

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

## E-Learning: The Second Wave

Craig R. Taylor

Taylor, who knows the e-learning industry inside-out, talked to some of the major players to scope what the next stage in the e-learning evolution is likely to be.

The first wave, Taylor acknowledges, left a lot of people burned. The platforms of different suppliers wouldn't work together, the content was lacking, and the e-learning sector of the market tanked. But, according to observers, the e-market is maturing. Buyers now know what they want, and the choices are improving.

Standards such as SCORM will enable interoperability among systems, providing options for purchasers. Suppliers are focusing anew on the quality of the content. New entrants continue to enter the space.

The consensus is that e-learning—as a delivery method and as a market—will grow, but perhaps not at the rapid pace predicted in the early days.

Taylor parses e-learning into its essential elements: content, services, and technology—then gives a comprehensive overview of where the e-learning industry stands and where it's going.

*For complete text, see page 24.*

**Reprint TD100224**

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## Dazed and Confused by E-Learning

Gary Segers

Segers, a training manager, had been “dabbling”—his words—in e-learning but decided that he needed to learn more. So, he attended an e-learning conference with thousands of training professionals (and e-learning vendors). In this article, he shares what he heard from other training managers and what he observed in general.

The e-learning industry is in a confused state, Segers concludes. At the conference, suppliers were telling different stories than they did last year, some e-providers have disappeared, and the new mantra is *blended learning*.

Segers asks, Why do I have to pay so much for e-learning? He points to an untapped e-market—small and mid-size businesses—but only if “competitively priced products are available.”

Next, Segers asks where the quality e-learning products are, saying that most of the off-the-shelf stuff is too simplistic. He also asks whether trainers know what they want or what to ask for, and he concedes that many supervisors don't like employees learning online at their workstations.

In particular, Segers questions whether everyone is forgetting that e-learning is—or should be—about performance improvement.

*For complete text, see page 32.*

**Reprint TD100232**

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## Breaking Through the E-Barriers

Martyn Sloman

A few years ago, the advice to trainers was to cut costs by making deals with a supplier of e-learning systems and content. It sounded good on paper, even to the CEO. Then, says Sloman, it all went wrong: The technology, cost-savings, and content didn't live up to the hype.

In Sloman's domain, the United Kingdom, few training managers report using e-learning to deliver programs. Ditto, according to U.S. studies. So, asks Sloman, is *e-learning* a term that “has moved rapidly from obscurity to meaninglessness without an intervening period of coherence”—to paraphrase ex-U.S. Labor Secretary Robert Reich on another topic?

Don't give up on e-learning yet, advises Sloman. There is hope behind the hype. E-learning is just regrouping; it will eventually provide a fifth to a quarter of all training but likely not as quickly as predicted.

Sloman thinks the real gain from e-learning is the ability to transfer timely information from one computer to another instantaneously at minimal cost. But that capability must be further developed in terms of training applications and learning.

Citing the rapid rise of email use, Sloman reminds us that history repeatedly demonstrates that a powerful technology is irresistible.

*For complete text, see page 36.*

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## How to Keep E-Learners Online

Caron Osberg

Even e-learning proponents admit that most users don't complete online courses. They don't find the material they want or need fast enough, they run out of time and need to get back to work, or they just get bored. Co-workers interrupt, phones ring.

You can make some online courses mandatory; you can aggressively market internally. But the most effective approach is building collaborative components into your organization's online training solution to foster learner interaction. Collaboration tools include threaded discussions, chat sessions, and virtual classrooms. Online course dropout rates go down when participants learning the same subject engage with each other.

Osberg cites the example of Berlitz International's worldwide e-learning system, in which courses aren't considered completed until participants go to an electronic bulletin board to answer three questions already posted there and add three of their own. The system is based on real-time, text-based communication.

Because learning is a social process for most people, notes Osberg, emails and even phone calls can create an e-learning community in which the online lessons are reinforced and enhanced.

*For complete text, see page 45.*

**Reprint TD100245**

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