

An electronic information letter by BNH Expert Software.

Unravelling the Mysteries of eLearning

by J. (Jay) Bahlis, Ph.D., Eng.

*"If confusion is the first step to knowledge, I must be a genius."
-Larry Leissner*

eLearning - that illusive and magical term. It is analysis, design, development, delivery, management, administration, support and evaluation of training and performance all wrapped up in a single term. It can be delivered in a synchronous and asynchronous mode. It is structured and unstructured learning. It is an authoring, delivery, administrative, support and evaluation system. It solves and creates problems. And of course it is loved and hated.

ASTD defines eLearning as "anything delivered, enabled, or mediated by electronic technology for the explicit purpose of learning." Although it may sound reasonable, it is by no means a widely accepted definition. Marc Rosenburg, limits the definition to solutions delivered over the Internet. Elliot Masie suggests that the "e" should stand for experience rather than "electronic", and as such Elliot argues that instructor-led training should also be included in the eLearning strategy. And to Cisco, "eLearning is the overarching umbrella that encompasses education, information, communication, training, knowledge management and performance management." It is the web-enabled system that makes information and knowledge accessible to those who need it, when they need it - anytime, anywhere. So what is eLearning? At the present time, eLearning is anything you want it to be. To truly understand eLearning, you should forget the term eLearning and focus on key solutions that make up eLearning. Solutions can be divided into two main groups:

Group I. Learning/Training Solutions

Three options are available for the delivery of training:

1. Synchronous - Internet Virtual Classroom

Refers to synchronous courses delivered over the Internet/Intranet in a simulated classroom setting (i.e., mimic classroom environment through the use of conferencing, simulated hand-raising, shared applications, chat and a shared whiteboard). Several products are available in this category - Brandon-Hall and Training Media Review publish comprehensive reports that compare functions and features of various Internet Virtual Classroom solutions. An article by Barbara Fillicaro that sheds more light on the subject is available on BNH's web site.

2. Asynchronous - Interactive Self-Study Courses

Off-the-shelf courses on generic IT and soft skills topics are available from several vendors including Smart Force and NetG; and custom-built courses with varied levels of interactivity can be developed using Authoring Tools. Courses delivered on CD-ROM, Diskette and Local Area Network are referred to as Computer Based Training (CBT) and those delivered over

the Internet/Intranet are referred to as Web Based Training (WBT). Training Media Review and Brandon-Hall publish comprehensive reports that compare functions and features of various Authoring Systems.

3. Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS)

EPSS are electronic job aids designed to enhance the performance of employees on-the-job. Include expert (intelligent) systems, embedded training, hypertext, hypermedia or combination. EPSS provide cost effective solutions when the application of learned concepts is complex, cumbersome or deals with a large body of knowledge.

Although three primary eLearning options are available for the delivery of training, in many cases, using the right blend of delivery options - including instructor-led, print and videos - may offer the most cost-effective delivery option. To assist you in selecting the most economical blend of delivery options that will meet your organizational, learning and learner's needs, BNH developed a decision support tool called ADVISOR. For additional info and to request a free trial account click on [ADVISOR Enterprise](#).

Group II: Administrative Management Solutions

Although a number of administrative and management solutions are available, only the two most common solutions are presented:

Learning Management Systems (LMS)

Software tools that automate the administration of synchronous and asynchronous learning events, including student registration, data collection, performance tracking and report generation - the main thread that links all the pieces. In addition, some tools assist organizations in managing skills/competencies and allow learners to create personalized learning plans. LMS Tools enable individuals to take control of their learning while providing the organization with a single system for managing the entire training program. Brandon-Hall and Training Media Review publish comprehensive reports that compare functions and features of various LMS Tools. An article by Bill Ellet that highlights advantages and limitations of purchasing or renting a learning management system is available on BNH web site.

Learning Content Management Systems (LCMS)


Software tools to create, store, manage and reuse content. LCMS tools generally work with content based on Learning Objects - commonly viewed as the smallest element of standalone information required by an individual to achieve an enabling performance objective or outcome. LCMS tools usually have good search capabilities, allowing developers to find quickly the text or media needed to build training content. Brandon-Hall publishes a comprehensive report that compares functions and features of various LCMS Tools.

Conclusion

Now that you know the key solutions that make up eLearning, it is easy to generate a mental map to help you understand what eLearning is all about. So next time you come across an eLearning solution, smile, close your eyes, find out where it belongs and away you go! Best wishes for the holiday season from all BNH team members.

Contributions

Contributions, on what worked and didn't - including practical tips, advice, white papers, case studies, articles, reviews, online seminars, software tools and research reports - are welcomed. Please send to bahlis@bnhexpertsoft.com. Full credit will be given to author.

For information, comments and questions please contact (Jay) Bahlis at (800) 747-4010 x 21 or  bahlis@bnhexpertsoft.com or visit the ADVISOR site at <http://www.bnhexpertsoft.com>.

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