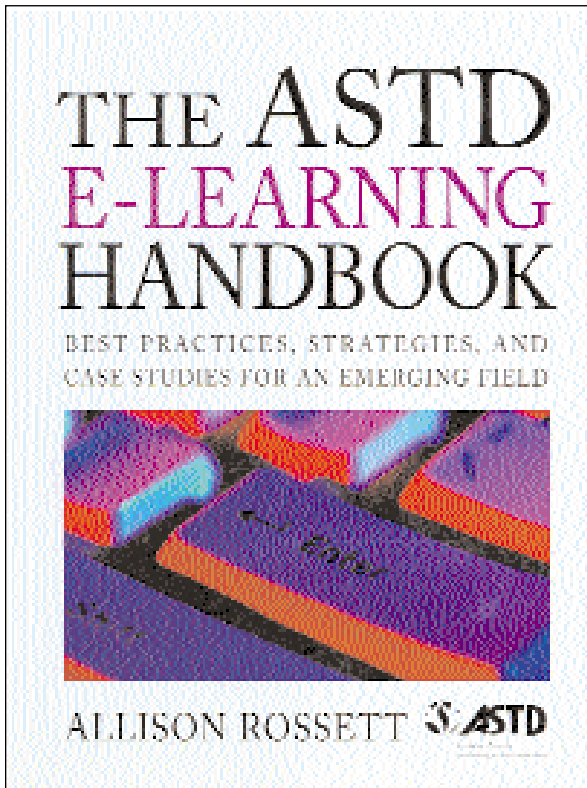


BOOKS



The ASTD E-Learning Handbook

Edited by Allison Rossett

Reviewed by Darin E. Hartley

Allison Rossett's *The ASTD E-Learning Handbook* could just have easily been titled, *Alphabet Soup: E-Learning From A to Z*. If you're in the learning business and are considering, using, or reconsidering e-learning, this is a must-read book for you.

Balance. That's the one word that encapsulates this hefty 543-page tome:

- balance between the hype and the hope of e-learning
- balanced contributor group—includes e-learning's gurus and rising stars
- balanced content—covers theory, practice, prediction, and reality.

Newcomers to the e-learning field often paint only the rosier of pictures when making a case for e-learning. They evangelize about the great ROI that implementing a new e-learning solution will provide. Rossett understands that such unadulterated praise is dangerous and counters it with realistic examples and concerns. There isn't room in this review to disclose what's in each chapter, but here are a few highlights.

In the film *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams's character asks his students to rip out the opening chapter of their textbooks. Inspired by his request, I'd

ask readers to tear out Rossett's introduction, "Walking in the Night and Thinking About E-Learning," fold it, and carry it with them as a reference. She accurately describes the current state of e-learning: It's a tool with great promise, but it still has glitches. Rossett is adept at condensing information into manageable chunks. For example, in two tables she highlights the benefits of and concerns about e-learning. That's a handy aid to use when you're investigating various e-learning solutions.

If you're wondering how today's e-learning will pave the way for future learning activities, read Wayne Hodgins's chapter, "Learnativity: Into the Future." Learnativity, according to Hodgins, is a "knowledge creation spiral that involves performing, capturing, managing, and learning."

Hodgins maps an analysis of current e-learning applications against some visionary concepts of learning. To support his premise, he peppers the chapter with quotations from various thought leaders, such as this one from Gary Hamel: "There can be no innovation in the creation of strategy without a change in perspective."

Hodgins may show us where e-learning is headed, but Elliott Masie's chapter, "Blending Learning: The Magic Is in the Mix," tells us where it is. Masie not only describes the necessity of blended learning, but he

also contrasts it with single method learning. In his opinion, blended has always been best. "Good instructors," says Masie, "have always combined great storytelling (an audio process), with print and whiteboard words and graphics (a reading process), with take-away tools or even homework." Some CEOs and CLOs often give the battle cry for 100 percent e-learning, but the reality is that a blended solution is more the norm.

Previous chapters make the case for e-learning, but Shonn R. Colbrunn and Darlene M. Van Tiem's "From Binders to Browsers: Converting Classroom Training to the Web" begins the artful discussion of how to best develop e-learning.

Do you presume that if content is available, you can pour it into the "Ronco Webomatic" and—*shazam!*—out it comes as e-learning? Though the technology does exist to take content and create Webpages with the click of a button, much of what you create in that fashion is actually e-reading, not e-learning. Colbrunn and Van Tiem detail the many considerations involved in converting existing content and classroom courses to Web-based training, such as organizational readiness, technical readiness, and course appropriateness for the Web.

Producing e-reading may bore participants, but you'll horrify some managers

Do you presume that if content is available, you can pour it into the "Ronco Webomatic" and—*shazam!*—out it comes as e-learning? Much of what you create in that fashion is actually e-reading, not e-learning.

ON THE NIGHT STAND

By Thiagi



My wife doesn't permit me to stack books more than 9 inches high on the nightstand, so I have to be choosy. My current stack includes two books intended to jolt me

from conventional thinking about change management: *Locating the Energy for Change*, by Charles Elliott, and *Survival Is Not Enough*, by Seth Godin. Elliot presents an excellent introduction to appreciative inquiry—an optimistic alternative to the gloomy paradigm that focuses on the pain of change, and Godin explains how to zoom through organizational evolution by eliminating hard-wired, anti-change reflex and by accepting constant flux as a stable equilibrium.

I frequently flip through the next two books: *Digital Game-Based Learning* by Marc Prensky, which explores training techniques for the twitch-speed generation, and *Training to Imagine* by Kat Koppett, which is a collection of improvisational theater techniques.

Next are true classics that reflect my cultural heritage: *Kural*, in the original Tamil, is a secular classic by the sage Tiruvalluvar. Its 133 chapters deal with such universal and timeless topics as ethics, integrity, leadership, learning, family values, and love. At the bottom of the stack, the *Kama Sutra*. My copy is the first unabridged modern translation of the Indian text by Alain Danielou. *Kama Sutra* constantly reminds me that my career of writing how-to books is perhaps the second oldest profession.

Sivasailam Thiagarajan is the resident mad scientist at QB International, a performance-improvement organization that helps people achieve speed, low-cost, and quality—all at the same time; thiagi@thiagi.com.

BOOKS

“I love e-learning,”
says John Chambers,
“because it makes employees more
productive, and it’s available
anytime, anywhere.”

if you say “games” in the context of learning. In “Games That Teach: Simple Computer Games for Adults Who Want to Learn,” William Horton attempts to ease some of that fear. “Simulations let people practice a difficult activity in a fun, challenging way,” says Horton, “without the danger posed by real-world failure. They give people a safe, non-judgmental place to practice a skill.”

Whether you elect to use word games, arcade games, or quiz-shows, Horton provides many creative ideas and support for using games to learn. You can visit <http://horton.com> to try out a few games.

What other tools are available to prevent participants from e-scaping? Jim Moshinski provides multiple tips for keeping learners engaged, in “How to Keep E-Learners From E-Scaping.” Corporate leaders are discovering a large gap in the number of employees who start e-learning courses versus those who finish them. Motivation, says Moshinski, keeps e-learners from ditching online courses. He describes a holistic process to use before, during, and after a course to help ensure success.

If you’re making a case for e-learning, turn to Patricia A. Galagan’s chapter, “Mission E-Possible: The Cisco E-Learning Story.” Her description of

Cisco’s e-learning operation is eye-opening and inspirational. From the highest levels at Cisco, e-learning is supported and even touted. That kind of backing makes it possible to accomplish great things.

“I love e-learning,” says John Chambers, “because it makes employees more productive, and it’s available anytime, anywhere.” Knowing that the CEO of a multibillion-dollar corporation supports e-learning might help you convince your organizational leaders to move in that direction.

So, whatever it is you need to find out about e-learning—how to get started, develop content, or maintain courseware—turn to this book. Who better to learn from than the experienced panel of contributors presented here?

The ASTD E-Learning Handbook, edited by Allison Rossett. New York: McGraw-Hill, www.astd.org and www.books.mcgraw-hill.com. 543 pp. US\$49.95

Circle 290 on reader service card.

Darin E. Hartley is ASTD’s developer of new business ventures. He is also the author of *Selling E-Learning* (ASTD Press 2001) and *On-Demand Learning* (HRD Press 2000); dhartley@astd.org.