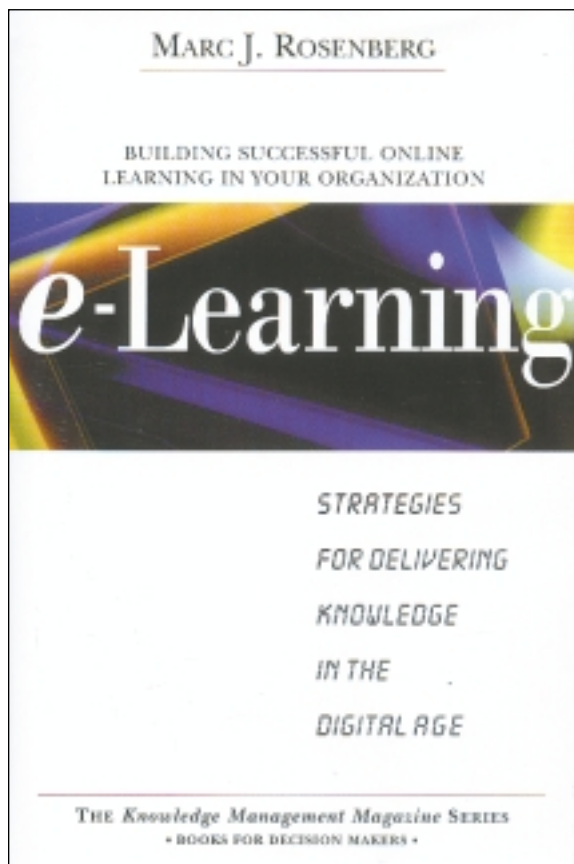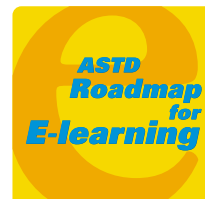# BOOKS

E-Learning:
Strategies for
Delivering Knowledge
in the Digital Age

By Marc J. Rosenberg

Reviewed by Brooke Broadbent

Go to your favorite online bookstore and search for e-learning titles. Inevitably, Marc Rosenberg's book appears at the top of any list—and well it should. His vision of e-learning includes a heavy dose of knowledge management, and so does his book, which is why it is earning a spot at the top of the knowledge management bestsellers. If your vision of e-learning doesn't include knowledge management or if you need to learn about KM, check out this book. Chances are you'll come away convinced that e-learning includes far more than formal learning through synchronous or asynchronous, self-paced or instructor-led, online courses.

According to Rosenberg, e-learning isn't exclusively online learning, CBT, WBT, EPSSs, KM, or whatever; it's an alphabet soup of digital approaches. But of all the books I've read about e-learning, including titles by Margaret Driscoll, Kevin Kruse, and William K. Horton, Rosenberg's is the only one that places KM at the center of e-learning. Rosenberg believes that if training professionals heed his advice and place knowledge management at the core of their e-learning strategies, they'll increase their value to their organizations.

The rationale for knowledge management is simple: Due to the rapid pace of change, there's a huge need for workers to have new, current information on demand. To help us understand what he means by knowledge management, Rosenberg includes examples of KM Websites—sites you might know but have never considered to be e-learning sites: travelocity.com, expedia.com, Ask Jeeves at ask.com, purina.com (a site that provides information about pets and helps you select the best one for you), and carpoint.com (an automotive industry site). Rosenberg tells us that "accessing KM systems is much more efficient than relying solely on training, even online training."

What lessons can learning professionals glean from those sites and apply to e-learning? The answer seems simple enough: The Web is a huge library. With specialized search tools such as Ask Jeeves, purina.com, and carpoint. com, users access the information they require quickly and with relative ease. If search tools and Websites like those are good for all Web users, why not make similar tools and Websites available for workers in your organization?

Rosenberg introduces his broad, learning-oriented approach carefully. The foundation: a clear explanation of the difference between learning and training. Learning is the way people process information internally to make knowledge; training is the way instruction is conveyed. Training, according to Rosenberg, has four main elements: 1) an intent to enhance performance, 2) an instructional strategy, 3) selected means and media, and, in some situations, 4) a formal assessment or certification process.

He also cautions us about confusing information with instruction. Though both aid learning, instruction is a structured intervention that focuses on facilitating learning systematically. Information emphasizes how to organize the content, in databases for example, so that it's accessible by users.

Accurate knowledge databases, which training professionals can help to design and maintain, enable workers to access the information they need, when they need it. Leaving work to attend a training program isn't necessary.

Knowledge management databases can be rich resources of information and performance support tools for users. A KM system can be broad, serving the needs of a wide community of users, including product specialists, sales reps, and customers. KM databases offer the added advantage of encouraging users to provide information to each other through online discussion groups, in which questions and answers are posted for all users to view.

In that way, knowledge management fosters a collaborative community. A community of people with similar interests, when linked to a workplace, taps into existing knowledge and helps all users learn and grow. Rosenberg states that the KM component of e-learning is not meant to replace the

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classroom. Rather, he argues that KM is best used in conjunction with other aspects of e-learning and conventional classroom learning.

He also examines e-learning implementation strategies. It's not surprising that Rosenberg, a human performance professional and former president of the International Society for Performance Improvement, warns us that adding technology to a poor training program doesn't make for quality training. He knows that the real e-learning issues lie with instructional design, change management, and project management, not the choice of technology.

The breadth of Rosenberg's book underscores the complexity of implementing e-learning. The questions in appendix A, "20 Key Strategic Questions You Must Answer About the Sustainability of Your E-Learning Efforts," encapsulate the book and cover these areas: your business readiness, the changing nature of learning and e-learning, the role of change management in building a durable e-learning strategy, how training organizations must reinvent themselves to support e-learning, and your personal commitment.

No one will tell you that it's easy to implement e-learning. When you consider the scope of the 20 strategies from appendix A, the importance of the last one looms large: How committed are you, personally, to e-learning?

Implementing e-learning is a major undertaking. You need to be committed to see it through. Rosenberg's book will help you assess your readiness. It also provides models and examples to help you succeed. In the end, however, your success will depend on your personal commitment and your knowledge of learning, change management, project management—and knowledge management.

E-Learning: Strategies for Delivering

Knowledge in the Digital Age, by Marc J. Rosenberg. New York: McGraw-Hill; www.books.mcgraw-hill.com. 344 pp. US$29.95

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