

For years, *Training Media Review* has reviewed training products—the good, the bad, the ugly. And for years, *TMR* has wanted to recognize those few outstanding products that rise above the competition.

Well, the time is now. And it was worth the wait.

Trainers face a more daunting array of products than ever before. To help you in the difficult process of deciding on a short list for your learning solution, *TMR* presents 10 products guaranteed to enhance learning within your organization. Three earn the designation “Best to Buy.”

The reviewers and judges are all working professionals in training and allied fields. They’ve evaluated products that span a range of media and topics. *TMR* selected the three highest-rated products in three media categories—Online, Software, and Video—and in a general category, Most Innovative. A separate panel of judges then evaluated the contenders in each category. I was responsible for the Editor’s Choice category and considered a broad range of products.

The winners in each category have passed through a double screen of astute and knowledgeable professionals. You’ll find that even our final selections aren’t spared the occasional criticism. You’ll also see how some products fall into different categories.

The judges’ comments still abide by *TMR*’s mission to provide honest, independent, hands-on reviews. Yes, the judges capture the essence of these outstanding products, but for those of you who seek an in-depth analysis, full reviews of all of the finalists can be found on the *TMR* Website

 tmreview.com.

The media-based categories are self-explanatory. “Most Innovative” recognizes a product that departs from the norms of its medium and topic to teach an audience something worthwhile and immediately applicable in the modern organization.

“Editor’s Choice” turned out to be the recognition of a body of work rather than a one-time success. In this category, I’d hoped to avoid the norm of the *Academy Awards*, which tends to recognize “practitioners” far past their prime. Instead, I chose to acknowledge the work of a married couple. I hope, and believe, they have their best work in front of them!

Bill Ellet is principal and editor of Training Media Review.

*Training
Media
Review
Selects the
Best
Learning
Products
of 2003*

The Products

72



Strategy CoPilot,
Imparta,
London,
Software

76



Virtual Leader,
SimuLearn,
Norwalk,
Connecticut,
Online

**MindManager
X5 Pro,**
Mindjet,
Software



The Angry Eye,
Trainer's
Toolchest,
Video/DVD

ExperienceCSR
(Corporate Social
Responsibility),
ExperiencePoint,
Online



DialogCoach,
Allen Interactions,
Software

**Leadership and
Self-Deception,**
CRM Learning,
Video/DVD



**The New Business
of Paradigms by
Joel Barker,**
StarThrower
Distribution,
Video/DVD



**Productive
Business Dialogue,**
Harvard Business
School Publishing,
Online

74

Patterns,
Quality Media
Resources,
Video/DVD



The Judges



Bill Ellet is principal and editor of Training Media Review; wellet@tmreview.com.

Darin E. Hartley is director of solutions development for Intrepid Learning Solutions and Lguide Research and Consulting; dhartley@intrepidls.com.



Cindy Huggett is learning and development manager for Kinetic Systems; chuggett@kineticgroup.com.

Patti Shank is managing partner and chief reality-check officer for Learning Peaks, an instructional technology consultancy; patti@learningpeaks.com.



Thomas Toth is a Macromedia MX 2004 Certified Developer and instructional technologist; ttoth@rainbow.com.

ONLINEBEST2BUYBES

Reviewed by Darin Hartley

The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner



Product Name: Virtual Leader
Product Designers: Clark Aldrich, Pierre-Henri Thiault
Pricing: US\$499 per named user, with group discounts and academic pricing available
Contact information:
866.847.6660,
sales@simulearn.net
 www.simulearn.net

Company Name: SimuLearn
Headquarters: Norwalk, Connecticut
Number of Employees: 12
Years in Business: 2
Target Market: Business and higher-education
Bestseller: Virtual Leader (off-the-shelf version)
In the Works: Call center and solutions sales versions of Virtual Leader
In the Details: The story of the development of Virtual Leader was the core of the book, *Simulations and the Future of Learning*.

The concept behind SimuLearn's Virtual Leader is a fascinating one: Put a leader inside a simulated work environment to practice the tenets of three-to-one leadership. But it's in the implementation of that concept that this program earns its marks. The manner in which Virtual Leader's computer-generated, 3-D employees talk, react, and display their support or disagreement is not only an impressive feat of design, but also an engaging approach to leadership training.

Computer simulations can be intimidating to first-time users, but SimuLearn has provided excellent background materials that bring learners up to speed quickly. There's also a well-written guide that describes the theories behind the content. All in all, Virtual Leader's production quality is superb, as is the value of its content.

With that said, SimuLearn hasn't forgotten to address the importance of proper feedback. After each portion of the simulation, the learner is given a summary of how he or she used the key tenets of three-to-one leadership to manage the expectations of the meeting.



Specific feedback throughout the course should aid in retention. But there's also plenty of indirect feedback through dialogue between characters.

Simulation-based learning will grow in its adoption and sophistication as the tools to produce it become more common. Virtual Leader offers a promising glimpse into this genre, and, if the courseware is used per the recommendations, it should provide the learner with opportunities to practice in a safe and fun environment. Although the offerings

from finalists ExperiencePoint and Harvard Business School Publishing are excellent products, it's SimuLearn's intriguing, innovative approach to leadership training that nudges it to the front of the pack.



SOFTWAREBEST2BUY

Reviewed by Thomas Toth

The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner



CAPABILITY BUILDING

Product Name: Strategy CoPilot

Product Designer: Imparta

Pricing: Online strategy tutorials US\$250

Strategy CoPilot (five hours of simulation including tutorials) \$570

Strategy CoPilot Professional (additional three phases of simulation—approximately six hours) \$1200

Contact information: 0044 20 7610 8806, mark@imparta.com

[imparta.com](http://www.imparta.com)

Company Name: Imparta

Headquarters: London

Number of Employees: 30

Years in Business: 5

Target Market: Sales effectiveness, executive education, and custom design

Bestseller: Creating Client Value—Sales Effectiveness Simulation, and associated workshops

In the Works: Online versions of all simulations; business acumen online course; Japanese, Chinese translation of products

Company Tagline or Motto: “Capability Building”

In the Details: Imparta has quadrupled revenues in the past three years.

From the moment I received Strategy CoPilot, I was impressed. Packaged in a silver attaché case—the contents of which included the CD-ROM, a quick-start sheet, and a headset—everything looked like it was there for a purpose. But it didn't take long to realize that the breadth of this program's content is huge. Imparta has taken an “everything but the kitchen sink approach” that really blew me away. And, yet, nothing is unnecessary. Everything about it serves to teach users how to make astute, strategic business decisions.

Strategy CoPilot effectively organizes its extensive content in useable chunks through a

tabbed binder interface, with categories such as Theory, Feedback, and Application. Such organization is essential in helping the user navigate this complex and detailed simulation.

Outside influences, internal conflict, personal baggage, and market analysis are all incorporated into the user experience. During the simulation, users have the option to choose how much

coaching they wish to receive from the in-program assistant. Yet, learners have complete control of where they are, who they talk to, and all of the decisions regarding the simulation.

The interactions, visuals, audio, and animations are high quality and lend a polish to this program that others should emulate. Much attention is paid to interface details, so that users always understand what is going on and that they remain in control.

Strategy CoPilot is a top-shelf e-learning program. It will serve as a fine coach for building strategic business skills and as a refresher tool when the real world starts to play out like the in-program simulation.



VIDEO BEST 2 BUY BEST 2

Reviewed by Cindy Huggett

The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner



Product Name: *The Angry Eye*
Product Designer: Elliott & Elliott Inc.

Pricing: Video US\$295; DVD to be available in 2004.

Contact information:
877.288.6657, info@trainerstoolchest.com

 trainerstoolchest.com

Company Name: Trainer's Toolchest

Headquarters: Buffalo Grove, Illinois

Number of Employees: 5

Years in Business: 3

Target Market: HR professionals, trainers, consultants, and educators in industry, government, education, and not-for-profit organizations

Bestseller: *Brown Eyes*, *Blue Eyes: Linking Perceptions and Performance Facilitation Resource* (a trainer's companion to *The Angry Eye*)

In the Works: Discussion guide for *Linguistic Profiling*, an ABC News production identifying a new form of racism

Company Tagline or Motto: "Building Training Solutions"

In the Details: Woman-owned, small business with more than 36 years of experience in the training industry

Provocative, real, and full of emotion. Those words describe *The Angry Eye*, a documentary of Jane Elliott's famous diversity exercise. This powerful activity has participants experience discrimination firsthand and causes viewers to feel as if they're in the middle of the action.

The diversity lesson begins as a group of participants approach a registration table.

Elliott is rude to the blue-eyed participants and puts collars on them. Then the participants are separated into two rooms based on their eye color. The blue-eyed room has only three chairs for 12 participants, while the brown-eyed room has plenty of chairs for all.

Before the groups are joined together, Elliott instructs the brown-eyes to treat the blue-eyes as inferior. When the blue-eyes enter the main room, they're forced to sit in the middle, as if they're on display for all to see. Posters on the walls belittle the blue-eyes with such phrases as, "If I have but one life, let me live it as a brown."

As the blue-eyes read the posters aloud, Elliott talks about racism and the inexcusable treatment of people who are different. Even though some of the blue-eyes break down in



tears—one leaves the room—the uncomfortable experience continues. Elliott is unapologetic, explaining her reasons for conducting the program in this manner.

Viewers can't watch this video without having some kind of emotional reaction. Its powerful message sinks deep. Because of that, only experienced facilitators should run this program and sponsoring organizations should be aware of the risk involved.

Such an unsettling, emotional video requires strong supporting materials. In this case, they're excellent. *The Angry Eye* is a fantastic diversity training program, and it deserves recognition as this year's best.

MOST INNOVATIVE

Reviewed by Patti Shank

The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner



Leadership and Self-Deception
CRM Learning
Video

Consider the opening words of CRM Learning's *Leadership and Self-Deception*:

In our work and personal lives, we spend much of our time attempting to solve problems... Whether we are ultimately successful solving these problems depends in large degree upon how, and where, we are willing to look for solutions.

Leadership and Self-Deception opens your eyes to what is often the most significant barrier to solving problems in our personal lives and at work: the mistaken notion that we are not part of the problem. The program calls this phenomenon *self-deception*—not being able to see how we contribute to any given problem.

Self-deception, though common, blinds us to real solutions and locks us into the same behaviors with the same not-so-great results. This perception is critical for personal development, and I haven't

seen it dealt with in such a straightforward fashion before. Most leadership programs are prescriptive. Most challenges, however, are messy, and the prescriptions provided are too narrow. *Leadership and Self-Deception* challenges participants to think differently and apply that thinking in a variety of situations.

Such an approach isn't without certain challenges. The content is thorny, and requires sensitivity and strong participant rapport. Finding a facilitator who can deliver it as a co-participant is essential.

Leadership and Self-Deception offers a truly innovative approach to tapping the potential of something few training programs even consider: learners' view of their own role in the problems they face.



BEST2BUYBEST2BUYBEST

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Strategy CoPilot is a mini business school in a box or, to be more precise, a mini attaché case. It combines theory lessons, full-featured video simulations, and “check your understanding” exercises in a design that lets learners move back and forth between them with ease. The production value of the media is high, as is the training experience.

For instance, when trying to assess competitive advantage, the learner can jump into the simulation, get help when stuck, go back to the theory lessons, and then test his or her understanding of key points. The product provides many opportunities to assess and improve business strategy, conceptual understanding, and application. This well-designed simulation allows learners to test their knowledge in a realistic way. In fact, I actually felt apprehensive about the results of my decisions, though I quickly became comfortable making all manner of mistakes and getting help to correct them. (Better to make these inevitable mistakes without messing up a “real” business.)

This would be excellent training for new managers or anyone who needs to understand how business strategy is set or needs to understand the effect of strategy on operations. Combine the training with discussion and experiences that show how these concepts apply in your organization and there’s a real opportunity to understand some fundamental business concepts.



Virtual Leader allows users to practice the art of influencing others in a nonthreatening environment and to see the results of their actions. Virtual Leader incorporates the principles of three-to-one leadership—a leadership concept that centers on power, tension, and ideas, and is based on the assertion that meetings are where leadership actions can be most influential.

First, you learn how these concepts influence getting work done. Next, the simulation drops you into a variety of meetings where you practice those skills. I've yet to experience another simulation that so effectively handles the idea of using communication, ideas, power, and tension to get your ideas across and get productive work accomplished. Simulated characters respond in real time as you select various actions. You can actually see how the others in the meeting are reacting to you, either through an indicator bar or through the characters' easily discernable body language. In addition, a detailed scorecard lets users measure their performance.

SimuLearn has created a fascinating approach to leadership training that will certainly make you think.



Strategy CoPilot
Imparta
Software

Virtual Leader
business skills suite
SimuLearn
Online

TMREEDITOR'S CHOICE

Reviewed by Bill Ellet

The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner The Winner



Product Name: *Patterns*
Product Designers: Robert and Pat Rosell
Pricing: Single programs, US\$525; complete three-part series, \$1187.50
Contact information: 800.800.5129, info@qmr.com
 www.qmr.com

Company Name: Quality Media Resources
Headquarters: Bellevue, Washington
Number of Employees: 5
Years in Business: 12
Target Market: Any organization interested in supporting respectful workplace relationships
Bestsellers: *You Can STOP Harassment* and *PATTERNS*
In the Works: *Dialogue-Now You're Talking!* (includes Communicating in a Diverse World; Dialogue for Cultural Understanding; Dialogue Between Genders; and Dialogue Among Generations (released November, 2003)
Company Tagline or Motto: "The Respectful Workplace Company"
In the Details: QMR is a small, family business (founded by Robert and Pat Rosell) with a client base of more than 15,000 organizations in 14 countries

The training media market doesn't lack its fair share of mediocrity, and worse. And, yet, choosing one program of merit is hard because there are enough quality products out there to try the conscience of any judge.

Is the CPI 260 leadership assessment more deserving than Innerwork Solutions's Coaching Skills For Leaders? How about Harvard Business School Publishing E-Learning's unusual online take on business communication in Productive Business Dialogue? What about *Village of 100* from A Step Ahead Productions, a video that puts diversity in a global perspective that can shock the most diehard denier?

Speaking of international issues, what about the online resource GlobeSmart, from Meridian Resources Associates, which educates us on doing business all over the world?

Those products, and many more, are worthy of recognition. Yet, I feel compelled to choose a product, a video/DVD, that stands for much more than a particular training production in a particular year. It represents a body of work that distinguishes the producer for persistence, high quality, and insight into human issues insidiously characterized as "soft skills."

I'm talking about *Patterns* from Robert and Pat Rosell at Quality Media Resources. This diversity program is a worthy successor to QMR's *Subtle Sexual Harassment*, *The Respectful Workplace*, *Millennium*, and *You Can STOP Harassment*.

The Rosells and their ensemble of actors breathe life into the common formula of precept and vignette with skill in writing, acting, and filmmaking. We're fortunate to have artists who can teach. **TD**

