



## Getting Started with e-Learning: Eight Questions To Consider

### Executive Summary

The face of corporate learning has changed. It is no longer possible to develop your human capital with a single approach. Today's corporate environment calls for out of the box thinking, incorporating the advantages of many types of learning to benefit your company's single biggest investment – your people.

Evaluating the ever-growing corporate learning solutions that are available enables you to obtain full benefit from your learning programs, by selecting the range of learning resources that best match your strategic corporate goals.

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## The changing face of corporate learning

Corporate learning is evolving. Corporations have traditionally focused on providing basic learning resources for their work forces, but today learning departments are looking for ways to play a more strategic role. Simultaneously they are looking for ways to maximize learning's effectiveness by placing corporate initiatives in context of the needs of individual employees. Learning has become the connective tissue between the corporate mission and the employees charged with carrying it forward. We call this Connected Learning.

## Why ask questions?

That's a good question. Answered questions can provide the needed information about an important topic. The following list can be used to start you on your way toward connected learning.

There are a lot of players in the e-Learning business; your job is to sort out the one(s) that best suit your needs. By framing your questions in the context of your business needs, you can determine quickly if a supplier has the best approach for your organization, and whether that supplier can become an important partner to you.

## What is e-learning?

According to Elliott Masie, a well-known industry expert, e-learning is "the use of technology to design, deliver, select, administer, support and extend learning." The growth of the Internet, with its ability to deliver constant access to efficient and effective training, has set the stage for personal and professional learning to reach

unparallel heights.

SkillSoft believes that the foundation of e-learning via the Internet is based on the adult learner's active participation in problem solving and critical thinking regarding a learning activity that the learner finds relevant and engaging. We believe e-learning includes instructionally sound courses with current and relevant content; convenient access to a wide range of course and reading content anywhere the learner is located; rapid content assembly to support the fast delivery of blended learning; the ability to customize content; the ability to deliver learning to global learners in localized languages; and the capability to track, report and measure learning results.

Contrary to more traditional approaches, e-learning is not a one size fits all endeavor. Aside from the vast array of learning styles that make up your audience, learners most often seek information in an informal, casual manner. To address the needs of formal and informal learning, organizations must adopt a multi-modal learning strategy, providing employees a rich array of learning resources that encompass the full set of business needs, and delivering these resources in ways that provide maximum value at the point of demand.

## What kinds of problems/business issues can e-learning address?

Many corporations have realized that the cost of instructor-led training is not a viable option for training thousands of widespread learners. The onslaught of the globally dispersed and diverse work force has added a host of logistical issues to the already complicated

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problem of onsite training. For example, how do you keep the training consistent across regions or even countries? How do you address your work force when language barriers come into play?

e-Learning has the power to tackle some of these issues, simply by its nature as a Web-based technology. A globally dispersed work force can view an e-learning course without having to travel. If your vendor of choice offers localized courses, your learners can view relevant courses in their native languages. e-Learning is the ideal tool for “level-setting” employees at multiple locations with basic skills. It is often incorporated into new hire training to ensure that employees in various job roles have the information they need right from the start.

Many corporations find the need to create custom learning objects to meet the needs of their learners, whether that includes company-specific information, tasks or policies. Having the ability to easily create and modify company-mandated courses can allow your company to keep training up to date and relevant to your business as it evolves and changes.

e-Learning has the ability to simplify the certification training process. Your e-learning provider should have the courses and supporting test preparation to ensure that your learners pass their certification exams on the first try. Mentors should be available to answer questions as they come up during the learning process.

Your provider of choice should also address the needs of those learners who desire live, instructor-led training.

Live, virtual training can be a great way to provide learners with a live experience while enabling them to stay at work rather than traveling to live training events.

## What is informal learning and why is it important?

Informal learning is the combination of improvised, unplanned, just-in-time learning efforts that are inherent in everyday business operations—activities that business professionals constantly engage in, such as looking up information in a book, asking an expert peer how to handle a business issue, researching a new business development using the Web, etc. Collectively, these on-the-job learning efforts exert tremendous influence over an organization’s real productivity and performance capabilities.

In-depth research by the U.S. Department of Labor shows that 70 percent of workplace learning occurs through informal learning processes driven by workers finding the information they need to do their jobs, and 30 percent of workplace learning occurs through formal learning programs planned and driven by the organizations that employ the workers. This means that formal training, where most money and effort are spent, only addresses a small portion of learning whereas most learning occurs in the workplace, where the least support is available.

In many cases, informal learning implies a search for the right piece of information or the clearest set of instructions. Finding these learning assets is almost as important as having the assets themselves. Research by IDC

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shows that knowledge workers spend 15 to 30 percent of their time gathering information, but that these searches are successful less than 50 percent of the time. That is why it is essential for companies to provide for their employees' ongoing needs to gather information efficiently, and to learn through formal and informal means.

## What is the right blend of learning modalities?

A major foundation of effective corporate learning development is the ready availability of high-quality learning content for the full range of enterprise needs. The ideal blended learning model is one that integrates a wide range of functions that empower learners to participate in several formal and informal learning activities.

High-quality blended learning establishes a balance between the instructional advantages for the learner and the learning objective. It allows learners to pick and choose how they want to learn and affords them flexibility and convenience about when.

A true blended solution includes online courses, online access to reference materials (books, white papers, etc.), instructor-led training, mentoring by seasoned experts and other information resources. These resources should be readily available, utilizing a search function to quickly allow access to the learning asset at the moment of need.

## What kinds of content should you provide?

Well designed e-learning content does a good job of addressing technical and business skills. However, it is

important to set learning goals, mapped to your strategic corporate goals, ensuring that what you teach your work force will benefit your company. You should make a conscious effort to find content that applies to all levels and all functions within the employee base, ensuring that your learning investment is directly correlated to desired business outcomes.

Based on the needs of your organization, you should seek a course offering that spans information technology, end-user computing, soft skills and business acumen. The educational goals of the curriculum should range from bringing new employees up to speed, to allowing established employees to develop new skills, to prepping staff for certification tests, if applicable.

It is also important to think about informal learning resources, and to find a learning partner that has the depth of informal content to meet your needs. Examples of this content include access to unabridged online books on a range of subjects including IT, business skills, desktop skills and other targeted subjects; live mentors to assist learners with questions; and concise articles that learners can take with them to use as refreshers of previous learned skills or even as idea starters.

It is critical to make sure that the e-learning partner you work with has the resources to meet your company's varied learning needs and corporate goals.

## **What are the technologies you will need to create an effective program?**

There are many important components to the technology (e.g. learning management systems, courseware, simulations, job aids, virtual meeting and rapid design tools) that delivers your e-learning courses and helps you manage your learning programs, including finding what you need easily, tracking/reporting on what learners have accomplished, compatibility with standards and customization of the user interface.

The search functionality of the technology you choose has the ability to make or break a learner's experience within moments. A powerful search engine will enable learners to find what they need quickly and easily, whether it is a course, a book or another informal learning asset. Additionally, the search should have the ability to return your custom content within the same integrated search result.

Tracking and reporting on learner progress and course completion is a critical part of the technology requirements. It is important to find comprehensive reporting options to allow administrators to easily monitor learning progress and to export results for use in external reporting and enterprise HR systems.

The technology you chose should meet guidelines outlined in section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which defines assistive technology compliance standards. It should also have the ability to play and track SCORM- and AICC-compliant content.

Today's organizations require support for complex, blended learning environments that need to be adapted to meet your changing needs. Your learning management system should support integration of custom content, including courseware and other document types such as Microsoft® Word or Adobe® Acrobat® (PDF) files. Additionally, the system should include standard site customizations such as color schemes, branding, organization-specific tabs and a variety of other presentation and system options that allow you to tailor its look and behavior. Your learning management system needs to be selected and implemented quickly to meet business demand for learning resources.

## **What do you need to do to ensure success of the program?**

Finding the right e-learning partner is critical in a successful transition to e-learning. It is not enough to buy courses and provide them to your work force. There are many aspects of the learning program that need to be managed and implemented to increase the success rate of your initiative. These include: program design, establishing program objectives and strategy, and defining success criteria; curriculum design, deciding on course selection based on competencies and training initiatives; technical planning, developing a deployment strategy; marketing and communication, determining target audiences, launching program and creating continuous promotions.

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You e-learning partner should offer assistance in all of these areas, in addition to other administrative tasks. It is critical to have the support of your vendor in the implementation of your learning program. The vendor should be able to advise you on initiatives and other pre-tested and validated programs that can get the program off on the right foot and boost learner usage.

## How will you measure success?

It might seem that measuring the success of a learning program is as simple as keeping accurate records of who took what course and what scores were achieved.

However, measuring your program's success against your corporate objectives is more difficult. It is important to work with a partner that has a pre-defined way to measure and execute against ROI goals. You are looking for a return that is a tangible, measurable result delivered from a well implemented, ongoing and strategically targeted training process.

There are a few areas that your company can and should measure—cost savings measured against your current training program; and the value measurement process that measures the operational or business improvements resulting from training that is strategically aligned with business goals. Business impact may be measured as monetary ROI or as process improvement.

It is through these measurements that your company can gauge the success of your learning program as a whole and more notably, how it measures against strategic corporate goals.

## Summary

Getting started with e-learning can have many benefits to your organization, from a cost, time and learning perspective. As an employer you now have the ability to influence more than formal learning process. Now, thanks to e-learning you can influence and tailor informal learning to meet the needs of your biggest asset—your human capital.



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## Recommended books about e-learning

All of these books are available from Books24x7®, a SkillSoft Company.

### **Basics of E-Learning: Training Technology**

*by Elisabeth Rossen and Darin Hartley ASTD © 2001 (20 pages)*

Increase your awareness of and bring you aboard the learning revolution known as e-learning.

### **Beyond Free Coffee & Donuts: Marketing Training and Development**

*by Sophie Oberstein and Jan Alleman ASTD © 2003 (197 pages)*

For training and development professionals who are interested in creative ways to get their message heard and acted upon by the appropriate learner.

### **Blended eLearning: Integrating Knowledge, Performance Support, and Online Learning**

*by Larry Bielawski and David Metcalf HRD Press © 2003 (355 pages)*

Learning technologies written from the combined perspectives of online learning, electronic performance support systems and knowledge management practices.

### **Blended Learning: How to Integrate Online and Traditional Learning**

*by Kaye Thorne Kogan Page © 2003 (148 pages)*

The buzz phrase of the moment in the world of training is “blended learning” but ... What is it? Can it help? All you need are in this up-to-the-minute guide to the latest trend in training.

### **Designing E-Learning**

*by Saul Carliner ASTD © 2002 (181 pages)*

Use this guide to adapt your ISD skills to e-learning, blend solutions to ensure learning sticks and make effective design choices.

### **Evaluating E-Learning**

*by William Horton ASTD © 2001 (125 pages)*

A Q&A guide to determine if e-learning is right for your organization.

### **Implementing E-Learning**

*by Jay Cross and Lance Dublin ASTD © 2002 (140 pages)*

This guide will help you build a powerful implementation and marketing strategy for your e-learning program.



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## **In Action: Implementing E-Learning Solutions**

*by Jack J. Phillips (Series ed) and Christine Pope (ed) ASTD © 2001 (200 pages)*

Structures, methods and paradigms that have worked in other e-learning organizations, and tips to making them work in yours.

## **Leading E-Learning**

*by William Horton ASTD © 2001 (147 pages)*

Guide your organization or business into the e-age.

## **On-Demand Learning: Training in the New Millennium**

*by Darin E. Hartley HRD Press © 2000 (171 pages)*

This book provides managers, human resource specialists, and training personnel ideas for developing new learning tools to meet the demand for self-service learning.

## **Project Managing E-Learning**

*by Bill Shackelford ASTD © 2002 (134 pages)*

Walks you through the basic elements of launching a successful e-learning project.

## **Selling E-Learning**

*by Darin E. Hartley ASTD © 2001 (117 pages)*

Loaded with hints to help plug your e-learning business ideas.

## **The Blended Learning Book: Best Practices, Proven Methodologies, and Lessons Learned**

*by Josh Bersin Jossey-Bass © 2004 (352 pages)*

Blended learning integrates use of the Internet with a rich variety of other approaches and technologies to create an integrated learning experience.

## **The E-Learning Fieldbook: Implementation Lessons and Case Studies from Companies that are Making e-Learning Work**

*by Nick van Dam McGraw-Hill © 2004 (337 pages)*

This resource shows how to use e-learning to meet strategic business goals through case studies and lessons learned by leading companies as they have implemented e-learning.

## **Using E-Learning**

*by William Horton ASTD © 2002 (168 pages)*

See how e-learning can offer considerable advantages to any organization or business.