



LIVE AND LEARN

A LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE NEWSLETTER
PUBLISHED BY EFFECTPERFORMANCE, INC.

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 3

SUMMER, 2004

Blended Learning

Something old, something new...

By Gus Prestera, PhD, CPT – President, effectPerformance, Inc.

No doubt you've heard the latest buzzword, *blended learning*. According to a 2003 *eLearning Guild* survey, 85% of organizations are using a blended approach. Still, many colleagues tell me they don't know what it is. Blended learning refers to learning experiences that are delivered through multiple and complementary approaches. For example, ABC Company provides some of its management training through interactive web-based training (WBT) courses, but it also delivers some elements via classroom instruction, live web-based seminars, web-conferenced book-of-the-month club meetings, daily tips beamed to their managers' PDAs, and a web log (a.k.a., "blog") through which managers exchange new ideas and respond to new challenges.

Critics of blended learning argue that training professionals have always used multiple methods to deliver training. In truth, even in the haydays of multimedia training, very few training departments migrated 100% to computer-based training. Most continued to deliver some of

their training in the classroom. While blended learning appears to be simply a new word to describe something old, it actually represents



A marriage of multiple technologies and methods. Will you take the plunge?

a major shift in the mindset of practitioners. Few practitioners today believe that one size fits all, that one mode of training is adequate for all situations. No one medium is ideal for every type of content, for every learner, or for every learning context. Using a multi-method approach, training professionals have greater flexibility in addressing a wide variety of learning and performance needs, cognitive styles, learning preferences,

and work contexts. Also, blended learning is more than simply delivering training via multiple methods, e.g., delivering sales training in one mode and management training in another. When used effectively, blended learning means that multiple methods can be brought to bear on a single learning need and attacked from multiple angles (as in the ABC Company example). In this way, we leverage the most effective elements of each approach to accomplish the overarching learning goals.

The realization that marrying several solutions to address a single need is the way to go comes at a time when an explosion of communication technologies, e.g., wireless networking, PDAs, web

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DOE TALK

By Gus Pretera, PhD, CPT

On June 15th, I attended a half-day *Social Styles* seminar, sponsored by Philly ASTD and presented by the Tracom Group. You may be familiar with Myers-Briggs and other personality and style indicators. Most are cognitive in nature, categorizing us on the basis of our perceptions and preferences. The *Social Styles* indicator is behavioral, categorizing us on the basis of how we behave in social situations. The most interesting feature is that the data comes not so much from our own perceptions of ourselves but from those of our coworkers. This gives the indicator much greater validity. Based on the model, our dominant social style can be *analytical*, *driving*, *expressive*, or *amiable*. It shouldn't be a big surprise that I'm *expressive*. Understanding our own social needs and those of others can be extremely valuable. *Social Styles* is a must-see for designers creating interpersonal skills training

conferencing, and streaming media, as well as security and cost concerns over travel, are driving supply and demand for e-learning solutions. In addition, advancements in the areas of learning management systems (LMSs) and learning content management systems (LCMSs) are helping to drive down development time and costs, while enabling training professionals to deliver and monitor e-learning in a variety of formats. In short, we have never been in a position to deliver training with as much flexibility and agility as we are today. As this trend continues, expect the number of delivery options to grow exponentially, their costs to decrease, and their speed to increase.

Pros and Cons

There are some very compelling reasons to use a blended approach to designing and delivering training.

According to the *eLearning Guild* survey, organizations using blended learning reported that it yields high learner impact (73.6%), is more effective than classroom training alone (76.0%), and learners like it (68.6%). One in four organizations reported that blended learning generated a high return on investment (27.3%), while few reported a low ROI (5.8%).

Blended learning is not without its challenges. Using multiple methods increases overall costs, development time, and complexity. More than

half of the survey respondents (56.2%) reported that blended learning takes longer to develop than non-blended learning. Many (38.0%) also reported that administering blended learning is more difficult. Because of these challenges, it is important to have strong management support and stakeholder buy-in for blended learning to succeed. Gatekeeping, for example, can be a major challenge. If learners are required to complete a WBT before attending a virtual classroom session, there must be a way to track completion of the WBT and then enforcing the prerequisite at the time the learner tries to register for the virtual class. Having a good system, whether automated or manual, is key. The *eLearning Guild* survey reported

“...we have never been in a position to deliver training with as much flexibility and agility as we are today.”

that more than half (56.2%) use testing as the primary gatekeeper. Many reported using classroom questioning (35.5%), LMS-controlled registration (29.8%), and instructor percep-

tion (19.0%). More than a quarter (27.3%) reported that their learners complete 0% to 20% of the assigned pre-work. Again management support is critical, but so is educating learners about the process and marketing the benefits of blended learning within the organization.

What can go into the mix?

Blended learning can range from simply making notes available online after class to highly complex orchestrations of media and content. Recently, a client asked us to design a

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What's the next big thing in e-learning?

By Gus Pretera, PhD, CPT

The June 21st issue of TIME featured a story about a relatively new phenomenon in pop culture. According to the TIME story, former Democratic nominee Howard Dean used it to engage and charge a politically apathetic segment of voters, helping him raise \$7.6 million in campaign funds and catapulting him, though temporarily, into the presidential race. This same force is responsible for surfacing the photos of the Abu Ghraib prison abuse and for forcing the resignation of Trent Lott.

What is this phenomenon that has swept cyberspace and is increasingly influencing national and world events?

In a word, blogging.

TIME reporter Lev Grossman wrote: "Why are more and more people getting their news from amateur websites called blogs? Because they're fast, funny and totally biased" (p.65). Blogs, short for web logs, are websites where writers post their own daily thoughts about anything that comes to mind. Often, blogs revolve around personal interests, e.g., politics, sports, and hobbies. There are hundreds of thousands of blogs, some of which receive millions of hits per day, achieving wider reach than many traditional news outlets.

So why should we care about blogs? Like it or not, blogs are fast becoming your workers' primary source of news and information. A 2003 poll

conducted by the *eLearning Guild* indicated that 51% of respondents believe blogs have potential for use as an e-learning technology. Imagine a CEO who posts daily blog entries for internal employees to keep them abreast of new challenges, opportunities, and success stories, similar to what Howard Dean did with his cyber-constituents. The CEO could share ideas informally, explain his or her stance on a variety of company issues, and respond to questions from employees at all levels of the organization. Imagine the various groups of specialists creating their own blogs, sharing best practices and responding to questions.

Some of this communication already takes place, using email,

listservs, and threaded discussion. They help to form learning communities within organizations. However, blogs are brief and non-intrusive, witty and candid, self-archived, widely accessible, inexpensive and easy to maintain, and can include a variety of media and links to other resources. Most importantly, the informal and uncensored style of blogs makes them fun to create and fun to read. As the TIME article suggested, "... blogs are America thinking out loud, talking to itself..." Whether or not blogs will catch on in more formal and politically correct corporate settings remains to be seen. But what better way to promote a creative workforce than to allow people to think out loud and say what they really feel inside?

"...Like it or not, blogs are fast becoming your workers' primary source of news...."



DESIGN TIPS

Strategy: *Gagne's Nine Events*

Dr. Robert Gagne, one of the founding fathers of instructional design, suggested that there are 9 basic events, or conditions, that must occur in order for a training program to be successful. Here's a quick summary of Gagne's 9 Events of Instruction:

1. Gain attention
2. Inform learner of objectives
3. Stimulate recall of prior knowledge
4. Present stimulus material
5. Provide learner guidance
6. Elicit performance
7. Provide feedback
8. Assess performance
9. Enhance retention and transfer

These basic tenets form the backbone of instructionally sound training programs. To learn more about Gagne's 9 Events and to see examples and strategies associated with each event, please visit the IDDE site: <http://ide.ed.psu.edu/ide/9events.htm>. It's a great resource!

F Y I

Jack Phillips will be speaking about Training ROI at the next GVISPI meeting on July 13th.

Don't miss it!

Register at www.gvispi.org.

2-hour sales training WBT. The course will be made available over the company's intranet, via CD-ROM, and in paper-based format. After completing this course, the company's sales reps will attend a one-day classroom session in which many of the sales concepts taught in the WBT are applied through role-playing exercises. The district sales managers are given similar training that emphasizes coaching skills, so that they can coach their sales reps when they ride with them on sales calls. This blended approach, involving WBT, classroom instruction, job aids, and coaching, exemplifies blended learning in action.

According to the survey, the most commonly used methods in blended learning are classroom instruction, interactive WBTs, online readings, e-mails, workbooks, virtual classrooms, threaded discussion, and web conferencing. Countless other possibilities exist, however. For example, sales reps can listen to instructional tapes in their cars, read materials on their PDAs, share ideas through a blog, discussion board, or listserv. The methods and combinations are bound only by our imaginations *and* budgets.

Want to start blending?

Karen Mantyla, in her book *Blended E-Learning*, says that it all starts with your needs assessment. Indeed, half of the *eLearning Guild's* survey respondents (50.41%) reported that front-end analysis determined which blended learning components they used. Most needs assessments focus on identifying the learning

and performance needs. In addition, Mantyla writes that it is important "to include a section on the technology (software and hardware) available to your learners..." (p. 90). Not everyone has speakers, access to the Web, or the right software to do what you want. Mantyla also suggests learning about the target audience's level of tech savviness and computer fluency as well as the optimal times and places for learning. As David Manning of the *Performance Development Group* recently

"... it all starts with your needs assessment... consider the strengths and weaknesses of each learning technology and method...."

pointed out to me, many sales reps spend their down time in the car, train, or plane getting to client meetings, in hotel rooms, and in the reception areas waiting for meetings to start. For many of them, those are the only places and times available to participate in learning activities, so audio CDs for the car and reading materials on PDAs might sometimes be more appropriate than classroom training, depending on the content and desired learning outcomes.

Next, consider the strengths and weaknesses of each learning technology and method, relative to the learning needs. Reading is a great way to learn. However, there are differences between reading materials in print, on a full size computer screen, on a laptop screen, on a PDA screen, and on a cell phone screen. Reading information is different from listening to an audio book... on tape or CD in your car, asynchronously on the web, or live via web conferencing. Reading and listening are different from actively participating in discussions, and so on. The nexus of communication technology and communication method yields many different possible approaches, each with its pros and cons and each more or less appropriate for a particular learning outcome. This is where you want to get help from an instructional designer with experience working with a variety of approaches.

As never before, we can bring to bear a comprehensive, multi-faceted solution on virtually any learning need and situation. This is the power of blended learning.

To learn more about blended learning and how we can help you match learning needs with blended strategies, please contact *effectPerformance*. To access the *eLearning Guild's* survey, go to www.elearningguild.com. Karen Mantyla's book (2001) is available from ASTD.



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