

The power of real-world scenarios, the challenge of competitive games,
the promise of performance-based results.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING SYSTEMS

eLearning Traps, Pitfalls and Swindles

There are common traps, pitfalls and swindles involved in all eLearning programs. It is not difficult to find yourself in one of these situations at any phase of your eLearning project. I would like to discuss the most common of these, and talk about how to prevent them before they happen.

What are traps, pitfalls, and swindles? For this piece, let's define them:

- *Traps*: eLearning development decisions that paint you into a corner, and are difficult to rectify.
- *Pitfalls*: Potential eLearning development hazards that can lead to unexpected challenges to quality, cost, or timeline.
- *Swindles*: Misrepresentations or ignorant assumptions about eLearning development.

The Top Five eLearning Traps

1. Pick the wrong Learning Management System (LMS).
2. Pick the wrong database platform.
3. Pick the wrong server platform.
4. Host your own eLearning on your company server.
5. Put content, database, streaming video and audio on a single server.

Technology is the key to online learning: you use it to develop the course as well as deliver it. One of the biggest traps in deploying eLearning is deciding on the technology to develop and deliver it. Finding a vendor to develop the technology aspect of eLearning is not difficult — finding a vendor that can develop the technology AND understands the fundamentals of successful eLearning IS your challenge.

One of the key features of all technology is its flexibility; it offers you several ways of achieving the same goal. In some cases, one choice is clearly superior to others. More often, however, any of the options lets you achieve

your goal for about the same effort. The result is choice paralysis, sometimes leaving even the most experienced online learning professionals with confusion about how to proceed.

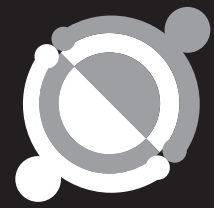
Because technology can be unfamiliar and intimidating, many people give preference to technological considerations when designing online learning programs, sometimes at the expense of the learning itself.

For example, when developing online learning materials, some people choose to show off technological capabilities—like video and audio—even when these do not add value to a course. In other cases, video and audio might augment the learning experience, but learners do not have access to computers that can play sound.

It takes an understanding of all the newest technologies to deliver successful eLearning, but we believe the technology should not **DRIVE** the eLearning itself. Successful learning happens when users are engaged — it fails when users have to overcome technical hurdles just to view it.

The Top Ten eLearning Pitfalls

1. Start the design without an eLearning instructional designer.
2. Start the design without an eLearning development strategy.
3. Start the design without a Learning Management System (LMS).
4. Use a web-page programmer to create your eLearning programs.
5. Pick the wrong Subject Matter Expert (SME).
6. Pick the wrong project manager.
7. Put an instructional designer in charge of the project.
8. Put a programmer in charge of the project.
9. Put a subject matter expert in charge of the project.
10. Separate your product documentation process from your product eLearning development process.



*The power of real-world scenarios, the challenge of competitive games,
the promise of performance-based results.*

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING SYSTEMS

eLearning Traps, Pitfalls and Swindles

In an ideal world every eLearning project would finish in the shortest possible time, would stay well under budget, and would have every conceivable feature included. Some of the common pitfalls listed above can cause a plethora of project problems from minor bumps to project derailments.

We often consult with clients to develop specific eLearning programs, and 90% of the time when we are called in, major decisions have already been made. A lot of the time instructional designers are forced to play the role of defacto project managers. Sometimes the Learning Management System has already been chosen, long before any vision of what types of courses will be developed are decided. These pitfalls are common, and can cause confusion, and more importantly, can cause budget issues and add to development time.

The Top Ten eLearning Swindles

1. You can have any two: fast, cheap, or effective.
2. You can save a lot of money by converting all of your instructor led programs to eLearning.
3. Our programmers will work with your SMEs to create effective eLearning.
4. Learners have to be entertained. If it isn't Hollywood quality, it won't work.
5. We can give you a fixed-cost proposal you can rely on without a front-end content analysis.
6. The more streaming audio and video you use, the more effective the learning.
7. Our instructional design methodology is to use lots of flash animation.
8. High quality graphics are more effective than wire-line drawings.
9. Users don't want a lot of information (text) in eLearning. Just give them learning bytes.
10. There is one right way to design eLearning, and we have a copyright on it.

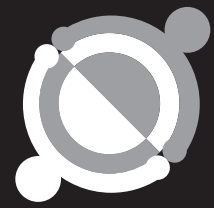
Although we are in the infancy of the eLearning revolution, we view the current situation as the "post-constructive" era. There are some standard ideas

emerging about how to develop and deliver "effective" eLearning. One thing to remember: put everything you hear and read into perspective. When someone says they have the "right way" to design or deliver eLearning, remain skeptical.

When envisioning your eLearning strategy, consider the traps, pitfalls and swindles listed above, and reconsider assumptions you may have about the direction you're headed in.

We have found that it IS possible to have fast, cheap, AND effective eLearning. We have created and adopted methodologies and processes that are based on sound design principles that work, and provide all three: fast, cheap, and effective. Users don't need multi-million dollar videos to view, users don't need Hollywood style production to learn — as a matter of fact, that type of production probably prohibits learning. When technology stands in the way of the flow of information, then the learning moment will be diluted.

We have found in our user research that there is not a lot of difference between complex, full-color, whiz-bang Flash animations and simple, one-color wire-drawings for making some concepts clear. Constantly evaluate your use of "rich" multimedia — rich multimedia has its place, but don't rely on that as your instructional philosophy. You will also find that there is a common perception that people don't like to "read" text online, that a lot of text is too boring. You may want to rethink this perception. We have found through the use of "narrative simulations" that if the content is compelling, readers will stay engaged. Ask your instructional designer to write a narrative simulation, and place it onscreen as text only. Get a sampling from your potential users and have them read it. You will be able to tell from their feedback if the story was compelling enough to keep them engaged, and not let their minds wander to their email inbox, or ringing phone. Don't assume that if you have technical content you can't use narrative simulations. You can. Technical content does not have to be boring!



*The power of real-world scenarios, the challenge of competitive games,
the promise of performance-based results.*

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING SYSTEMS

eLearning Traps, Pitfalls and Swindles

There are a lot of eLearning vendors who may claim to have the “magical solution” to all your eLearning needs. They may claim to have the “proven methodology” that will work for all your courses and audiences. If you hear this from your vendor, you might want to get on the phone and bring another one in to meet with you. In

this post-constructive era, there is no one “right way” to develop eLearning. It takes a strategy of avoiding common traps that have emerged, rethinking the assumptions you have, and knowing when to question what some people are saying to you.