

eLearning Business in Singapore

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Introduction

IDA Singapore states that our metropolitan nation is experiencing growth in both the demand and supply of the eLearning equation, and is fast becoming one of Asia's most promising eLearning markets. It is hardly surprising that the industry is growing as quickly as it is. Almost anyone who possesses a computer at home, school or work can appreciate the benefits of eLearning. With eLearning, people can learn almost anything from cooking a fancy turkey feast to even tiling their own bathroom floors. It can even bring 'live' and inspiring lessons from lands far away into a local classroom and provide excellent management training for the busy corporate executive, eliminating travel and time away from the family.

The benefits of eLearning

In fact, Singapore has been ranked by World Economic Forum as one of the most network ready nations in the world, according to its Global Information Technology report 2003 – 2004. In 2003, about 73.7% of households in Singapore own at least a desktop or a laptop computer and about 64.6% of households have internet connectivity. In fact, the number of households with high-speed internet connectivity has increased significantly compared to the past.

According to an article on the IDA website, *eLearning: Tough Times, Good Times*, many companies and organizations

today are developing eLearning technologies and solutions to capitalize on the convenience and effectiveness of online learning. Pacific Learning, which compiled data from the US Army, United Technologies, Federal Express and Xerox, states that eLearning is 60% faster than classroom learning. There is also a higher content retention of 25% to 60%. Learning gains are also estimated to be 56% greater, and consistency of learning is said to be 56% better. eLearning also delivers training 38% to 70% faster. This certainly shows the effectiveness of eLearning.

According to another research organization, IDC, eLearning will dominate 40% of the IT training market by 2005. IDC conducted a study of 250 companies in the Asia-Pacific region and noted that while some companies still need to be convinced of the benefits, the adoption of eLearning will increase as content improves and localization issues are resolved, and as use of the Internet increases and telecommunications costs go down (*eLearning: Tough Times, Good Times*).

According to Phillip Fersht, Director of Consulting at IDC Asia Pacific, most organizations are not ready to embrace eLearning yet because they lack the understanding and they would like to be furnished with convincing and hard facts so that they will be able to benchmark against what their competitors and other people are doing. Fersht further mentioned that 30% of the companies that IDC has interviewed said

that they usually do not monitor the return of investment on training.

The blended eLearning approach

E Learning initiative can also offer a blended eLearning approach, which comprises of both the “e” sessions and also the live sessions. With the “e” portion, one is able to learn independently and perform the following functions:

- Navigating the program
- Digest page contents
- Listen to audio clips
- Watch animated graphics
- Watch videos
- Do exercises and tests
- Work on assignments
- Consult the eMentor
- Participate in discussions.

On the other hand, the “e” function is well complimented with the Live Sessions. In the ‘Live Sessions’, participants get to experience sitting through an entire presentation and attending review and workshop sessions. They even get to experience working in groups to understand group dynamics and how to be a team player. Both the “e” and “l” components bring about a synergistic and interesting learning environment.

Here are some of the core eLearning programs currently available, which comprise both the “e” and “l” components:

- eCITPM (Certified IT Project Manager Assessment) (70% “e”/ 30% “Live”)
- eSTEEM (Security Technology & Management) (80% “e”/ 20% “Live”)
- eSITP (Strategic Infocomm Technology Planning) (70% “e” / 30% “Live”)
- eOOAD (Object Oriented Analysis & Design) (60% “e” / 40% “Live”)
- eINET (Internet Technologies) (90% “e” / 10% “Live”)
- eJAVA (JAVA Programming) (90% “e” / 10% “Live”)

Currently in 2004, corporate training as an industry has shrunk slightly (1.2%

according to ASTD statistics), as companies tightened their expense budgets. All technology markets also go through 5 different growth stages and each stage has different characteristics and typically attracts different types of buyers.

Feedback for the eLearning experience

Bersin and Associates conducted a survey on nearly 1200 readers in October and found out that actually most major companies nowadays have significant experience with internet based training. 43% of those surveyed felt that they belonged to the “advanced” category and have used eLearning extensively and realized the benefits from their efforts. 45% of the respondents were categorized as “Intermediate” meaning that they have used eLearning in a few applications and could use help to improve their results. 12% of respondents were classified as “Beginner” indicating that they have not used eLearning but want to learn how to use it the following year. It is certainly comforting to know that the “intermediate” group yielded the highest percentage showing that people are more adaptable to new technology and have the willingness to learn.

Challenges faced by eLearning

However, the right support has to be present in order to support eLearning and to reap its benefits entirely. Some of the inconveniences pertaining to e learning is that it takes rather long to build courseware and sometimes, the tools and methodologies to measure results effectively are not in place. In addition, there is still much to get value out from the learning management systems.

In 2004, it is predicted that the Learning Management Systems will grow and it is likely that one other vendor will merge. Rapid e learning is also likely to become a red-hot market and most corporate buyers will consider or implement rapid eLearning.

The blended learning approach will continue to be a key topic for research, discovery and new approaches. Training analytics will also become a “mandatory” feature of LMS systems and the “simulation market” will become more visible but will still be highly fragmented. The content development will continue to move “in house” with more and more focus on Learning and Content Management systems, development processes and new tools.

During the ITSC Plugfest 2004, it was mentioned that it is important that eLearning content conforms to certain defined standards of interoperability and reusability of their contents with other learning management system or learning and content management systems. It is, however, important to focus on content development, content aggregation and disaggregation, and data model elements for tracking and monitoring.

Possible business prospects for eLearning

During SARS, eLearning suffered. The sudden and swift attack affected our education system quite badly and if we are unwilling to move into e learning, government agencies are embarking on the e learning platform based on the tenders and open discussions are held. Evident in Singapore, the MNCs, Corporate, TLCs, GLCs and SMEs will always take the lead from the government. Hence, e learning is here to stay and it is definitely not just another .com buzz.

The regional HQs of many companies in this region as well as the west will require on-time and quick deployment of training, dissemination and collaborative learning of new products without disrupting the operation of the business. Therefore, e learning will compliment those requirements and ensure cost savings in areas of traveling, accommodation and time. Due to terrorism, the middle-eastern countries are facing restrictive movement of their people into

many countries especially the west. Asian countries like Singapore can assist these middle-eastern countries in developing an e learning environment so that training and learning need not be at a physical location but in a virtual environment without compromising the standards. Increasingly, there are also more middle managers who see the importance of adopting e learning as a form of training for their staff without disrupting the business operation. This is a positive change compared to the initial stages where most were apprehensive about eLearning.

Business prospects for local companies

Local companies should also be able to enjoy some business in the e learning arena. In fact, eLC Consultants created a customized blended course for Singapore’s Ministry of Education (MOE) and was also awarded the e learning systems integration and content development contract from the police coast guards (PCG). GetIT Multimedia also partnered with Cisco since 1999 and said that eLearning has played a key role for Cisco systems and spurs their optimism for phenomenal growth in 2004. ICUS partners RSO (Italian Consultancy) to extend their European reach and they established a unique franchise arrangement in the corporate eLearning marketplace. Ncode Consultants is working with Shanghai IT education organization to promote the eLearning solutions from Singapore such as Success Publications which is jointly developed.

Conclusion

eLearning as a business certainly is making some headway in Singapore, especially since schools are placing emphasis on the use of information technology for education and remote learning. It also helps tremendously that Singapore has a high computer literacy rate and hence adopting eLearning measures will be met with less

resistance and people are more willing to embrace it locally. In fact, most Singaporeans today are going online for job searches, banking and education. The prospects for eLearning need not be confined to our island, as we can export out expertise to other less developed countries and help them along with their eLearning initiatives.

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