

Electronic way of skills enhancement

The time has come for e-learning to become the virtual mode for providing real education, says Karthik K S.

OFTEN in the history of business, one fundamental shift is accompanied by multiple smaller tectonic shifts, which relatively go unnoticed. The winds of liberalisation and the subsequent radical change of India's business landscape has given rise to many other smaller shifts, e-learning being a significant one among them. While the west adopted e-learning a decade back, the Indian businesses though left behind are now fast catching up. In this article, I would like to trace the reasons behind e-learning's popularity, the current scenario, kind of tools used before winding of with a hint of the future.

Reasons behind e-learning gaining acceptance.

The shift in allegiance towards e-learning has more to do with senior management's acceptance of training in general. With the quantum jump in the skills required by every employee in the organisation senior management of India Inc. is convinced about the need to continuously train them both on domain knowledge and business skills. Business skills are no more limited to senior management, or sales. There is also growing acknowledgement of the importance of the business skills of employees at all job levels and across all verticals.

With organisations spanning across the globe and their employees present across shores it is becoming increasingly difficult to impart training to these employees in the traditional classroom mode. More and more employees are on the move and bringing them to the classroom is not possible. With the increasing frequency at which skills of employees have to be honed, taking assistance of technology-based training is becoming an imperative.

Advantages of e-learning

To deploy training fast, to a large population who are present in geographically dispersed locations. e-learning is best utilised where there is simulation or scenario based training.

As WR Hambrecht + Co had reported that in e-learning "...learners...can better understand the material, leading to a 60 per cent faster learning curve, compared to instructor-led training. Whereas the average content retention rate for an instructor-led class is only 58 per cent, the more intensive eLearning experience enhances the retention rate by 25-60 per cent. Higher retention of the material puts a higher value on every dollar spent on training."

E-learning scenario in India

e-learning in India boasts of several success stories and of course a few mediocre implementations as is to be expected with any new trend. Some MNCs have extended their Virtual Corporate Universities to Indian shores giving access to their

India based employees. The reverse is also true with some Indian global enterprises extending access to their Virtual Corporate Universities to employees who are working in their companies present in foreign lands. Organisations like Wipro are able to train their employees who are present in various parts of the globe. Thus when considering training employees who are present in the other half of the globe Wipro need not worry about travel costs. Aditya Birla Group who have companies in different countries wanted to have a common training ideology spanning across different verticals and cultures. The Gyanoday Virtual Campus, which is managed centrally at Mumbai, trains its employees in different companies on Business and other skills.

Components of an e-learning solution.

A typical eLearning System in any corporate will have the following components :
Learning Management System: It is easy to manage 20 participants who come for a classroom training session. However, it is a nightmare for the training manager who has to manage training for 2,000 or 20,000 participants as they will be in the maze of excel sheets. Organisations who have deployed e-learning use a Learning Management System (LMS) to register employees for their training. The LMS registers, tracks and manages employees and place them in their respective project groups or divisions and locations. As and when the employees' job profile changes from project to project or if he moves from location to location his training plan also changes accordingly.

Organisations who have taken advanced LMSs get to connect the LMS with their existing HRIS system so that as and when there is a change in the employee rolls it automatically reflects in the LMS and which also defines the change in the training plans. Some LMS even Map the total competency available within the organisation. A skills audit conducted by the assessments engine within the LMS then identifies the skills gap within the organization that in turn will create custom training plans for every individual.

The Collaboration tool of the LMS forms a platform for peer-to-peer interaction and mentor to trainee interaction. Most Indian enterprises that have setup Virtual Corporate Universities have gone in for part or almost all of the features as listed above. Depending on the creativity of the training department different enterprises have gone beyond the typical usage of these tools and are using them for other business usages e.g. for business meetings.

Content: e-learning content used in corporates is either off-the-shelf content or custom created content. Organisations who are stepping into e-learning for the first time start with off the shelf content. There is a lot of quality e-learning content available in almost every vertical industry. Content in use by Indian industry are in soft and business skills, IT skills, typing skills, language skills, telecom skills, etc. For more specific content pertinent to their organisation they either develop their content or outsource it from content development companies. This content is normally either on their own products, or on sales training, induction training, business processes etc. Today innovations in media and the convergence of media and content have helped convert a lot of real life scenarios to be delivered via the computer.

Authoring Tools: Most organisations today use some form of authoring tool if they have to develop content themselves. Some use smart rapid content authoring tools that take existing Microsoft PowerPoint files and convert them into e-learning format after adding voice and text to it. Thus trainers and experts in these organisations

create e-learning content without having to have any knowledge about content development. The subject matter expert himself is the e-learning developer. Some organisations are even using these tools to develop content that is being used for purposes other than training e.g. announcing quarterly results through their site.

The trend in India Inc has been to start with a pilot of a few courses and for a select group of say 100 users. Since the hardware and software requirement is not very high training departments go in for this initial investment to train a select group on specific subjects and use this experience in later implementing it enterprise wide within six months.

Organisations who have employees in different countries opt for a fully outsourced hosted model whereas organisations that have employees under one roof or who have a VPN opt for Intranet options. Whichever model or route it is, there is no mistaking the writing on the wall that much of the future learning will be delivered via the electronic media and e-learning as a segment will witness exponential growth. Even our traditional education systems will some day be directly impacted by this.

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