

A Job Like Mine - Charles Gould

Originally published eLearning Age, November 2010

Each month e.learning age talks to someone carving out a career in the industry. This month, Archana Venkatraman* talks to Charles Gould.



*Above: Charles Gould,
Managing Director of
Brightwave.*

Ten years ago Charles Gould left PricewaterhouseCoopers, where he was principal consultant, to set up online training company Brightwave. It was a nascent sector then, but a decade on, his business provides e-learning solutions to many global organisations and was voted the best e-learning development company in the 2009 E-Learning Awards.

Gould, still its managing director, remembers those start-up days: "We were starting a family at the time. My father-in-law said: 'Charles, you know what you're doing, right?' I was fully aware of the risk, but I knew the industry had a lot of potential and there would be many opportunities."

It may seem like Gould took a punt and struck gold in the end. But his decision was thoughtful, calculated and based on sensible projections.

"At PwC I was helping clients to use learning management systems and was already sensing the shift away from classroom training towards e-learning. Each time I met clients who had innovative ideas about e-learning, I became more convinced."

"Besides, I am not someone who was going to stay in a very large organisation," he adds.

In his role at PwC, Gould met clients and saw himself at the heart of the initial stages of e-learning revolution. With some investment he, a technologist friend and a PwC colleague started Brightwave.

"Brightwave was founded in my attic with PwC as our first client. Since then we've grown organically." Today it provides bespoke e-learning tools and services to public and private sector companies.

Why the name? "We didn't want just a description of what we do." So Brighton, the city Gould lives in and loves was certainly in the name-game. "Bright also signifies intelligence and creativity. And 'wave' because you surf the internet. Together they sounded good." And we agree.

Gould loves his job because it is in Brighton, he is his own boss, he has a talented, well-bonded team, he gets to work on challenging projects and is at the centre of the exciting transformation the industry is undergoing revealing new possibilities as it unfolds.

The genesis of Brightwave is clear, but what about Gould's own journey? He insists that he got into this sector "by chance". Gould started as a freelance journalist, and did some work with an author who was also developing a multimedia CD. "I got involved in the multimedia CD project as well and found it interesting and promising."

He began developing interactive learning modules and his next role within the sector was to build a learning management system at BT. Gould was later headhunted by PwC's client training division. By 2001 he realised that big companies were gearing up to make huge investments in e-learning strategies, and decided to set up Brightwave.

His company is at the premium end of the market providing high impact online training solutions. How much do they cost? According to its website, "Rule of thumb is £20k an hour but we can do it a lot cheaper or more expensive depending on what you're after."

So amid tough economic conditions, how did it come out unscathed? "We help companies improve effectiveness of training and enable them to realise genuine return on investment."

Brightwave's principle is learning first and technology second. "We develop learning centred, business-focused solutions."

Gould aims to help learners do their job better, to improve their efficiency and competence. "LMS shouldn't feel like LMS, learners should not be left to grapple with the learning systems. It must be flexible, responsive, personalised, and suit the needs and preferences of individual learners," he says.

He explains how Brightwave helped Sky enhance the competence of its call centre staff, and, in another instance, says: "BUPA was undergoing huge transformation of its business and IT infrastructure. It needed a module for its staff to learn quickly."

The entrepreneur says that investing hundreds of millions of pounds on IT is a positive step but any organisation which ignores the training aspect will not realise the potential of the investment.

He worries about cost-cutting, saying that although he understands the business case behind chasing cheaper learning solutions, "organisations hamper their future growth" when they do it. Gould also sees a lot of talk but little action on using social media for training and notes that business lags behind its staff, who have super-fast broadband connections, high-end pocket devices and collaborative tools at home.

Are we making progress? He sees a positive shift from simple event-based learning to a more flexible pattern and is excited about the future of e-learning, the impact of the latest technologies, their role in delivering effective solutions and a promising future.

It must feel good to think about the day, 10 years ago, when he decided to take a bold step into an emerging sector. But Gould says: "I sometimes think, I could have done it quicker and regret how long it's taken me to understand the industry's potential."

NB: Archana Venkatraman is a reporter on e.learning age.

Note to editors - About Brightwave

Brightwave is the UK's leading provider of highly engaging work-based e-learning that delivers results and helps change behaviour. Brightwave works in partnership with complex global clients to provide a complete e-learning service, from content development to innovative tools, hosting and management, performance support and evaluation.

Clients include BT, Bupa, DHL Logistics, EDF Energy, IKEA, ScottishPower, Sky, Swiss Re, T-Mobile, TUI, The Royal Bank of Scotland, Virgin Atlantic Airways as well as public sector organisations like the Healthcare Commission, City of Edinburgh Council and Office for National Statistics.

Call us on 01273 827676 or email us at enquiries@brightwave.co.uk to find out more about our corporate learning solutions and how we can help your business.



Visit our [brightideas](#) page for some inspiration. Browse through [articles](#), watch [videos](#) and play back [webinars](#) at the click of a button.