

Learning experiences in a connected world

Lars Hyland, Brightwave's Director of Learning Services, traveled this year to the US as part of the Beyond e-Learning Mission. His report below looks at the key trends of interest and concludes on what will characterise learning and performance solutions in the future.

- Learning experiences in a connected world
- Key trends of interest
- Conclusions

Learning experiences in a connected world

It is clear that the impact of information technology is having profound effects on how we learn throughout our lives. In the developed world we are moving closer to assuming universal access to computers, mobile phones and connection to the internet. The rate of adoption and change in the areas of hardware and software continues to accelerate. However, an interesting anomaly is the pace at which we are evolving new design strategies to make best use of the technology to hand.

The mission yielded some interesting insights into how business and education are making use of learning technology. However, the overwhelming conclusion is that there is not a big gulf between US and UK thinking and activity in this area. The US has embraced e-learning more readily primarily for geographical (less long distance travel) and cultural reasons (a more self motivated workforce on the whole). The scale of the domestic market makes the economics clear cut.

With the emphasis moving towards performance, the economics also shift to support the design and provision of high quality (but not necessarily expensive) tools and content that are clearly aligned to organisational goals and individual key performance indicators.

However, the design aspects of these learning experiences continue to be highly variable and their effectiveness may be diminished as a result – this applies to all learning, e- or otherwise.

Key trends of interest

The key trends of interest are:

- Designing the whole end to end learning experience
- A shift of focus away from formal to informal learning
- Earning attention
- Making technology invisible
- Less learning more often
- Storytelling and sharing
- Polarisation of e-learning activity

Conclusions

Going forward then, there are some key areas which will characterise more and more learning and performance solutions in the future:

Design the whole end to end learning experience - To effect change, learning experiences must start with being directly aligned with organisational objectives and follow through with support in the workplace. This means the training community must embrace and integrate the disciplines of communications, learning and performance support in their designs.

Earn attention - With the learner firmly in the driving seat, attracting and earning the right to hold their attention becomes crucial to engaging them to learn and commit to changing their behaviour and performance in the desired manner. Individuals will increasingly take responsibility for their own learning and social networks as this will, more than ever, drive success or failure in the workplace.

Make technology invisible - The more technology becomes transparent, the easier it is for the learner to focus and engage with your learning experience. This means putting extraordinary effort into designing user interfaces that are intuitive. It means ensuring your IT infrastructure is reliable, fast and well integrated.

Less learning more often - Smaller, more frequent learning experiences that can be more easily and relevantly interwoven into day to day activities are more effective than traditional courses. The recognition will take hold that taking people out of the context in which they will be required to practice new skills and utilise new knowledge is not an efficient way to secure performance

improvement. Learning designers need to understand and design integrated learning experiences that use a variety of media channels (the blend) sequenced over time to maximise the spacing effect.

Storytelling and sharing more important than ever - Well-written stories have impact and are naturally more memorable. Good learning designers already use these but the quality of writing is critical. The demand for quality writing (and wider media communication skills) will grow. With Generation C (the Creative Generation) coming into the workplace, this will no longer be the domain of a few “experts” – everyone will be expected to contribute via blogs, wikis and other collaborative and social networking tools. This suggests that organisations should actively develop both the written and oral communication skills of their people in order to oil the wheels of informal learning activities and to allow for easier capture and use of this corporate knowledge base.

Polarisation of learning design effort - When e-learning becomes linked to real business objectives and is designed for its environment, then it quickly focuses on its strongest present value. These are Access, Assessment and Practice.

ACCESS - For fast moving environments where knowledge expires (for example product knowledge) and you are task/execution focused, the value of e-learning comes in small, simple presentations that are quick to access and digest close to or at the point of need. The vast majority of e-learning activity within best practice organisations falls into this category. Its success is based on embedding its production and deployment as a process.

ASSESSMENT – largely driven by compliance and regulatory requirements, the efficient automation of testing and storing records of completion remains a clear driver behind most e-learning implementations within the workplace.

PRACTICE - where a change of behaviour is desired, then instructional design plays a more active role. Here, the trend continues towards bespoke learning solutions that provide context and engagement beyond straightforward knowledge dissemination. Where learning is difficult to acquire in the real world, virtual immersive simulations and practice environments enable an individual to safely accumulate practical experience.

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.