According to the world-renowned researchers Bersin & Associates: ‘Over the past three years, the rapid e-learning market has grown to represent a significant portion of e-learning content. By 2005, rapid e-learning represented 36 per cent of all e-learning produced. Furthermore, market trends show that this segment will continue to grow and will potentially reach 50 per cent of all e-learning produced by 2008’.

Key reasons for this market segment growth include the fact that a recent survey of HR managers by Bersin & Associates indicates that up to 72 per cent of training requirements are time critical and need to be addressed inside 60 to 90 days. This requirement ties in tightly with the tenets of rapid e-learning.

With large workforces geographically dispersed, directing numerous business segments or product lines, our most innovative brands and businesses are now locking on to the potential of e-learning across the enterprise.

PepsiCo is a typical example of a global enterprise now turning to wide scale web training. As enterprises become more complex, efficient e-learning infrastructures tend to become more mission critical.

How can the corporate centre of a world leading convenience food organisation be absolutely sure that meals served in its Western Australian outlets meet the exact standards developed in the Illinois based HQ? How does the quality controller at the head office of the major drinks company ensure that sodas sold in the Czech Republic taste the same as in Downtown New York?

Enterprises like PepsiCo usually have an extremely broad training requirement often mandated by corporate initiatives to provide employees with training that is specific to their job. This training can include regulatory compliance, quality control, health and safety, diversity, product, process, and internal systems training.

In the case of product training, enterprises typically have a large number of products, large salesforces and, in many cases, are supposed to present solutions to the customer rather than just a series of separate products. All of this greatly increases the need for up-to-date training.

In the case of global IT provider Insight, for instance, after taking over a major competitor, a dramatic revision of the Can e-learning make the grade for our biggest corporates? Lars Unneberg, of Norway’s Mohive investigates.

As enterprises become more complex, efficient e-learning infrastructures tend to become more mission critical.

Key points

- The driving concepts behind rapid e-learning are:
  - A reduction in the time spent in creating e-learning.
  - Enabling subject matter experts to be the primary source for content development.
  - Having easy-to-use software tools that lower the barrier to creating content.
businesses’ e-training infrastructure has become a cornerstone in Insight’s consolidation drive. Since acquiring Software Spectrum last year, Insight has been eager to integrate as quickly as possible and share best practices across the newly enlarged enterprise. Making the Mohive e-Learning Publishing System accessible across the entire organisation has been the fastest way to ensure that knowledge and critical information is disseminated at the speed today’s competitive marketplace demands. Insight’s new enterprise scale e-learning system will support training hubs in the UK, France, Germany and three sites in the US, with web-based programmes accessible to the company’s 4,500 or so employees, operating out of more than 170 countries. The challenge for enterprises like PepsiCo or Insight is to develop training programmes that address the business issues within the organisation and ensure the training is consistent, approved, and delivered to the entire organisation in a timely fashion while ensuring costs are reasonable.

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In order to implement a successful rapid e-learning initiative in a large organisation, the following three cornerstone concepts should be considered:

1. **Content creation time** Implementing rapid e-learning will reduce the time spent on creating content. Industry guidelines suggest that traditional e-learning projects - produced in-house - can take at least ten weeks from conception to final publishing. This number goes up significantly depending on the number of people involved in the review and approval process. Rapid e-learning is designed to reduce this time, so any rapid e-learning implementation should demonstrate how it will reduce the production time of e-learning content.

2. **Subject Matter Experts** Rapid e-learning depends on the concept of subject matter experts (SMEs). SMEs are usually sought to provide content for e-learning since they tend to know the subject matter best and are able to use the right messaging and terminology. These SMEs will be the ones to produce the content. So any programme that is put in place should address their needs and requirements and ensure they are able to create e-learning efficiently.

Engaging SMEs not only refers to having software that makes it easy for them to create content, but also having software that ensures they are able to do so efficiently. Factors to consider include ensuring they are enabled to create content; they are able to reuse existing content, streamlining the creation process by providing approved graphics and media, and ensuring there are as few bottlenecks as possible so that they can be more efficient in their work.

3. **Software tools** There are currently numerous desktop and server-based solutions on the market that provide a variety of functionality, ranging from converting Microsoft PowerPoint files into Flash, to advanced web-based software systems that make it easy for SMEs to create interactive sequences without requiring advanced technical skills. Selecting the right piece of software will go a long way to ensuring a successful rapid e-learning programme. When selecting the software that will be used to create e-learning, create a list of requirements and ensure that the products you select meet these requirements.

As rapid e-learning continues to grow as a concept and drive the training industry forwards, there will be an increased level of maturity in terms of implementations and tools available. Until the concept matures however, it will suffer from the same pitfalls that all emerging technologies and concepts face: the ‘buzz’ effect of over-hyping and promising to be a fix-all solution.

One final thing to consider is that, while all rapid e-learning implementations promise reduced content creation time, there still needs to be content produced. It is critical to ensure that an enterprise rapid e-learning project has a committed team to ensure its completion will be driven forward, not just dragged along.

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**Big business’ unenthusiastic perception of e-learning**

Arguably, ‘big enterprise’ perceives itself to have been badly served by e-learning. With no established channel for entry, e-learning programmes have often seeped into big organisations through back doors left open by early adopting evangelists. While this has served to highlight the raw potential for e-learning within large operations, seeing potential and harnessing it are two entirely different things.

‘If it ain’t broke don’t fix it’ is the mantra for many of our blue chips when it comes to training today. With an established infrastructure to support mature workflow practices, larger businesses may be attracted by the potential of today’s most exciting training systems but be reticent to take the brave first steps towards genuinely scalable enterprise wide e-learning.

As the CEO of the e-learning operation that’s recently converted companies like BBC, PepsiCo and global IT provider Insight to the benefits of enterprise scale training on the web, Mohive’s Lars Unneberg is more familiar with the problem than most.

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