



Book e-Learning 2.0

Proven Practices and Emerging Technologies to Achieve Real Results

Anita Rosen
AMACOM, 2009
Listen now

- play
- pause

00:00
00:00

Recommendation

Training consultant Anita Rosen designed her book to resemble one of the “asynchronous e-learning courses” she describes within its pages. Her presentation on e-learning is exceptionally clear and is filled with very strong content. Rosen explains that you can’t make many of the decisions involved in developing e-learning courses too far in advance, because technology is changing so quickly and new tools are emerging constantly. That said, she does a great job of methodically covering the major aspects of e-learning. She explains current principles and practices, and sums them up at the end of the book in a guide for “subject matter experts” who design e-learning courses. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to corporate trainers, academic distance-learning developers, and anyone else who makes decisions about training.

Take-Aways

- Both large corporations and small businesses can benefit from e-learning programs.
- E-learning requires you to conceive and organize training in a new way.
- E-learning can cut training expenses.
- To organize e-learning, use the same principles that you use to organize Web sites.
- “Synchronous e-learning” takes place in real-time. It works best for teaching material at a specific time or with a specific teacher.
- “Asynchronous e-learning” students can access the course material and study without a guide. This learning works best for a workforce dispersed in time or space.
- Web 2.0 technologies allow very specialized, personalized e-learning courses.
- Too many graphics and audios can distract e-learning students.
- Use short videos to explain and demonstrate how to do specific tasks.
- To enhance learning, use graphics and multimedia functionally and legally, according to copyright rules.

Summary

The Advantages of E-Learning

Corporations are always looking for new and better ways to deliver training, and even small businesses want to find ways to keep their staffs up-to-date. E-learning offers powerful possibilities for both groups. Once you develop an e-learning program, it is always available. Participants don’t have to retain as much content as they do in a traditional classroom setting, because they can always review the course to refresh their memories. Trainers can develop courses that meet specific corporate

needs or audiences.

“For more than a decade, e-learning has been touted as the next big thing in training. Yet most organizations are still trying to figure out how to make it work.”

Calculating the return on investment for an e-learning course is relatively easy: Compare the cost of developing the e-learning course (plus technical support costs) to the cost of the in-person training it would replace. Often, an e-learning course works out cheaper. Before engaging your firm in e-learning training, set definite, concrete goals that you want the training to achieve within a given time parameter. An example of such a specific goal is to “move 50% of all training courses to the Internet within eight quarters.”

The Five Stages of Technology Acceptance

Once you’ve identified your goals, evaluate them for feasibility, prioritize them and integrate them into your “existing organizational goals” as well as into your corporate communication patterns. Make sure the trainers, “subject matter experts” (SMEs) and employees who will use the training all support the training’s format and goals.

“Many organizations stop after identifying their goals and then don’t understand why their initiative doesn’t meet their expectations.”

Anticipate communication problems – they occur in any training situation. Managers want to implement training from the “top-down” and tend to look for broad solutions. They focus too much on the end-goal without providing guidelines on how to reach that destination. Trainers have the opposite problem: They get so involved in the finer details of creating an e-learning program that they lose sight of the final goal. To succeed, “all levels of the organization need to communicate using a shared vocabulary.”

“A Web course is a subset of a Web site.”

The introduction of new technology proceeds in five stages. In the past, corporate Web sites passed through each of these stages; e-learning is passing through them now:

1. **“Denial”** – People resist new technology. Today, some organizations still rebuff the notion that they need e-learning.
2. **“Outsourcing”** – People admit the change might be useful and hire outside experts to implement contained solutions. Some organizations admit e-learning might help them and hire course developers, or buy “generic courses” or software that allegedly enables them to implement e-learning immediately.
3. **“PowerPoint”** – Managers include the new development in their presentations and budgets to show they’re on board.
4. **“Execution”** – Now managers must actually act on their plans to use the new technology. Sometimes this stage looks the same as outsourcing, except that the organization has brought e-learning in-house.
5. **“Integration”** – Everyone accepts the trend as the “expected way of doing business.” The organization uses e-learning easily and well. The firm’s management values the training and the experience learners gain in the process. It tries various approaches to find what works best. Everyone involved understands how e-learning differs from traditional training. It doesn’t stop with the answers that are easiest for the trainers or with course designs that are “creator-centric.”

E-Learning Design

E-learning depends on the Internet, and the rules governing Web site design apply to e-learning as well. For example:

- The interface should be clear, clean and easy to use.
- Users should be able to retrieve the information they need “within three clicks.”
- The Web site should support “global navigation.” These are the buttons that feature on every page, for example, to access the home page. Designers should also facilitate “local navigation” by creating tools that allow users to glide smoothly through an individual page on the site, such as the scroll function.
- The Web site should be “sticky,” giving visitors reasons to stay, and “ping-pong,” motivating visitors to bounce back to it.
- Use HTML and XML to make content readable on a range of browsers.
- Compress files and break them up so content loads quickly.
- The design of the Web site should match that of your company’s brand.
- The Web site should enable users to provide feedback.

“Synchronous” and “Asynchronous” E-Learning

E-learning programs can be either synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous e-learning takes place in real time. It is similar to traditional in-person training, and the trainer and students can provide one another with immediate feedback. Synchronous e-learning is appropriate when the content is “time sensitive” or “personality bound,” and depends on a particular context or speaker.

“Learners have no more patience than anyone else.”

Developing a synchronous e-learning program is easy. It may involve little more than distributing existing PowerPoint material and adding two-way communication. However, trainers don’t receive the “nonverbal feedback” they would receive in a traditional in-person class, and they miss nuances. Learners, meanwhile, are less likely to become deeply engaged or to collaborate.

“Interestingly, people rarely try to minimize the time it takes for learners to take training. Rather, they are more interested in minimizing the time it takes for course creators to create it.”

In asynchronous learning, the content is available on the Internet for students to access at will, and students determine the pace of their e-learning. Asynchronous training is especially useful for organizations with widely dispersed workforces, for organizations such as hospitals who must “constantly train and retrain employees,”

and for firms that depend on volunteers or workers with shifting schedules.

“The most difficult aspect for a trainer giving synchronous e-learning is the lack of nonverbal feedback. Giving such a course is like talking to yourself.”

Asynchronous learning has two categories, “traditional e-learning” and rapid “e-learning.” In traditional e-learning, the content is preset and doesn’t change. Generally, it has a “long shelf-life.” Usually, these courses require large budgets, and presentation techniques include “simulations or 3D models.” However, often specialists produce these kinds of courses, and their interactions with your SMEs may be complicated.

“There are no absolute rules about which companies are better suited to rapid e-learning than for traditional e-learning.”

“Rapid e-learning” courses, with content you can continually update, use words alone for communication and are inexpensive. Just one or two people working for a few days can develop such courses. Rapid e-learning courses are appropriate for short-term situations, such as training staff to address a specific new problem. They also work in situations when the content “already exists in some other format” and you just need to adapt it for presentation.

The Possibilities of Web 2.0

Web 2.0 refers to these trends, which are coming together to increase personalization and specialization online:

- **“Application services”** – Services that don’t live on your computer but rather elsewhere on the Internet. They replace or run alongside applications on your own machine.
- **“The Long Tail”** – Online services such as Netflix, which serve niche markets. Learners in this category “don’t fall into the training department’s core market or [are] traditionally hard-to-reach learners.”
- **“Mashups”** – Combinations of existing applications to create something new.

“No single tool can be used to create all the different elements found in e-learning.”

Web 2.0 provides these new services:

- **“RSS (rich site summary)”** – Enables interested users to subscribe to Web sites. They receive notifications when new content appears. RSS is useful for online learning, because it enables learners to receive regular updates.
- **“Podcasts”** – Audio and video broadcasts formatted for digital delivery, often to an iPod or similar device. These add new dimensions to e-learning.

“In the living, breathing, continuously changing page found on consumer social networking sites, acceptance among adults, as in the business world, is restrained and cautious.”

The flexibility of Web 2.0 services enables you to offer training sessions as short as 15 minutes, which you can distribute on smartphones as well as traditional computers (assuming your designers use graphics viewable on any platform and understand users’ phone practices).

Organizing an E-Learning Course

The average user needs one minute to read a page of content. Divide courses into 15–20 page blocks, which equal 15–20 minute units. Organize courses on four levels:

1. **Level 1: “Course”** – A course outline is especially important for asynchronous learners, who won’t have a trainer at hand to guide them. Provide a “frame of reference,” such as a set of objectives.
2. **Level 2: “Chapters”** – Provide a “services bar” that makes moving between sections of the course easy.
3. **Level 3: “Pages”** – Each page should consist of a summary and “bulleted points,” in a format that is easy to read online. Include optional links to additional material.
4. **Level 4: “Subpages”** – Include “drill-down” activities to reinforce learning, such as exercises, movies or supplemental reading. At this level you can personalize the course according to user needs.

“No one knows what the Web will look like in 10 years. Nor do we know what social phenomenon will push the Web in a new direction.”

For course navigation, provide both a tour that guides users through the entire course in a stream, and a “step-by-step” approach that lets users view each component, as in a flow chart.

Simulations provide active illustrations of course concepts, but they can be expensive to develop. Many trainers let their enthusiasm carry them away, putting in simulations because they are fun or impressive, rather than because they really support course goals.

“The advent of a technology does not mean that the old is bad and the new is good.”

Tests are an essential and often inexpensive element of good e-learning courses. Good tests engage learners, stimulate their thinking, reinforce retention of material, consolidate the stages of a course and prepare learners to continue. Tests tell managers which employees have completed the course, how well they’ve mastered the material and how well the course works.

Using Images and Sound

Poorly used images distract learners and slow their progress. Graphics come in a range of formats. The more colors and the higher the resolution, the slower the image will load. Reduce file size, resolution and colors whenever possible. Follow copyright law: Never take images from someone else’s Web site without permission, and if

you photograph your employees, ask them to sign waivers. Placing images on the right side of the page makes processing the page easier, since English-speakers read left to right.

“One of the biggest mistakes course creators make is to try to make their courses more interesting just by adding simulations or games that do not directly support the learning objective.”

Use sound sparingly. Audio can be distracting, and most learners retain less from an audio format. Because having students read a passage themselves is faster than having a speaker read it to them, adding audio narration slows a course down. Video adds more than audio. Use short videos to give visual explanations and demonstrate how to do specific tasks.

Evaluating an E-Learning Course

The design of your course should enable you to use and reuse it, to rearrange the contents, to provide learners access at any time and to convert it easily from one format to another. Evaluate the “learning management system (LMS)” you choose according to how well it achieves these goals. Beyond that, choose your system based on your organization’s needs and what you want students to do. For example, will they be allowed to take tests repeatedly? If so, do later results overwrite earlier ones? Finally, make sure the LMS you select satisfies the Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility requirements, so all employees can participate.

About the Author

Anita Rosen is president of ReadyGo Inc. and author of several books, including *eCommerce a Question and Answer Book*.
