

Chapter 7

Learning and Playing get Personal

ABSTRACT

Developments in information technology are finding new applications in teaching, and these “e-learning” approaches are having a significant impact on the way people learn and play. Since e-learning, which includes different types of learning and can be applied to a variety of situations, offers many benefits for students, it is increasingly being embraced in both academic and corporate teaching settings. The market for e-learning has seen remarkable growth as e-learning has been applied in various ways to education in primary and secondary schools, institutions of higher learning, and workplace settings. E-learning approaches are even beginning to affect the way we play, and there is potential for online gaming platforms as new e-learning tools. The remarkable growth of e-learning is no surprise, however, since in the case of both learning and play, e-learning breaks down long-standing barriers.

INTRODUCTION

As we advance further into the digital age and as the information industry grows more mature and multi-faceted, we begin to see changes that have a deeper effect than we might initially realize. When the first commercially available calculators were introduced onto the market, it’s likely that few besides mathematicians and accountants took notice, and it was military and research scientists who were first concerned with the Internet. However, both the calculator and the Internet have since become deeply ingrained in the way we live, work, and learn.

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In these examples, the individual inventions themselves didn't initially suggest the immensity of the collective change they would enact upon the culture as a whole. Likewise, certain trends that we now witness are the beginnings of a greater change than we realize. As information technology becomes more and more ubiquitous, working its way into everything from our telephones to the cars we drive, we see its impact on the way we live more and more. At no time is this trend more apparent than when we are learning or playing, as "e-learning" is changing everything in both of those spheres.

THE RISE OF E-LEARNING

"E" Means More than Just "Electronic"

Superficially, e-learning refers to forms of learning that are administered electronically. It's the same "e" that prefaces "mail" when referring to e-mail. In practice, however, that letter signifies a great deal more. Just as e-mail revolutionized the way people send written correspondence to one another, e-learning has revolutionized the way in which people learn and the way in which society as a whole thinks about learning. E-learning methodologies may well employ electronic tools in their delivery, but what really makes e-learning unique is the way in which one can use those tools to create a uniquely customized and individualized learning experience.

E-learning takes on many forms, but the support of an information system is at the core of all of them. Ultimately, this is the goal of e-learning—to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from an information system to an end user. In this sense, e-learning can refer to the act of locating information via a search engine, taking a college class over the Internet, or using a custom designed piece of software to learn a new skill on the job. Any time knowledge is imparted from an information system through an electronic medium, e-learning is taking place, regardless of whether an automated test, a piece of software, or a "flesh and blood" administrator or teacher oversees the actual process of transmission.

The Benefits of E-Learning

It is hard to pinpoint exactly what it is about e-learning that makes it revolutionary. Why do people find e-learning so appealing? For some, it might be that e-learning appeals to their particular learning style, whereas for others it might be an issue of access. Figure 1 illustrates the results of a recent survey that asked students at an Ohio

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