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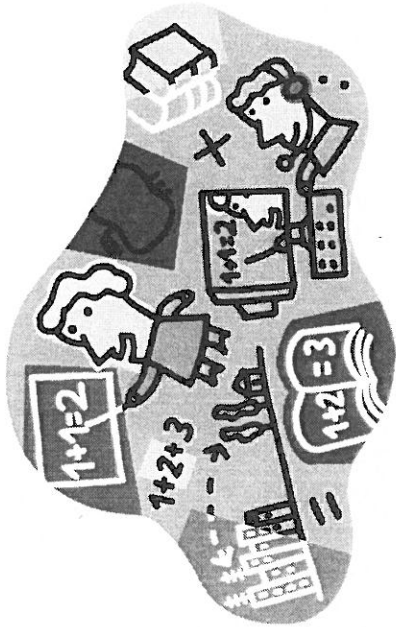
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V 1.1 – January 2014



E-LEARNING

CONCEPTS, TRENDS, APPLICATIONS

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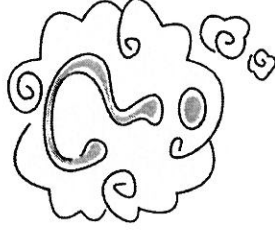
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Introduction

While the term “e-learning” has been thrown around quite a lot in recent years, many are still unaware of what it actually means and how it can help them achieve success in both their professional and personal lives. This short e-book aims to provide an introductory level overview of the e-learning field for those people.

This e-book is divided into five main topics. The **first topic** sets the case for e-learning by dealing with subjects such as its history, its advantages and any drawbacks, and whether it can actually lead to learning. The **second topic** describes important types of learning tools that are available today. The **third topic** deals with the characteristics of online courses and how one can create successful learning communities. The **fourth topic** is about emerging learning trends. Here we explain themes such as micro-learning and gamification. And the **final topic** describes the application of e-learning in different industries.



What is e-learning?

When it comes to education, the model has been pretty straight forward - up until the early '00s education was in a classroom of students with a teacher who led the process. Physical presence was a no-brainer, and any other type of learning was questionable at best. Then the computer evolution happened and it radically changed the learning landscape.

In essence, e-learning is a computer based educational tool or system that enables you to learn anywhere and at any time. Today e-learning is mostly delivered through the internet, although in the past it was delivered using a blend of computer-based methods like CD-ROM.

Technology has advanced so much that the geographical gap is bridged with the use of tools that make you feel as

if you are inside the classroom. E-learning offers the ability to share material in all kinds of formats such as videos, slideshows, word documents and PDFs. Conducting webinars (live online classes) and communicating with professors via chat and message forums is also an option available to users.

There is a plethora of different e-learning systems (otherwise known as Learning Management Systems, or LMSs for short) and methods, which allow for courses to be delivered. With the right tool various processes can be automated such as the marking of tests or the creation of engaging content. E-learning provides the learners with the ability to fit learning around their lifestyles, effectively allowing even the busiest person to further a career and gain new qualifications.

Some of the most important developments in education have happened since the launch of the internet. These days learners are well versed in the use of smartphones, text messaging and using the internet so participating in and running an online course has become a simple affair. Message boards, social media and various other means of online communication allow learners to keep

in touch and discuss course related matters, whilst providing for a sense of community.

In the fast-paced world of e-learning the available technologies to make a course exciting are always changing, and course content can and should be updated quickly to give students the very latest information. This is especially important if the e-learning training is being given to employees in a sector where keeping up-to-date on industry developments is of the utmost importance. This is one of the reasons why many businesses are now offering training via e-learning - other reasons includes low costs and the ability for employees to study in their own time and place.

Overall, traditional learning is expensive, takes a long time and the results can vary. E-learning offers an alternative that is faster, cheaper and potentially better.



The history of e-learning

The term “e-learning” has only been in existence since 1999, when the word was first utilized at a CBT systems seminar. Other words also began to spring up in search of an accurate description such as “online learning” and “virtual learning”. However, the principles behind e-learning have been well documented throughout history, and there is even evidence which suggests that early forms of e-learning existed as far back as the 19th century.

An e-learning timeline

Long before the internet was launched, distance courses were being offered to provide students with education on particular subjects or skills. In the 1840’s Isaac Pitman taught his pupils shorthand via correspondence.

This form of symbolic writing was designed to improve writing speed and was popular amongst secretaries, journalists, and other individuals who did a great deal of note taking or writing. Pitman, who was a qualified teacher, was sent completed assignments by mail and he would then send his students more work to be finished using the same system.

In 1924, the first testing machine was invented. This device allowed students to tests themselves. Then, in 1954, BF Skinner, a Harvard Professor, invented the “teaching machine”, which enabled schools to administer programmed instruction to their students. It wasn’t until 1960 however that the first computer based training program was introduced to the world. This computer based training program (or CBT program) was known as PLATO-Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations. It was originally designed for students attending the University of Illinois, but ended up being used in schools throughout the area.

The first e-learning systems were really only set up to deliver information to students but as we entered the 70s e-learning started to become more interactive. In

Britain the Open University was keen to take advantage of e-learning. Their system of education has always been primarily focused on learning at a distance. In the past, course materials were delivered by post and correspondence with tutors was via mail. With the internet the Open University began to offer a wider range of interactive educational experiences as well as faster correspondence with students via email etc.

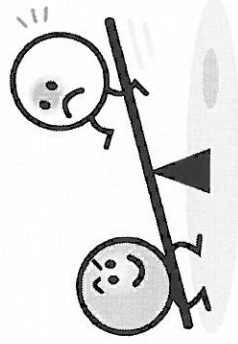
Online learning today

With the introduction of the computer and internet in the late 20th century, e-learning tools and delivery methods expanded. The first MAC in the 1980's enabled individuals to have computers in their homes, making it easier for them to learn about particular subjects and develop certain skill sets. Then, in the following decade, virtual learning environments began to truly thrive, with people gaining access to a wealth of online information and e-learning opportunities.

By the early 90s several schools had been set up that delivered courses online only, making the most of the internet and bringing education to people who wouldn't previously have been able to attend a college due to geographical or time constraints. Technological

advancements also helped educational establishments reduce the costs of distance learning, a saving that would also be passed on to the students - helping bring education to a wider audience.

In the 2000's, businesses began using e-learning to train their employees. New and experienced workers alike now had the opportunity to improve upon their industry knowledge base and expand their skill sets. At home individuals were granted access to programs that offered them the ability to earn online degrees and enrich their lives through expanded knowledge.



The benefits and drawbacks of online learning

Whether you're a high-school teacher looking to engage your students in a more interactive way, or a corporate trainer hired by a large company to design training