



The Effect of Web-Based Technology on Transferring Skill-Based Knowledge

by Rick Flath

Educators and trainers are constantly in search of more effective and efficient ways to increase learning whether in traditional classrooms or in a work setting. Rapid technologies in all fields have made computer driven learning a must due to the unlimited capabilities of the internet. Recent advances in study of the brain are beginning to shed important light on how our brains process visual, text, and audio input. This research suggests that learners are capable of multiple approaches, and a well-designed combination of learning modalities is most effective.

However, in spite of all the research on learning systems and extensive curriculum development from elementary schools through high schools and universities on new ways to teach students, the vast majority of American businesses are stuck in classroom training (using old videos with poor quality) and unpredictable on-the-job training. On-the-job training, the most traditional method, is rife with inconsistencies of practice, generally not related to published standard operating procedures (SOP), and subject to vastly different interpretations of processes and procedure based on who is doing the training. Few, if any, business training programs provide any sort of evaluative feedback on what the student has retained. Additionally, supervisors are often pressed into service to be the on-site trainer with no knowledge of how to do so effectively.

A 2001 publication from the National Academy of Sciences outlines important guidelines on redesigning learning:

- The students' past experience with curriculum affects their learning processes.
- The interaction between topics must be relevant and meaningful to them.
- Learning is optimized when students are aware of their learning experience, have the ability to predicate outcomes, and have a trial and error approach available.

Unfortunately, most business leaders, HR professionals, and trainers have little understanding of adult learning. Businesses assume that if you are hired, you can be trained using whatever training program is available! It is no wonder that new employees are quickly de-motivated, job performance is less than optimal, learned tasks rarely coincide with the SOP, and workers' compensation costs escalate due to poor training which can lead to accidents and increased personal risks.

Web-Based Technology

The advent of web technology has made computer based learning from elementary schools to university settings a common methodology. In computer aided instruction, students

can individually interact with the material at their own pace.

As a nation, we are becoming screen lookers and thus demand instant communication and feedback. In a recent *New York Times Magazine* article (November 23, 2008), "Becoming Screen Literate," Kevin Kelly writes, "We are people of the screen now. Last year, digital-display manufacturers cranked out four billion new screens, and they expect to produce billions more in the coming years. That's one new screen each year for every human on earth." There is no place one can hide from a screen, from elevators, gas stations, buses, supermarkets, department stores, computers, etc. We learn by watching, interacting with the screen, and through social networking, discussing the unfolding images with whomever is nearby or even around the globe. The recent phenomenon of viral videos is an amazing outgrowth of instant communication.

An Outline to Increasing Job Skills Based on More Effective Learning Techniques

- Before training begins, speak with your employees on how best they may learn new material. Ask about their learning styles and experience within the classroom.
- Design learning programs around classroom, computers, and on-the-job training.
- Use full range of web-based technology from visual, audio, feedback loop systems, interactive conversations, expert content, text, etc. The cost of production and broadband streaming has been significantly reduced over the years.
- Train your supervisors to be good teachers. Why assume that they know anything about adult learning. Just because someone likes to be around people does not make them a skilled teacher.
- Consider hand held devices that have both video and audio capabilities. Imagine your housekeepers with portable audio and visual devices, cleaning rooms based on approved SOPs.
- Consider interactive "blogs" for your employees. Start a wiki on the training programs to let your employees become involved in the training program. Add ideas on how to make learning interesting, fun, and interactive.

Applicant to Skilled Employee

Before hiring:

- 1) The applicant views the open jobs and the job requirements on the computer before speaking with an interviewer.

2) The interviewer and the applicant watch a short video of the company, the job duties, the department functions, etc. and discuss the candidate's ability to perform the various job functions.

Upon hiring:

1) Upon hire, the new employee has a full one-day orientation program about the facility, completing employment forms, etc.

2) The next two days, the employee watches films, listens to audios, etc. about the job and takes short quizzes to measure retention.

3) On day four, the employee gets introduced to the job duties, has a trained trainer who understands adult learning, and begins to perform duties. The advantage of the prior two day training is that the employee has a basic understanding of the job before meeting the trainer or his/her supervisor and feels confident that this job suits his/her interests and capabilities.

4) On day five, review/test the training, the retention of job skills, and the orientation to the company and the department.

Learning job duties is not a one-time hit-or-miss endeavor left to whomever is not doing something that week. Learning is most effective when it is interactive and self-paced, complete with feedback systems to measure success (think quiz!) and developmental programs to enhance learning. If teachers use computers in elementary schools, then why not your organization? Wander through a mall on a Saturday and see the wide variety of computer devices, iPods, Blackberrys, MP3 players, etc. that people of all ages are using. While these devices are embraced by everyone under 40, one only has to go to a senior center and library to see the incredible computer usage by "seniors" as well.

Corporate training is primarily stuck in old systems with little measurement in its effectiveness. In fact, usually the only formal feedback is the 60 or 90 day review, and that approach is a very expensive feedback system – way too little and way too late.

In today's tough economic times, it is much more cost effective to use the web to design interactive training systems that get results rather than tired approaches that lead to poor training, low levels of job effectiveness, and eventually turnover. ♣

Rick Flath is President of Flath & Associates Consulting, Inc. specializing in human resources and organizational change issues. He can be reached by calling (203) 318-1803 ext. 42 or email rick@flathassociates.com.

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