

eLearning: a new way to develop employees

The most successful electronics companies recognize that improved-performance programs play a persuasive role in attracting, motivating, promoting and retaining a highly qualified workforce. The trend toward providing more effective training and development programs has led to in-house staffing and classroom facilities, independent teaching resources and, in the most ambitious situations, even corporate campuses. These have, however, been rather costly and, in many cases, only marginally successful.

eLearning—the emerging, Web-enabled alternative to traditional training—is fast becoming the preferred route to building and sustaining advanced performance capabilities through improved efficiencies and effectiveness. Its application holds enormous and positive potential for capturing untapped performance and enhancing profitability.

eLearning offers a new way to think about workforce development. It transcends the customary classroom mentality in favor of a Web-based method of delivery that responds to specific needs, is self-paced, is highly interactive and is measurable. The value proposition for eLearning is threefold:

- It reduces time-to-proficiency, increases employee motivation and confidence, improves judgment and decision-making, encourages teamwork and reinforces cultural influences;
- It improves productivity, increases sales effectiveness, upgrades customer service and promotes customer retention;

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- It reduces training expense, minimizes costly errors, reduces overtime, shrinks headcount and lowers attrition.

The growing number of product providers in the marketplace foretells the future of eLearning. Companies such as Docent Inc. and Click2learn.com Inc. are a few of the recognizable pioneers, with new entrants scrambling to get in the front door of this emerging teaching technology. Their products and services range from hardware to learning management systems, training content and high-end performance simulation.

The eLearning solution represents a forward-thinking departure from its more traditional predecessors. These five attributes distinguish eLearning:

- It's Web-based. Portals are available on the Internet at any time and from any place. Attendance is measurable, and the cost of participation is negligible.
- It's a virtual classroom. Multiple channels attract a global student body and allow higher levels of interactivity.
- Personalized curricula. Students can tailor the content according to their individual career needs and advancement opportunities.

- Learning experience. From very basic to highly interactive, and from textbook learning to performance simulation, participants can choose their own levels of sophistication and proceed at their own pace.

- Measurable results. Web-based learning management systems have the ability to track attendance, record test scores and correlate training effectiveness with business results (ROI).

Evidence of the success of the eLearning experience can be found in a number of corporate programs. Siemens uses eLearning in conducting a performance simulation course for 10,000 finance professionals located throughout its global operations. To enhance the financial insight of more than 8,000 cross-functional managers, Pratt & Whitney created a business decision-making course designed to simulate program and financial management skills in a realistic business environ-

ment. British Telecommunications undertook an intense eLearning program to train 20,000 customer service representatives to sell e-commerce products.

eLearning has its challenges. Many companies already have sizeable investments in corporate campuses or extensive in-house capabilities and might be reticent to pay the price of embarking on a new direction. There's also the question of culture shock. Will the workforce and corporate infrastructure be successful in adapting to this new style of teaching? Though still in its infancy, the future of eLearning is clear. With leaders jumping at the opportunity to hone their competitive edge utilizing eLearning techniques, others will need to give serious consideration to changing their ways in order to remain viable contenders in the dynamic global environment. The potential of this new best practice is unmistakable. •

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