



## State of the Union

### A Look Back at Our Rollercoaster Ride of 2008

Gus Prestera, President  
effectPerformance, Inc.

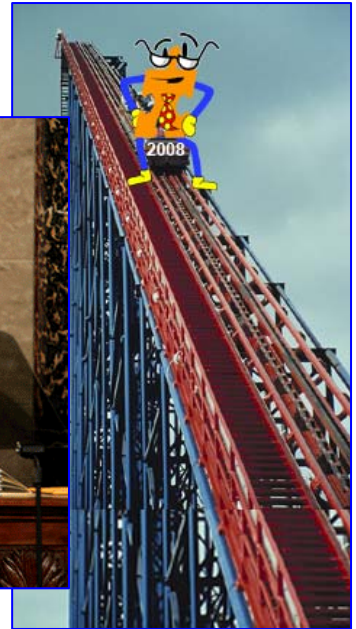


My fellow training professionals—it's been a heck of a year with all of the dramatic ups and downs of a soap opera. Where should I begin?

When I started effectPerformance, Inc. in 2003, I had a goal in mind that we would set new standards for instructional design quality, and we would do it by working with only the most talented, most passionate individuals and by keeping our operations small enough that we could control quality tightly. Having spent most of my professional life managing others, I hungered for the opportunity to do less managing and more doing. In other words, I wanted to spend as much of my time as possible designing, developing, ensuring quality, and consulting my clients. Over these past few years, this model has served our clients and me very well. They've been the most professionally rewarding years of my life.

But in 2008, I began to realize something—a profound change was taking place. My loose confederation of staff, contractors, and vendors was becoming a high performance team. Certain individuals began to take to take on more and more responsibility. They began to have meetings

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## Designing for Expandability

### When You Know You Will Be Adding New Content Over Time

Stacie Comolli  
Instructional Designer



When you build an e-learning course, do you treat it as a one-time investment, or do you design it as a platform onto which you'll be adding more courses over time?

Over the past couple of years, we have worked with a manufacturing company to build and maintain a globally distributed online supervisor training curriculum. Part of this curriculum was a series of seven e-learning courses and two reinforcement games. Recently, we added a new course to this series and found that our forward thinking design approach helped us streamline the work and meet this request easily. Here are some ideas that we pulled from this experience:

#### 1. Create a Flexible Look and Feel

Create a look and feel that can accommodate multiple color variations while supporting the same theme, so that all of the courses appear connected yet can have their own distinct looks. For example:

create an interface that uses a basic color palette, then assign one complementary color to each course as its trademark. Be sure to use enough colors that you can add more, over time, when necessary.

#### 2. Use Templates for Consistency

Use templates to maintain consistency across courses, so any content or interactions in the new courses match the original. For example: create a few content presentation and interaction templates that you re-use across courses.

#### 3. Diversify Characters

Select a diverse set of characters with a variety of ages, ethnicities, and genders. Provide enough character variation to support a realistic work environment. For example: one character cannot be both high-performing and low performing. If this is an important distinction, use two characters. We have found that when building management courses, using at

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**News from  
our sister  
company...**



In 2008, we launched our sister company, Bevenour Prestera and Associates. Whereas effectPerformance focuses on custom training solutions in which the client provides the intellectual property, the new firm produces intellectual content of its own. Here's the latest on the growth of Bevenour Prestera and Associates:

**Business Plan:** Colleen and Gus developed a comprehensive business plan. The business will grow primarily through co-development arrangements and by word-of-mouth.

**Branding:** We've got a logo! With the help of Belen Bilgic-Schneider, we've developed a logo for the new firm and the branding that goes with it.

**Web Site:** Jeff McCary built the web site, which launched in November. Check it out: [www.bevenourprester.com](http://www.bevenourprester.com).

**Coaching for Performance:** We've begun development on our first off-the-shelf offering, a coaching course that will consist of both online and classroom components. With eP's new LMS capability coming online this month, we will be ready to host courses starting in mid January.

**Road Show:** Over the coming months, Colleen and Gus will be meeting dozens of training managers to discuss the firm's capabilities. In several cases, we will be discussing co-development projects in which we will build a course specifically for a client, then repackage the core content so that it is available for other clients to purchase off-the-shelf.

## Designing for Expandability

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least three direct report characters helps spread the "issues" evenly, so no one character is consistently the bad one.

### 4. Hire Local, Reliable Talent

If you know you may need to expand the curriculum over time, and you are using voice-over, be sure to hire reliable local talent. Remember, it may be a year or two before you go to add a new course – your goal is to be able to easily book the same voice. For example: consider the impact on your project if the talent is no longer available. You wouldn't want to switch character voices.

### 5. Plan Ahead

Knowing there was a high probability that we would need to add courseware for different audiences, we structured our processes to accommodate updates. For example: this course required global distribution so it was likely that certain courses would only apply to a specific geographic region. When we designed our interface, and conceptualized our content, it was critical to keep in mind any localization tasks (such as translation) that needed to occur.

The next time you are faced with a curriculum project that has the potential to expand over time, remember to maintain flexibility in your design, consistency in your approach, diversity in your characters, practicality in your scheduling, and always plan ahead!



**Gus Prestera  
to present  
at PADLA**

**When?**

Wednesday, January 21, 2009  
8:30 to 11:30 AM

**Where?**

LasSalle University  
Metroplex Campus, Plymouth Meeting



**What's it about?**

Blended learning is a design approach that involves combining multiple instructional formats—some technology-based, some traditional, some self-paced, some instructor-led—to address a single instructional need. This approach offers potential advantages in terms of learning, transfer, and cost avoidance. In this session, we'll examine those potential advantages and look at specific examples of blended courses, programs, and curricula, then discuss best practices for applying a blended approach, common pitfalls, and lessons learned.

This will be one of two "e-Learning How-To Sessions."

For more information or to register, visit:

<http://www.padla.org/events1.htm>

## Announcement Gus Teaching @ PSU!



**Class Schedule:**

March 10<sup>th</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>  
6:00 pm to 9:00 pm

There's still room for more, so if you're interested, go to: <http://www.gv.psu.edu/>

### Class - INSYS 597: *Special Topics in Learning Technology*

This design strategies course is intended to work out your strategic thinking muscles and tap into your design creativity. Students will develop and present a design strategy proposal that significantly incorporates e-learning. ◆

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without me. They began making decisions without me. They would brainstorm ways to improve our processes and systems to make future projects more successful. Though these things began happening long before 2008, it wasn't until this year that I began to take notice that it was not just a few individuals sporadically firing bursts of initiative—it was the grassroots formation of a truly special team.

One of the first signs of this movement came from my wife, Mae, the Executive Director of effectPerformance, Inc. After a decade of working as a financial analyst, controller, and auditor in the accounting discipline, in 2005, she made the brave decision to switch careers. She left a great job at a prestigious center city law firm, working for a wonderful boss, to work with little old me. From day one at eP, she was large and in charge. She quickly made a name for herself with clients, learning the ins and outs of instructional design, and managing a string of very successful projects. She managed our finances and began implementing systems to help us track our time more effectively and budget more accurately for projects, among other things. This past year, Mae worked with programming genius Jeff McCary to develop an online timesheet program, which we will be rolling out this month. Mae also worked with our clients to upgrade a management assessment program, to develop the selling skills and product knowledge of their sales people, and to design several curricula for new positions.

Similarly, Stacie Comolli had great year. She continues to grow her skill set, taking on more and more project management and coaching responsibilities. This past year, she was the lead designer on several projects, involving both classroom training and e-learning. She helped to screen new hires and coached some of them as we onboarded them.

Alicia Pfaff took some big steps this year. Coming off last year's efforts to develop eP's Flash game platform, she worked with Allan Kobernick and me to create our first mobile learning module. She also worked with Jeff McCary and me to design eP's Flash Test Engine, a rapid development platform for authoring online tests. In addition, Alicia took the lead in producing a series of online sales training modules—more than 4 hours worth of e-learning content. She authored the modules in eP's Semi-Custom Courseware (SCC) platform, coordinated with the content designers, graphic artists, programmers, audio engineer, audio talent, and the client, and ensured quality for the many moving parts. The last of these modules were recently delivered on time and on quality. Last but not

## A Preview of 2009

Despite the miserable economic forecast for 2009, we expect it to be a pretty good year. Though some of our current clients are experiencing budget cuts and budget freezes, there seem to be others who have funding and are interested in working with us. Though we can't predict what will happen with the economy, we can say what our priorities will be for 2009.

1. **New course offerings from Bevenour Pretera and Associates.** In 2009, we will be developing a variety of off-the-shelf courses, using our blended approach, starting with *Coaching for Performance*. We plan to build other courses throughout the year, including a presentation skills course and a leading change course. The timing will depend on client needs. If, for example, an organization needs us to create a sales training course, we will shift priorities to get that done first.
2. **Web 2.0 technologies.** Over the course of the year, our team will invest time into researching and optimizing the use of Web 2.0 technologies for instructional uses. These technologies—blogs, wikis, user-generated content platforms (YouTube), social networking tools (Facebook)—harness social interaction and collaboration. Though they've been used for years in higher education, we will see them used increasingly in the workplace. How do we take advantage of these tools to promote learning and performance?
3. **Assignment tracking system.** Our team will develop a system to help us track, monitor, and encourage the completion of offline assignments. One of the most persistent challenges that classroom instructors face is getting their learners to complete their prework and postwork assignments. We're going to see what we can do to improve that situation.
4. **Expand capacity and capabilities.** In order to meet the growing demands of Bevenour Pretera and Associates clients as well as that of eP's clients, we are in the process of scaling up our production capabilities. We have established offshoring relationships with affiliates in India and Argentina, which give us access to over a hundred developers and graphic designers. We are pursuing strategic alliances in other areas as well, which increase our capacity and expand our capabilities even further.
5. **LMS hosting capabilities.** For smaller client organizations that do not yet have their own LMS, we are now able to host any courses we produce for them.

least, Alicia took the lead this year in writing the SCC production guide, a comprehensive document that explains our entire development process in painstaking detail. Her creativity, attention to detail, and hunger for learning new things never fail to impress.

Belen Bilgic-Schneider is a graphic designer, but to most of us here at eP, she's known more simply as the Goddess. Around here, where we don't give out titles lightly, you really need to be something special to earn that distinction. Belen is very creative and has mad skills, sure, but what really makes her special is her patience and perseverance in working with us (a rather annoying Type-A

bunch of people who tend to give Type-B artist types of people the fits) to get each and every graphic element just right. She also has tremendous organizational skills, which enables her to be more productive than any other graphic artists I've ever seen.

Over this past year, Belen has really taken ownership of the graphic department, helping put tools and systems in place to improve quality and efficiency. As we gear up for 2009, Belen is taking the lead in helping us expand our graphic production

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capabilities. In addition to supervising US-based artists, she coordinates with our offshoring partners in India and Argentina. Soon we plan to have a graphics production capability to rival that of any large firm, and our Goddess is the linchpin.

Allan Kobernick has been with me since the beginning. He helped me produce eP's first courseware product, a cool Authorware program we built for a pharma client, back in 2003. Since then, Allan has been instrumental in building up our e-learning capabilities. He helped me build the SCC platform, turning my abstract, unconventional (read insane) design ideas into concrete functionality. If I can dream it up, he can find a way to make it happen. In 2008, he helped us build our first mobile learning module. He contributed on a number of projects in a variety of capacities: programmer, photographer, video producer, and audio producer. Recently, Allan helped me screen and select an LMS partner (we went with GeoLearning), and is currently working to integrate our platforms with that LMS. He has also helped with recruiting and selection of new talent and with initiating our offshoring relationships.

Jeff McCary is like a singer who keeps belting out the hits, one after the other. Last year, he helped us build and refine our Flash simulation platform and our Flash game platform. This year, it was the Flash test engine, which syncs to an Access storyboarding tool. Recently, he built version 1.0 of the eTimesheet, an online timesheet for our team to use for submitting their hours

worked. The system will provide us with timely information about how many hours our team is working on different tasks for different components within different projects. The additional level of detail will help us get better at forecasting budget hours and managing projects to those budgets. Eventually, eTimesheet will be part of a broader project management suite of tools that will help our virtual teams work more effectively and more autonomously.

Mae, Stacie, Alicia, Belen, Allan, and Jeff form the nucleus of eP, what I refer to as the core team. Over the past few years, they've individually and collectively taken initiative and demonstrated that they are not merely interested in working *for* effectPerformance, they are ready to lead it into the future. At no time was that more evident than during my recent surgeries—where I had my colon removed to deal with a bad case of ulcerative colitis. I'm not good at being sick, as my wife will tell you, I'm miserable not only because of the ailment itself but because I can't do the things I need to do. I get a little cranky, you might say. However, the core team did such a great job of covering for me during my recovery that hardly anyone noticed my absence. Projects were completed on time and on quality and clients were happy. That greatly contributed to my speedy recovery.

We had some other great contributions this year as well. Michelle Kirschner, coming back from maternity leave, has picked up right where she left off, delighting her clients. Amanda Gonzalez made significant contributions this year, helping with curriculum design, classroom training, and e-

learning. With each new project, she gains confidence and fluency.

Graphic designers Len Crockett and Terry Nelson and instructional designer Mary Casey joined the team this year and each has made strong contributions. Diane Darling and Noelle Archambeau recently re-joined the team, and we're looking forward to seeing them expand their roles at eP.

The year has been filled with ups and downs. Early in the year, I rejoiced at the birth of our niece, Anna. There was the downer of realizing that I would require surgery, but then the happiness of recovering and feeling better than I have in years. There were the challenges of teaching but also the satisfaction of seeing students blossom. There was the anxiety of selling our home and buying a new one amidst the fears of a recession, but the joy of spending our first Christmas in our beautiful new home. There was the fear of launching a new business venture into the teeth of a dismal economy, but then the excitement of seeing how many colleagues are jazzed by what we're doing. There is the anxiety that comes from friends, neighbors, and colleagues losing their jobs or worrying about losing their jobs, but there is also reason to hope that a new trainer-in-chief in the White House can lead us to better times. Yes, lots of ups and downs, but always forward and always thankful to be living full and eventful lives, doing what we enjoy doing, helping people unlock their potential. Here's to more ups and downs in 2009. Cheers!



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**effectPerformance**



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