

E-Learning in the doldrums?

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I was staggered by who, exactly, attended the recent ASTD conference in Atlanta Georgia, USA. By a show of hands at least, it would appear that the vast majority were new to the L&D profession and in their first year or two. That's thousands of people having to learn all about what it means to provide credible, professional L&D solutions.

In a session about e-learning a similar proportion was apparent.

That session was facilitated by Macromedia founder, Michael Allen and when he discussed the wide use of electronic page turners as 'e-learning' there was a sea of nodding heads in his full session attended by hundreds. When discussion turned to whether these same people were guilty of creating electronic page turners, the same response was evident.

No Blame, no shame

Let me be very clear here. I'm not blaming any of these people for creating less than ordinary learning experiences for their clients. I shudder to recall my own attempts at any form of learning creation in my formative years.

The fact that so many had come to hear Michael Allen's advice is encouraging in any event.

So I'm glad that in that session, so many people might have had their ideas modified somewhat by the leading edge ideas offered by Michael.

What concerns me is that, if the attendance figures are representative of each year's new L&D professionals, then Michael will be very busy facilitating his session for every new group. Moreover, there are another few thousand new L&D professionals in the e-learning field who will not have heard his message. (He quoted one major finance player who had restructured the organisation and literally overnight, scores of their employees

became e-learning developers with expectations of turning out product immediately.

The source

So, how do scores, or perhaps hundreds or thousands, of e-learning developers get their inspiration to create engaging learning which in Michael's words, "*do more than just teach people how to click the 'Next' button*".

Well, my guess is that it comes from 2 sources.

The first is their own experience. If the sea of nodding heads in Michael's session give us any indication, then that experience will be heavily weighted in favour of electronic page turners. Despite what one would hope is an intuitive understanding that this is not useful learning, without an alternative model against which to compare, then they are probably destined to re-create the sins of the past. The image that comes to my mind is that of first offenders entering prison only to learn how to become better criminals.

The second source of their inspiration could be the growing band of providers who advertise promises of, wait for it, '*Rapid e-learning*'.

Why, all you need is some content and your company logo and in the blink of an eye, you'll have your e-learning program ready to rock and roll. The exciting menu options extend as far as the inclusion of 'Next', 'Back', and 'Menu'. Templates available include the popular (but limited in scope and capability) 'PowerPoint'.

With that kind of inspiration, the great artists of the world would still be representing their ideas with ochre and charcoal and the Louvre would closely represent the walls of a cro-magnon cave.

I think we can do better.