# Trends in e-Learning

**Dr Amy Finn Chief Learning Officer for Centra Software identifies five key trends in e-learning and what these will mean for your organisation.**

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This article is about trends in e-learning. Yet, just a few years ago, no one had ever heard of the term "e-learning."

Many people have heard of terms such as distance education or distance learning, yet with the introduction of e-learning, distance education took on a whole new meaning.

With e-learning, the possibilities for getting knowledge and information out to the learner at an accelerated pace opened a whole new world for knowledge transfer.

In recent years definitions and terminology changed in the rapidly growing field of education, training, and learning.

The industry went from using such terms as "technology-supported learning, distance learning and distance education" to "online learning and web-based training" to "e-learning."

This change happened within months.

The category of live e-learning evolved for a number of economic and technological reasons. It became possible, by in large, out of need.

Yet the roots of live e-learning are deeply embedded in the understanding people have with all forms of learning delivery methods such as conferencing, email and web-based training for example.

Today, e-learning allows us to train and develop our workforce continuously, to capture, share, and manage knowledge and skills of the professionals who work in our organisations, colleges, and universities, and to get the right information to the right people, when and how they need it.

## The Future for E-Learning

Given that eLearning is here to stay, we need to examine some trends to help set the stage for 2004 and beyond.

These trends help us to understand why and how e-learning will continue to become a driving force in business and industry, as well as in the arenas of education.

## Trend Number 1: E-learning as a Business Strategy

Smart organisations know that eLearning is a strategic solution that must be deployed throughout their organisation.

It is no longer a question of "if," but "when."

E-learning is becoming and will continue to be a part of organisational infrastructure, similar to mail packages and other suites of products used to increase organisational productivity.

Organisations deploying e-learning for one set of business reasons are finding it to be an integral part of their operating strategy.

Deployments of enterprise-wide e-learning are used for increasing sales effectiveness, improving organisational competency, and building richer customer relationships.

## Trend Number 2: Integrated E-learning Suites

The e-learning universe is large and diverse, consisting of three major categories: content, technology, and services.

In many cases, a comprehensive e-learning solution consists of components of each, integrated into e-learning "suites" aimed at solving a particular business problem, such as sales or product training.

Relative to content, think of the vertical areas where you would apply content, such as business skills, technical skills, soft skills, and specific areas related to various functions in your organisation.

Also consider what format you can best deliver the information whether it is simulations, games, mentoring, or various other methods.

In the area of technology, you need to think of your needs today and tomorrow for learning management, content management, knowledge management, content distribution, competency management, collaboration, assessments, reporting, workflow and localisation.

In the area of services you may need to think about change management, customisation, strategic deployment, project management, and other areas related to the successful implementation and deployment of technology within your organisation.

## Trend Number 3: Blended Learning

An emerging trend in e-learning involves blended learning programmes, designed to integrate e-learning with traditional training methods to increase overall effectiveness.

No longer is one delivery method alone sufficient to handle enterprise-wide training needs.

The construction of true blended learning programmes moves learning itself into a new age.

Blended learning preserves the necessary consideration of how people learn, offers options for learning, improves learner retention, increases completion rates for learning programmes, and has been shown to produce measurable savings in learning offerings.

## Trend Number 4: From Discrete to Integrated Learning

If there is a trend towards blended learning, there is also a trend towards a seamless transition from one learning activity to another.

Instead of point learning activities that stand alone, such as a physical classroom training session, or a Web-based training module, the trend is towards the integration of these activities or delivery mechanisms.

Look for seamless transitions from live group activities to individual exercises, from self-paced learning activities to live and back again, from activities in smaller groups to activities in a larger learning community and back again.

E-learning makes this possible with great ease!

## Trend Number 5: The Disappearing LMS

A few years ago organisations looked to Learning Management Systems (LMS) to solve their business problems.

The LMS strategy was a reasonable one, but one that involved a corporate commitment in time, cost, resources, and energy that few organisations could afford or be successful at.

Learning Management Systems were said to be able to "do it all" for the internal workings of an organisation.

The fact is that no one product can do it all, and it is not reasonable to assume one would be able to do so.

True knowledge delivery solutions need to work internally as well as internally.

They need to connect suppliers, business units within your organisation, and customers external to your organisation.

They need to work in a world that joins your suppliers, your internal organisation and your customers in such a way that the knowledge and information needed by everyone in your supply chain is there for them when they need it.

The LMS is only part of any solution.

The trend is to look at the bigger picture of knowledge delivery solutions that address enterprise-wide learning needs from the inside out.

## The Future

These five trends in e-learning are intended to provide you with a framework to consider the eLearning needs of your organisation.

In the months and years to come, smart organisations will bring together executive decision makers from all corners of their company to understand the corporate needs for e-learning and

make purchase and buying decisions based on an understanding of today's business needs and tomorrow's requirements for growth and evolution.

Finally, think about how your organisation will handle the change.

Clearly, how your organisation will accept the new paradigm of e-learning is key.

Remember, if your employees don't know what to do with it, or can't or won't use it, even the best product, technology, or service won't provide the returns you are looking for.

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