on improving performance efficiently and effectively – one student, one classroom, and one teacher at a time. If we provide better solutions that drive academic achievement, our students will be much better able to compete with their peers in countries around the world.

What can private sector leaders do to get involved in education reform?

Besides contributing time and finances, people in the private sector can use their own experience of prototyping and explaining what the success criteria are – what it takes to succeed in the workplace – and making sure those are translated in the curriculum offered in K through 12 education. The Obama administration is moving things in the right direction by shaping a broader definition of 21st Century skills for students, realizing some of the dimensions of global and social understanding and awareness that are critical for success. It is also critical that people have the technology savvy and skills, as well as traditional hard skills, for success in the future.

How will the introduction of new technology to the classroom affect the student-teacher relationship?

Actually, the variety of learning experiences enriches the relationship and makes it more effective. A day of uninterrupted lecturing is passive and not effective for all students. Enriching the day with multimedia and other forms of delivery have improved learning outcomes. It's incumbent on school districts and individual schools to provide teachers with the right training to be able to use all these new tools and techniques. ●