

# Good Scouts

eLearning, a six-month research project that's a collaborative venture between Brandon Hall and Jay Cross's Internet Time Group, seeks to collect information to help training professionals make sound decisions when creating a corporate learning environment. One of the reasons for the project, outlined on eLearning's Website, is this: "Decisions about learning infrastructure don't come easy. Past projects have often left a bad aftertaste. Hundreds of vendors compete for attention. Management consultants, training vendors, and knowledge management providers all present solutions. But managers lack the time to assess the situation fully, see beyond the hype, and confidently choose the best solutions and providers for their particular situation. Things change every day. Chaos reigns."

eLearning's sponsors plan to issue a final report in six months. But what if you find yourself in that chaotic situation now, trying to see beyond the hype and "confidently choose the best solutions and providers"?

## Lost in the wilderness

Tom Hawkett knows how you feel. In 1992, while working for a software developer in Birmingham, Alabama, he was charged with locating a vendor to provide sales training for the company's associates. "I was unable to find a good way to search the choices and compare them," he says. So Hawkett quit his job, moved back to his native Toronto, and started The Training Broker.

The Training Broker maintains a database of more than 2,000 prescreened training suppliers with varying specialties. Vendors register to be screened through TTB's Website. After they complete basic information about their offerings, a TTB staff member contacts the vendor and several client references, and reviews course outlines and sample training materials.

Initial contact with TTB can be made through the company's Website. Managers looking for training resources can complete the customer questionnaire, which asks for information such as training needs, number of employees to be trained, and goals and objectives. After transmitting the questionnaire, you'll be

assigned an account manager who's responsible for getting to know you, your organization, and your needs intimately. "We strive to be an extension of your training team," says Hawkett. The account manager then takes those requirements back to TTB, where another staff person evaluates them and prepares a report for you recommending three to five choices to fulfill your training needs.

## Happy campers

Mike Nadolski, performance navigator at Whirlpool's Performance Solutions Center in Covert, Michigan, has been working with The Training Broker for almost a year. "They've done dozens of searches for us," he says, "and [their assistance] has been invaluable." Recently, Whirlpool submitted a global request to TTB for a program management course; TTB returned with four options. "Time equals money," Nadolski says. "It would take me four to five hours [to do this research]." Indeed, Hawkett claims that using TTB instead of doing your own searching and screening can save up to 70 percent of your time.

"We save time, but we also increase the quality of clients' decisions," says Hawkett. "We provide information that's just-in-time and customized to the need."

## Tell the eSurvey

If you're interested in participating in eLearning's research project, there's a One-Minute Survey you can take via the Website at [www.internettime.com/elearning/index.htm](http://www.internettime.com/elearning/index.htm). Answer such questions as

- How far ahead do you plan your organization's training infrastructure?
- What is your most pressing training or performance challenge?
- What would most help you making major training and performance decisions?

After you click on the radio buttons indicating your responses and press Submit, the frame will reload to show you how your answers compare to those of other respondents.

Tom Muir, director of sales colleague development at Warner-Lambert Consumer Health Care in Morris Plains, New Jersey, is another TTB client. "Their approach really interested me," says Muir, who has been at W-L for a little more than a year. "I was in the middle of a huge development effort. When I sent out requests for proposals, I also sent one to TTB." The great thing about the TTB response, according to Muir, is that the proposals all came back in the same format. "It was a very compatible way for us to compare options."

Working with TTB has also saved Muir time in another area—educating vendors about Warner-Lambert. "Our development effort was part of an overall strategy we'd developed that had unique requirements," he explains. "When TTB screened our proposals, they were all conceptually well aligned with the strategy we had developed."

The average client pays TTB about \$500 (Canadian) for a search and report. Muir has spent about \$3,000 (US) with TTB thus far but says, "It would have been a valuable exercise even if [TTB] had found nothing for us."

The Training Broker also earns a commission from the selected vendor. Does that drive up the price that the client pays? "Only about 10 percent of our vendors raise their prices to cover our commission," says Hawkett. "Plus, we can help broker deals on price based on a client's budgetary restrictions." Hawkett says that occurs in about 20 percent of cases.

Although one company such as TTB does not a trend make, eLearning's mission statement indicates that there's a powerful need for this type of decision-making support. We were unable to find any other companies in direct competition with TTB, but it seems inevitable that more enterprising businesses will be offering similar services soon.

Contact The Training Broker,  
800.263.1311; [www.trainingbroker.com](http://www.trainingbroker.com)

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