Predictions for 2006 - E-learning experts map the road ahead (Jan 06)
By Lisa Neal, Editor-in-Chief, eLearn Magazine

As eLearn Magazine nears its fifth anniversary, we have seen the world of online learning change in many significant ways. Who, in 2002, envisioned the popularity of podcasts, wikis, and blogs? Yet for all the emphasis on how content can be created and disseminated, there has been too little focus on the quality of the learning experience. That's why my prediction for 2006 is that people will realize that technology, no matter how innovative, is just an enabler. New technologies only succeed if they help people learn. Read on for more predictions from some of the most thoughtful and opinionated people in the e-learning field.

"I do not have any brilliant predictions but I do have some high hopes for 2006: First, that the new year will bring an increase in high-quality research on e-learning; and second, that the design of e-learning environments will be based increasingly on scientific evidence and research-based theory of how people learn."
—Richard E. Mayer, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

"Next year will be a 'building year' for e-learning, with evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, changes. To begin with, the Learning Activity Management System (LAMS) will continue to build momentum and become the darling of online learning, spurring more conversation on workflow in online learning and integration of learning applications. The threat of the Blackboard/WebCT merger will center both discussions around the need for e-learning frameworks, while leading to a grassroots movement for teaching with small tools outside of learning management systems. But the United States Department of Justice likely will quash the merger in the end on antitrust grounds. Finally, in the corporate e-learning world, not much will happen next year. Again."
—Michael Feldstein, Assistant Director, SUNY Learning Network, USA

"The 'e' in e-learning will continue to expand with more electronic gadgets and gizmos capable of delivering learning anywhere at anytime. Audio podcasting will become an accepted and desired method of delivering learning to the mobile workforce quickly and efficiently. Video podcasting will remain in its experimental stages as regards learning, but will gain a foothold toward the end of 2006. Corporations will begin to recognize the power of handheld game platforms like the PlayStation Portable (PSP), which has wireless Internet access, a USB port, and the power to easily download and play audio and video content. Designers will struggle to determine the best strategies and methods to deploy instruction on these devices."
—Karl M. Kapp, Assistant Director, Institute for Interactive Technologies and Professor of Instructional Technology, Bloomsburg University, USA

"Over the coming year, m-learning begins to grow in earnest. Podcasting, the 2005 New Oxford American Dictionary's 'Word of the Year,' will expand and evolve dramatically. With
the advent of enhanced podcasting, the delivery mode will integrate chapters, bookmarks, images, and video clips. The new features will be exploited for e-learning in an expanding array of mobile devices. As a result, e-learners are no longer chained to their computers and network connections; they are learning while hiking in the mountains, strolling on the beach, or jogging along a city street."

—Ray Schroeder, editor, Online Learning Update blog, University of Illinois at Springfield, USA

"This will be the year that an American Disability Act lawsuit is launched against both a public and a private university system for 'access' discrimination caused by their e-learning offerings being not flexible enough for those with visual and other impairments. We will also see at least three e-learning courses in the sciences and engineering at a prestigious university that use the Xbox and/or Playstation as their courseware platform."

—Michael Schrage, co-director of the MIT Media Lab’s E-Markets Initiative, USA

"Slowly but surely, people are getting 'real' about reusable learning objects (RLOs), and that realism will result in more practical approaches to RLOs. Within organizations, RLOs provide a means of inventorying content and ensuring consistency in key messages, such as product and policy descriptions. Across organizations, groups use RLOs to re-use whole courses as-is or with slight modifications. But the idea of automatically creating courses 'on the fly' by assembling learning objects seems to have been quietly dropped. Although some wild and impractical uses for mobile learning will be proposed, podcasting is poised to be its first real widespread practical application. Finally, as people look at the data on their investments in LMSs and LCMSs, many will question whether they've achieved real cost savings and productivity improvements."

—Saul Carliner, assistant professor of educational technology, Concordia University, Canada

"This is one of the easiest years to make predictions in some time: 2006 will be the year of video. From video-on-demand services such as sports, to distributed video (Reuters allows Web sites to run video for free), to vodcasting and other forms of consumer video, we will be awash in video this year. Expect also to see a continuation of the copyright debate, the continuing expansion of distributed Web services (the "Web 2.0" phenomenon), and (as a result) an increasing emphasis on free and open content, at the expense of commercial content. In e-learning proper, the migration away from commercial LMSs to Moodle, Sakai, and Bodington will continue, as will the less visible migration from LMSs altogether. In other words, the universe is unfolding as it should."

—Stephen Downes, Researcher, National Research Council Canada

"This is what I'll be wondering and watching in 2006: What will happen to the importance of standards efforts? What will be the impact of unifying technologies such as AJAX and SOAS on the need for open standards? I have a USB drive that can be used to install and run applications from any computer it's plugged into. How might we use that capability in e-learning? I wonder when we'll admit that we sell teaching and instruction but that learning is
something that happens inside people's heads and can't be bought, sold, or packaged? Who will be the first company to come to market with the complete package for which the corporate world waits? (Hint: It won't include more and larger systems.) I wonder when we, as a marketplace, will understand that the competition is not between products but between the ways people want to learn."

—Mark Oehlert, Director of Learning Innovations, The MASIE Center, USA

"We've all been creating and accumulating large amounts of materials and resources for e-learning. Some are platform-based, others are not. As a result, we are faced with the problem of facilitating the retrieval of information on the Internet. Search engines such as Google give users much information, but not necessarily the systematic knowledge they require. We must provide a portal site for finding courseware that really fits learners' needs. This portal should be a convenient tool that contributes to the optimal usage of information contained in e-learning systems."

—Masaaki Kurosu, Professor, National Institute of Multimedia Education, Japan

"Here in the USA and abroad, both in K-12 and at the tertiary levels, we will see a growing acceptance of blended learning in the classroom. Best-in-class teachers can create educational content for CD, DVD, or live broadcast that is designed for classroom presentation guided by a live tutor/teacher. The content will be designed to be stopped and restarted several times during a classroom experience, blending the best of the distant teacher with that of the live resident teacher. In that way, not everyone on site must be expert in all content, such as physics, calculus, or even Machiavelli. And, it is a teaching-labor multiplier, potentially bringing higher quality education in more topics areas and at less cost."

—Richard C. Larson, Founder and Director, Learning International Networks Consortium (LINC), MIT, USA

"I predict 2006 will be the year of 'networked learning environments' where any student, instructor, or researcher can access any learning resource at any time from any place, with:

- greater connection and integration of courses to educational resources such as libraries, research labs, advisors, peers, museums, alumni, parents, and other institutions
- an increase in eReserves, digital content from publishers, and ePortfolios to showcase student achievements
- technology providing greater efficiencies for individual and institutional assessments
- GUI (Graphical User Interfaces) enhancements for e-learning systems that incorporate social networking concepts to strengthen communication, extend interactions beyond the classroom, and facilitate the discovery and creation of new information."

—Matthew Pittinsky, Chairman, Blackboard Inc.
"It seems to me that for three main pillars of e-learning—technology, courseware, and service—the following aspects will have the most impact on researchers, teachers, and learners in 2006. Technology: Web-based simulations and business games, and streaming multimedia (video, audio, animations). Courseware: free and open source authoring tools (open sourseware), open courseware and reusable learning objects for knowledge sharing. Services for: collaborative learning and virtual teaming, mobile (ubiquitous) learning, and IP-based conferencing (including Internet2)."

—Dr. Vladimir Uskov, Professor of Computer Science and Co-Director of the InterLabs Research Institute at Bradley University, USA

"As instructors and trainers continue to become aware of the power and ease of creation of things such as wikibooks, blogs, Webcasts, and podcasts, 2006 will spur an explosion of media-rich and creative instructional approaches. Audio and video will become more expected in e-learning. For instance, instructors will increasingly add audio books to student reading (i.e., listening) lists. At the same time, knowledge repositories and mobile e-learning will lead to a rise in personally selected learning experiences and even self-labeled degrees. Entire certificate and degree programs will be available from content in handheld devices such as an iPod or MP3 player. This will lead a boom in professional development and training opportunities."

—Curtis J. Bonk, Professor, Indiana University, USA

"From a budget perspective, training will grow at least 15 percent over last year, closing some of the losses of the past few years. Outsourcing models will be scrutinized more closely, including both business processes and e-learning content. Colleges and universities will capture more of the full-time employee market, both serving individuals and enterprises. Simulations, approaches, and techniques will be used increasingly in traditionally non-simulation courses, and there will be the release of between five and ten new educational experiences that closely resemble real-time computer games."

—Clark Aldrich, Author of Simulations and the Future of Learning and Learning by Doing: A Comprehensive Guide to Simulations, Computer Games, and Pedagogy, USA

"2006 will be the year that companies understand that a new business model is required to get both high quality and reasonable cost in online learning. Until now the choice has been one or the other. The new model will put the provider and the client on the same side of the table, leveraging the cost of compelling quality by syndicating solutions among several 'client partners.' That business model will spell even more trouble for library vendors and will open a window of opportunity for those high-end providers who can integrate quality and granularity with a user-centric design schema."

—Jonathon Levy, Senior Learning Strategist, Monitor Group, USA

"The Power of Us: Mass collaboration online will change the way learning is defined and delivered in 2006, moving away from start/stop courses to continuous learning experiences (acquire and maintain). There will be less connecting people to content, and more connecting people to one another (collective knowledge). Peer-to-peer support will finally
augment virtual ILT and online mentoring. Web services will allow specific functionality to be deeply integrated into the enterprise to create new blended solutions and personal online learning spaces. Collaboration will drive content creation and accelerate content development. Innovations from outside the industry will create new business models-think Amazon.com, eBay, and Salesforce.com."
—Ben Watson, CEO, Ensemble Collaboration, Canada

"Where last year introduced us to mobile learning innovations such as podcasting and VOD (video-on-demand)-casting, 2006 will be the year that mobile learning comes of age. Mobile learning is the practice of supporting cognitive engagement using a variety of personal digital resources that create connections between and among people, information and processes. Whether one is talking about laptops or handhelds, iPods or smartphones, or some combination thereof, mobile learning matters because today's learning stakeholders are mobile, and want the convenience of getting their information and learning resources when and where they want them, on whatever devices they choose. As mobile device adoption continues to bring new voices to the global learning conversation, learning designers will need to ensure that learning imperatives in the future are less oriented toward a command-and-control style of teaching and training and instead embraces learning solutions that are built upon principles of connectedness, communication, creative expression, collaboration, and competitiveness."
—Ellen Wagner, Sr. Director, Learning Solutions, Adobe Systems, USA

"2006 may be remembered as the year of more of the same. Two trends appear strong: do it yourself (DIY), and information-as-instruction. DIY e-learning appears to be gaining popularity with no sign of decline. There are an increasing number of DIY e-learning tools for authoring. Some of these educational authoring tools are a bit of a stretch, but then again, spray paint in the right hands can become art! A second and related trend is the continued blurring of the line between information and instruction. Instead of "build it and they will come," the new mantra may be "publish what you have and consider them trained." A counterbalance to these trends will be a few well-developed programs from organizations that have enough at stake to demand instruction instead of information."
—Margaret Driscoll, Learning and Development, Consultant, IBM Global Services, USA

"The collaboration market is changing radically; interactions with collaboration technologies are fluid and can be accessed from any device at anytime. Rapid changes like these require the confluence of a number of trends that converge like a 'perfect storm.' The result at the end of this decade will be a collaboration market not recognizable by today's standards. These ten trends include:

1. The convergence of audio/video/data conferencing
2. Presence (and status) everywhere!
3. Convergence of synchronous and asynchronous collaboration functions
4. Enterprise collaboration convergence and standardization
5. Pushing collaboration into the infrastructure
6. RTC market consolidation
7. Driving collaboration into industries and processes
8. Changing distribution channels
9. Changing buyers for collaboration solutions
10. The rise of mobile collaboration (PDA/cell phone as a platform for collaboration)

As these ten trends impact collaboration, emerging will be human-centric, fluid, rich-media interactions occurring anywhere, anytime, and with anyone that will significantly impact enterprise learning."
—David Coleman, Founder and Managing Director, Collaborative Strategies

E-learning ultimately changes almost everything for students, whether we're talking about college kids or mid-level managers. Responsibility for learning moves to the individual. Will that sophomore taking Intro to Religion online keep up with her assignments? Will that sales rep complete the e-Learning modules about the new product? Will the repairperson use the performance support tools and participate in the online community? Many prefer what they know—classroom experiences led by instructors—and are, as Iowa’s Ken Brown found, not particularly adept at learning more independently and online. In 2006, we must go beyond touting the joys and glories of technology to grappling with how to guide, rivet, and serve dispersed and diverse independent e-learners.
—Allison Rossett, Professor, San Diego State University and co-author, Blended Learning Opportunities.

Lisa Neal is Editor-in-Chief of eLearn Magazine and an e-learning consultant.

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