

Make the Most of Existing Tools

By Steve Pena, Instructional Designer and Implementation Consultant for SyberWorks

The students who began college this year have been dubbed the first “Net Generation,” because they habitually seek, receive, and even expect information to reach them over Web services like Twitter, Facebook, Google, and YouTube. Soon, they will join our world’s “movers and shakers,” but they are already so wired into the Web that (according to Beloit College’s “Mindset List”[®] for 2009), before arriving on campus, they had checked out their roommates on Facebook, “...where they have shared their most personal thoughts with the whole world.”

This is the first of many future college classes that:

- Drink electronic media like water, and breathe broadband communications like air.
- Will expect us to deliver e-Learning content over the Web channels where they “live.”
- Will require highly interactive, graphic, and “engaging” training materials.
- Won’t allow themselves to remain bored by training that doesn’t grab and hold their interest.

This implies a lot for the e-Learning community. But it doesn’t mean that we must abandon the way we create and deliver e-Learning today. In fact, you may *already* possess all the tools you need, to start producing more interactive and engaging e-Learning materials *immediately*. If you haven’t yet tried the following technologies and techniques, *now* might be a good time to start!

Active Images

These are images over which one defines “hot spots” that launch other windows, actions, and animations when users click the hot spots. This technology is often used in Graphical-Choice Questions and Web Demonstrations, and can add a lot of interactivity to learning materials (without too much effort).

Some course-authoring systems include their own tools for creating these Active Images, and yours may be one of them. A good way to see if your course-authoring system has this ability is to check its documentation.

Web Demonstrations

Your existing course-authoring system may also include tools for creating animated Web activities with which users interact. And in some cases, you don’t even need to be a programmer or Flash expert to create them.

If your online course materials are mostly limited to static images and simple Flash movies, then consider adding interactive demonstrations and exhibits. They should be pertinent, of course, and ideally, should add information to your training (rather than just repeat what’s already there).

Flash Activities

We're all familiar with Flash movies. But Flash can do so much more than just movies. For more information about this, check out Al Lemieux's earlier blog article, *"10 Tips for Using Flash in e-Learning."* In it, he describes how Flash authoring tools can:

- Produce step-by-step procedure animations
- Pull many audio formats into e-Learning materials
- Create and enhance online course navigation
- Produce animated simulations
- Bring various video formats into e-Learning materials, and trigger events directly from video frames
- Create drag-and-drop activities
- Create online quizzes and tests

His article is well worth reading (or reading again)! <http://www.syberworks.com/articles/tips-for-using-flash-in-e-learning.htm>

Linked-in Files

Intellectual capital comes in many forms. Your department, or others in your organization, may have already created images, Word documents, spreadsheets, PDFs, Flash animations, or even entire Web pages that (in part or whole) could be turned into informative and engaging training materials. And your course authoring/delivery systems may already provide functions for turning them directly into training.

Yes, many of these sources can be pretty static...even Web pages. But some of them permit much more interactivity and engagement than we usually see. PDFs, for instance, can link to other PDFs, animated exhibits, Flash movies/demonstrations, and Web pages.

So scour your organization's existing intellectual capital. You may unearth some gems for your online training.

A Good Text Editor

Not quite as glamorous as some of the above, but don't forget to include a text editor in your training-developing arsenal. The "Net Generation" that we mentioned earlier (and those that follow) probably won't rank reading as a preferred learning activity. Text alone won't be engaging enough for tomorrow's learners. And though it's still done, the days when one could throw a bunch of words onto a Web page and call it "online training" are largely past.

I'm not saying that writing isn't important. It's actually more important than ever. Tomorrow's learners won't have much patience for masses of uninspiring text. And if training materials aren't as clear, direct, and short as we can realistically make them (while still communicating required ideas), then we'll risk losing our audiences. So in addition to interactivity and engagement, we'll need to strive for conciseness, clarity, and as much brevity as is practical, in our future online training.

I'm sure you can come up with many more examples. And please look for them. I just wanted to point out that you may already own tools for adding interactivity and engagement to the training that our "next-generation" audiences will demand.

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About SyberWorks

SyberWorks, Inc. (www.syberworks.com) is a leader in the custom e-Learning Solutions and Learning Management System industries for Fortune 1000 corporations, higher education, and other organizations. Located in Waltham, Massachusetts, the company serves the multi-billion-dollar e-Learning market. Since 1995, SyberWorks has developed and delivered unique and economical solutions to create, manage, measure, and improve e-Learning programs at companies and organizations in the United States, Canada, Europe, and other countries.