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The difference
between missing
the point and
missing the
boat.

By Patricia A. Galagan

Things CEOs Should Know About E-Learning

1. E-learning is here to stay.

It should be part of any broad plan to e-enable a business. It can have a direct impact on competitiveness, employee retention, recruitment, and costs. Avoiding that transformation can put employee and organizational readiness at risk.

2. E-learning doesn't equal e-training.

To view a corporation's e-learning strategy as just moving instructional programs online is extremely limiting. Such thinking may cause you to miss out on many other options that e-learning makes possible—such as knowledge management, performance support, and virtual communities. Don't limit the impact of e-learning by settling for just online instruction.

3. Strategy matters—a lot.

E-learning strategy must account for issues of culture, leadership, change, business challenges and trends, outsourcing, and long-term business results. Technology is an important tool, but it isn't in itself a strategy. Relying solely on technology without considering the environment in which it's used will put your e-learning efforts in jeopardy. Disassociating “way cool” technology from learning strategy paves a way cool and expensive path to nothing.

4. Make learning a priority.

Before you even think about e-learning, make sure you understand whether your organization values and supports learning at all. If your company has a culture in which people hoard knowledge, cover up their mistakes,

operate in silos, and have no time to reflect, then you don't have a learning organization. No e-learning program will make up for that.

5. Don't forget the content.

Which is more important: content or processes for managing it? Both. Each is crucial to the overall success of e-learning, and neither is particularly effective without the other. One pundit has said that a learning management system without content is like air traffic control without airplanes.

6. Commitment is key.

Without significant personal investment in and advocacy of the e-learning strategy by you and all “C” officers and senior management, the plan—however grandiose and expensive—will fail. Period.

7. Expect high ROI.

Few other projects will yield a more obvious or immediate return-on-investment than e-learning. But mea-

suring learning's ROI is tough to do—and expensive. ROI measurement processes and tools are complex: They tie together many different and sometimes confusing aspects of content, processes, and people, and they interconnect with other management systems and processes. When done correctly, however, ROI can be the single most important and most universally regarded tool by which management can assess the real value of investments in e-learning and learning management. It's wrong-headed to assume that the only purpose of ROI is to enforce cheaper training. Cheaper training isn't necessarily better training.

8. E-learning is as much a cultural change as it is a technology change.

People are accustomed to learning in a classroom with all of its rituals and social reinforcement. E-learning is a different kind of experience, and there will be resistance. Be prepared to invest in marketing e-learning internally and to support learning as a legitimate work-time activity. Provide incentives to learn in this new way.

9. Check your own assumptions about learning.

Your most productive learning might have occurred through mentoring or coaching, or through informal conversations with peers rather than in a classroom. Adults learn in a variety of ways, and the more an e-learning plan allows for different learning options, the more it will be able to optimize those processes.

The Five-Minute Pitch: A Trainer's Guide

Anyone with a working knowledge of CEOs knows you should never try to tell them 10 things about any topic.

“Conversations at this level get vertical in a hurry,” cautions Clark Aldrich of SimuLearn.

The attention span of the typically busy CEO for anything but the big picture is short. Think of it this way: **If you were trapped in an elevator with your CEO for five minutes, what would you want her to know about e-learning** that would instantly take the conversation to a strategic level? Ask yourself the same question that you get from trainees: What's the takeaway?

10. Get yourself up to speed.

It's important that you're aware of the applications of e-learning in your industry or a closely related one. Prepare for e-learning with an up-front analysis of competitors' activities. You will want to know how they're using e-learning to

- roll out new corporate strategy
- support a major new offering
- provide employees with performance support and knowledge management tools and processes
- support ongoing customer relationships.

Many companies outsource portions of their e-learning to one or more suppliers—opting to buy or lease content, infrastructure, or services rather than create them. The supplier market is consolidating and changing rapidly so it pays to research the market rigorously. At a minimum, compare the cost, effectiveness, scale, and pricing of various e-learning solutions. A comprehensive e-learning system will have one or more of these components:

- a learning management system to contain and facilitate e-learning
- content tools for creating and managing content and curricula
- directive tools for assessment, testing, skill-gap analysis, certification, and tracking
- matchmaking tools that can connect learning resources with employees' needs and tools that can push customized content to people depending on their performance needs, available connectivity, and preferred learning modes.

11. E-learning is information, communication, education and training.

As such, it is a core element of your business strategy. Successful e-learning aligns intellectual capital with business strategy. But beyond that, it combines

learning and communication with the Internet to link together diverse processes and knowledge across an extended enterprise—employees, partners, and customers—to achieve organizational agility and speed, cost efficiencies, and improvements in quality, performance, and relationships.

12. Successful implementation and adoption of e-learning require active engagement.

In particular, engagement of senior executive stakeholders from each of the business units. Just as you hold the CLO or VP of training accountable for success in building out and driving the implementation, you need to hold each business-unit executive accountable for adoption of the new technologies and processes. Metrics that evidence business impact are vastly more valuable than training statistics.

13. E-Learning doesn't mean self-paced purgatory.

It does mean more media and tools in the classroom, more live interaction online, and more self-paced content. The more different ways that you use e-learning tools and technologies, the more accepted e-learning will become as a standard corporate practice, and the more efficient it will be.

14. Learning is communication between an organization and an individual.

Learning should be as automatic, as easy, and more individually relevant than email. E-learning will enable employees to weave learning into their work lives as seamlessly as they do voice-mail. TD

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