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Gearing up for eLearning

published: Wednesday | March 19, 2003

By **Ilsa H. duVerney**, Contributor



Ilsa duVerney, Productivity Plus Ltd. eLearning workshop organiser, stands to declare the eLearning workshop open. Seated, from left, are facilitator Christine Duckworth of Intrac Inc. USA, Dr. Lloyd Eubank Green, (JATAD) and Lorna McDonald, associate director, Productivity Plus Ltd. - Contributed

RECENTLY, THE Technology Innovation Centre at UTech hosted a workshop coordinated by Productivity Plus Ltd and facilitated by Intrac Incorporated USA. The presenter was Christine Duckworth, certified Instructional Designer who brought a wealth of information to twelve companies locally and twenty four participants as they geared up for implementing eLearning in their organisations. Our National Training Agency HEART and The Jamaica Association for Training and Development were well represented at the seminar. Christine explained what really is eLearning?

WHAT IS ELEARNING?

In a global economy that capitalises on knowledge, eLearning can provide the learning edge on demand. eLearning uses web-based technology to engage participants in learning experiences. The learning event may be live session transmitted over the internet, a self-paced multimedia course accessed on the intranet, an interactive CDROM module, and other resources. The value of eLearning is the flexibility for learners and facilitators to continually update their knowledge beyond the boundaries of a traditional training room or classroom. e-Learning can provide benefits traditional training room-based instruction cannot. e-Learning technology enables continuous learning without the hassle and expense of flying people to other cities to teach or participate in a training session. Not only does a company conserve the travel budget, but the employee doesn't need to be away from work, home, and family for days on end to follow the training. He or she can simply log into a training session from a workstation. Because of the convenience. learning becomes part of the day-to-day culture of the organisation.

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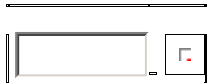
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CULTURAL INSIGHTS

As organisations expand beyond the country's borders, e-Learning provides an easy way for people from different parts of the world to contribute cultural insights into the most effective way to operate globally and harvest knowledge from all corners of the world. The contributions and insights that stem from e-Learning sessions can open the lines of communication between groups and countries that were isolated before due to distance. e-Learning can help create a unified vision, communicate values across corporate and country boundaries, and develop common skills for a company when its workforce is spread throughout the world.

BENEFITS TO BUSINESS

Training budgets can be cut enormously with eLearning. Some of the more obvious savings are found in eradicating travel expenses for employees to attend seminars in far-off places. Specific benefits include:

Cost savings: Travel expenses are reduced, costs associated with maintaining a training room are reduced, and participants' time out of the workplace is greatly reduced.

Consistency: Skilled trainers are no longer restricted by geography, allowing them to reach participants across the country and around the world with a consistent message. In addition, those individuals who "miss the message" due to scheduling difficulties can access a recorded session to review information directly, rather than relying on word-of-mouth.

Fast rollout: e-Learning provides a shorter delivery cycle. Training content can be modified continuously and delivered just-in-time to meet the changing demands in the workplace.

BENEFITS TO LEARNERS

Studies demonstrate that learners have higher rates of retention due to the audio, visual, and hands-on resources that eLearning delivers. The interactive portion of on-line training assures optimum results as your employees become part of the training environment. Learners can benefit from live e-Learning in the following ways:

In demand: Employees can access courses from around the world to meet their specific learning demands, allowing them to remain competitive in the workforce.

In the Office: Live e-learning eliminates travel and is less disruptive to office productivity and family life.

Immediate: Live e-learning allows one to respond quickly to training demands, providing the right instruction at the right time.

WAYS TO USE ELEARNING

Live classes

Tutorials

Long distance team building Project/study groups



New hire orientations

New product roll outs

Customer demonstration

Communicating values and attitudes

IS THE FACILITATOR ELIMINATED?

John Naisbitt in the book Megatrends (1982), cautioned that "The more high technology around us, the more the need for Human touch." Some persons feel that eLearning technology will replace the trainer and facilitator. Whereas there will be a reduction in the need for the stand up trainer to impart basic knowledge and information as this may be given electronically. The trainer will be needed to facilitate group processes for attitude change and enhancement. Although video conferencing allows for interaction of the trainee and the trainer, Naisbitt continued to say, "Talking with people via television cannot begin to substitute for the high touch of a meeting, no matter how rational it is in saving fuel and overhead."

SOME CULTURE SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Courtney Johnson who represented the Jamaica Association for Training and Development at Gearing up for eLearning had this to say of the workshop:

"We should approach the future with an attitude of positive anticipation. As far as possible, we should position ourselves to adopt, to modify and even influence the field. We should be prepared for changes in a purposeful manner for the benefit of us as individuals, for the benefit of our organisations and indeed for the benefit of our whole society."

Courtney saw eLearning affecting us in Jamaica in the following way:

This thing called time:

Harry C. Triandis,(1994) a world renowned anthropologist in his observations, has found many attitudes that different cultures have about this thing we call time. In developing countries, it is fair to say that people are somewhat nonchalant when it comes to the use of time. In Jamaica, and perhaps is the case in some other developing countries, there is not enough appreciation and in due course, not enough respect for time- to be precise, the exactness of time. Time is a critical discipline for us to have when offering a service professionally and successfully. This implies good planning and scheduling and especially so for an eLearning programme which would not of course proceed without a contingency plan.

An eLearning facilitator should think not only of his or her punctuality, but as such should also consider all the supporting resource persons with their plans and schedules fitting into the over all delivery schedule. A new respect for time, accompanied with early planning of an event, is a discipline and a value for Jamaica to cultivate in order to increase our competitive advantage in the world.

Ilisa H. duVerney is an HRD/Process Consultant and Managing Director of Productivity Plus Ltd (Ja) in collaboration with Christine Duckworth, Intrac Inc. (USA), and Courtney Johnson of the Jamaica Association for Training and Development (JATAD). Please respond to: ppl.hrd.duv@cwjamaica.com or www.Intrac.biz or jatad@cwjamaica.com.

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