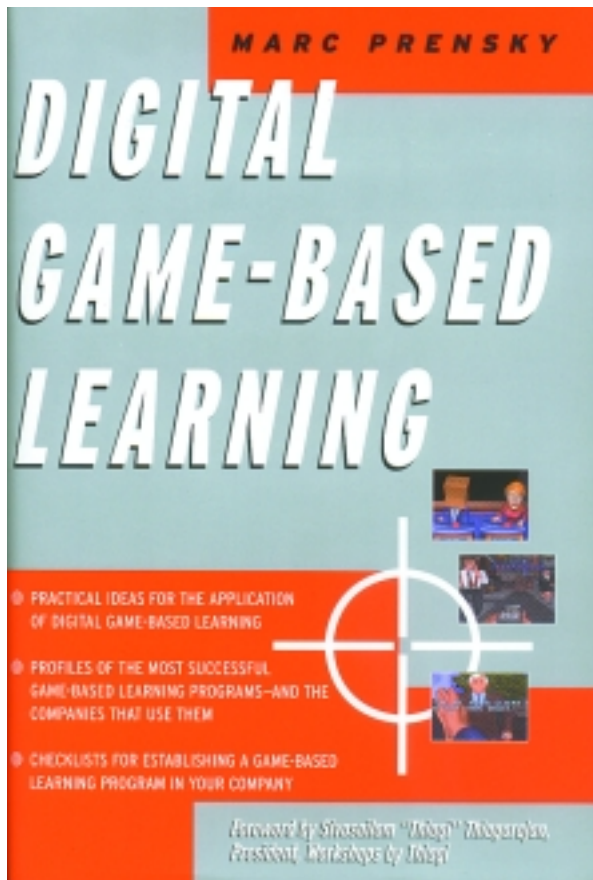
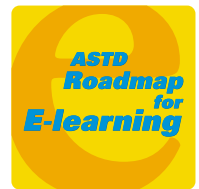


BOOKS



Digital Game-Based Learning

By Marc Prensky

Reviewed by Deanne Bryce

Do you believe that e-learning is all hype? Or are you the head cheerleader for the e-learning evangelists? ("Go e-learning, go e-learning, go!") As an educator and a corporate trainer who has been around long enough to observe many trends and much hype, whenever something sounds too good to be true, I'm a skeptic. So, I walk the line somewhere between being a believer and a disbeliever.

Even if you're a disbeliever, if someone secretly placed a copy of Marc Prensky's *Digital Game-Based Learning* on your desk, you couldn't help but notice: bright orange cover, 400-plus

pages, and teeming with answers. Well, at least answers to the dubious questions I mentally listed prior to cracking open the cover:

- Who is Marc Prensky?
- How do you choose the proper learning application for the desired content or learning outcome?
- How do you select a learning application that's appropriate for the audience?
- How do you link learning to business results?

Prensky earned his M.B.A from Harvard and his corporate training experience at Bankers Trust. Based on that, I expected him to combine practical busi-



12 Simple Secrets of Happiness at Work: Finding Fulfillment, Reaping Rewards

By Glenn Van Ekeren

Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop, said, "If you ever think you're too small to be effective, you've never been in bed with a mosquito." Like that? Glenn Van Ekeren's follow-up book to *12 Simple Secrets of Happiness* is packed with plenty of inspirational quotations. This little tome provides thoughtful insights and encouraging words on how you can make your work experience more satisfying. Inside, you'll find stories and observations from the likes of such disparate personalities as Michael Jordan, Walt Disney, Zig Ziglar, and Barbara Walters. Thumb through the pages and find a quote to tape to your computer as a daily pick-me-up.

12 Simple Secrets of Happiness at Work: Finding Fulfillment, Reaping Rewards by Glenn Van Ekeren.
Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall Press;
www.phdirect.com. 192 pages. US\$11

ness experience with game technology. His early training and experience as an educator left me hoping he would ground his arguments solidly in learning theory principles. Soon after I began reading, it was clear that Prensky would address my concerns.

Choosing the proper learning application. Prensky uses the first few pages of the book to acknowledge that no one application works in every learning situation. He writes: "There's a variety of materials or content to be learned...ranging from information and facts to tasks, processes, skills, theories, and more—all of which are best learned differently.... The first cut isn't by the type of learner but the type of material to be learned. Learning style or type of learner can still be, and should be, a second cut."

Prensky supports his ideas with a reference chart identifying 13 types of learning by content and the appropriate learning activities for each. The chart is a great reference tool for trainers because it presents different learning applications for various learning goals and provides clear examples.

Selecting a learning application that's appropriate for the audience. The book provides a thorough review of the pop culture prevalent in the United States and explores how current and future employees, part of the Games Generation, "adapt to greater speed and thrive on it" because they grow up playing digital games and watching

MTV. Trainers need to be aware of those influences as they select learning applications.

According to Prensky, some trainers reproach learners for refusing to respond to anything that isn't fun. He suggests that instead of blaming learners, trainers should try to understand what motivates them and create appropriate learning opportunities. And what are the greatest motivators? Pleasure and fun. Prensky wants learners to have so much fun that they don't realize they're learning.

Although an advocate of digital game-based learning, Prensky addresses the issue of individual preference by suggesting that trainers provide learners with a choice when designing any digital game-based learning application. Learners should have the opportunity to get the same information without playing the game. That model has broader implications for our profession: Trainers should provide learner choice to any learning approach, not just digital game-based applications.

Linking learning to business results. Consider this Prensky's wakeup call to the training profession: Trainers need to enhance how they link learning objectives to business results. They need to better understand and improve what they're doing—be it through digital game-based learning or not. They can't be experts in designing and delivering every aspect of learning, but trainers should be experts at knowing the possible solutions.

Learners should have the **opportunity** to **get** the same information without **playing** the game.



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BOOKS

Who's the biggest supporter of digital game-based learning? The U.S. military, says Prensky. "By the 1980s and early 1990s, the military spent billions of dollars a year on research and training creating very complex, sophisticated types of simulations." He further explains, "The military's training mission is daunting. It has to train 2.4 million men and women in the four services plus another million civilian employees to work as individuals, as teams, as units, and in combination to meet all sorts of unforeseen and difficult objectives around the world and under very high pressure."

By the end of the book, I felt satisfied that Prensky addressed my concerns. I also liked that he took an alternative approach to the layout,

adding reader choice: You can read the book from beginning to end (the usual linear format) or if you're a Web-based information gatherer and have become accustomed to searching randomly, you can select a specific topic from the detailed table of contents. That alternative reading option probably explains the repetition of material and the many references to other parts of the book.

He also guides readers to his interactive Website twitchspeed.com. Try a game, discuss the book with other readers, or drop the author an email with your questions about the latest developments in digital game-based learning.

As a learning professional, I consider this book to be a valuable tool. It may not encourage you to move immediately into the position of head cheerleader for e-learning, but at least you

won't be surprised when the growing generation of technologically savvy workers fails to respond to the old ways of training.

Digital Game-Based Learning, by Marc Prensky. New York: McGraw-Hill; twitchspeed.com. 442 pp. US\$29.95

Circle 290 on reader service card.

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