

An Introduction To E-Learning

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E-learning can be simply defined as the use of computer technology to deliver education and training courses and can be delivered in many ways including online courses, offline courses (often delivered via a CD-Rom), blended learning and learning via an interactive teacher or trainer. This type of learning is designed to be extremely flexible and gives the learning the choice of what, where and when they study.

E-learning can be divided into three tiers, depending on the degree of interactivity involved:

Tier 1 – the most basic form of e-learning and is little more than the electronic delivery of content to the learner. Examples include placing a presentation online for a learner to view.

Tier 2 – allows the learner to have limited interaction with the content but does not allow for interaction between learners. Examples include online quizzes or demonstrations.

Tier 3 – encourages self-directed learning whilst engaging the learner in a learning community similar to a regular classroom. Examples include virtual classrooms.

The Benefits of E-Learning

Research suggests that there is no significant difference in educational outcome between e-learning and traditional classroom training. However, e-learning offers significant economic and social advantages over traditional classroom training including:

- Learning can be delivered anywhere, anytime and any place
- The time taken to learn is significantly reduced due to the individualised nature of the learning
- Improved consistency of training as the learning is not dependent on the skill of an individual trainer
- Cost of delivery is reduced as most of the significant costs are incurred during the development phase.
- Increased motivation to learn through the provision in instant feedback to the learners' questions and responses. This is particularly beneficial for learners who may feel intimidated in a traditional classroom environment.

Barriers to E-Learning

At an organisational as well as an employee level, there are several barriers to overcome to guarantee the effectiveness of e-learning including:

- Fear of initial costs of developing a course and providing equipment
- Lack of support from management and peers
- Lack of computer competence to access learning material
- Lack of behavioural skills (i.e. taking responsibility for own learning, determination, persistency)

Calculating the actual ROI (return on investment) and building alliances with other companies and/or training providers, are two of the many suggestions provided in the “*Practical guide to e-learning for industry*” on how to tackle these barriers. The full document can be accessed under <http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au>.

The Characteristics of Effective E-Learning

- It engages the learner
- It challenges the learner
- It allows the learner an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learnt
- It is set in a context related to the workplace
- It provides timely feedback
- At the completion of the course, the learners can demonstrate their understanding and application of its learning outcomes
- It is readily adaptable for new conditions if needed.

To be educationally sound, an e-learning course should meet these four requirements:

- It must have a learner focus
- The content must be accurate and self-contained
- The learner must be able to navigate the content with ease
- The content must be accessible. The course must take into account of the language and cultural background of the learners, their preferred mode of learning, their literacy and numeracy skills, their motivation and their emotional make-up. Any learners with disabilities must be able to access the content.

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework) is the e-learning strategy for the vocational education and training (VET) sector. It provides the VET system with the essential e-learning infrastructure and expertise needed to respond to the challenges of a modern economy and the training needs of Australian businesses and workers. For more information on the Framework, log on to www.flexiblelearning.net.au

E-Learning and Workforce Development

E-learning has emerged as an essential component of industry-wide workforce development designed to address issues central to Australia's growing needs for high skill levels in both current and new workers.

Many industry sectors are committed to holistic workforce development. They include medical technology, aged care, dairy farmers and manufacturers, water supply, stainless steel manufacturing and independent grocery retailers.

Workforce development focuses on long term human resources. It aims to match employer demands for skills and knowledge with employee needs for professional and career development. It embraces both attraction and retention strategies along with organisational structures and management processes.

This workforce development approach is particularly important for industry sectors looking for sustained productivity, not quick fix training solutions.

Useful Resources

The following links provide training providers, industry and enterprises with additional information about e-learning and how it can be applied.

<http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au/Guide/default.htm#>

The Practical guide to e-learning for industry is an effective set of information screens, checklists and links that will help any business, large or small, to get started in e-learning, or to improve existing e-learning programs.

http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au/casestudies/2008_publication.pdf

This document showcases how industries have successfully embedded e-learning within their workforce development strategies.

<http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au/>

Provides links to assist industry to develop e-learning opportunities. This site also provides funding opportunities for industry.

<http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/go/home/QLD>

This site outlines Queensland initiatives as part of the Australian Flexible learning Framework.

<http://lorn.flexiblelearning.net.au>

The learning object repository network (LORN) is an easy to use portal that allows teachers and trainers to access quality learning resources for the Australian VET sector.

<http://e-standards.flexiblelearning.net.au/>

Recommended standards for technical services, information formats, and intellectual property management. The aim is to bring about the smooth transfer of resources between different information systems, resource repositories and learning platforms.

http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au/2009/guidelines_supporting_elearners_in_workplaces.pdf

Guidelines for supporting learners using e-learning in workplaces

http://industry.flexiblelearning.net.au/2009/guidelines_supporting_elearners_in_workplaces.pdf

This publication outlines how e-learning has been implemented in vocational education and training by focusing on innovative e-learning case studies and profiling specific e-learning products, resources and support networks.

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