Case Studies on E-Business Adoption by Canadian Training and Development Firms

Final Report

Prepared by: Murray Richmond
for the
Canadian Society for Training & Development (CSTD)

March 2004

Table of Contents

Case Studies of the Adoption of E-Business
by Canadian Training and Development Firms

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the factors that lead to the adoption or non-adoption of e-business by private sector education and training firms with a view to determining how to encourage more firms to adopt e-business. For this study, e-business is defined operationally as using the Internet to generate revenue and / or promote new business.

This study was undertaken by the Canadian Society for Training & Development (CSTD) with financial assistance from Industry Canada.

The Methodology

An eleven-question interview checklist was developed (Appendix A). Potential respondents, all senior executives of the firms in question, were sent a personal e-mail with an invitation to participate and with the interview questions attached. Respondents who agreed to participate were interviewed by telephone. A transcript of the interview was produced and verified by the respondent before being included in the study. A transcript of each interview is provided in Appendix B.

The interview checklist also contained eight questions about the organization including number of employees, market segments served, geographic markets targeted and the use of information and communications technologies by the firm, and the availability and importance of a high-speed Internet connection.

The Firms Studied

Fifteen firms were selected, mostly from the CSTD membership list. The sample was chosen to give a diverse cross-section of education and training businesses varying by the nature of the business, size, and geographic location.

A total of twenty-three firms were invited to participate in the study to obtain the fifteen participants. One firm chose not to participate and no response was received from seven of the firms.

Table 1 provides a list of the firms who participated together with the name of the person interviewed.

Table 1: Firms Participating in the Case Study Interviews

Firm	Person Interviewed	Role
Automated Learning Corporation www.automatedlearning.com	Dr. Robert Abell	President
Bruner Business Communication www.brunerbiz.com	Jody Bruner	President
BNH Expert Software www.bnhexpertsoft.com	J (Jay) Bahlis	President
CE Network, Inc. www.cenetwork.com	Jim Haufe	Vice-President
DocworksCPTI Inc. www.docworkscpti.com	Lorne Novolker	Vice-President of Learning Solutions
Gandy Associates www.gandy.ca	Teresa McGill	President
Ingenia Training and Consulting International www.ingenia-training.com	Ramona Materi	President
JED New Media www.jednm.com; www.jedlet.com	Joanne Duchastel	President
Jolyn Enterprises www.peoplepuzzles.net	Lynda Trommelen	Partner
Psychometrics Canada Ltd. www.psychometrics.com; www.careerid.com; www.testingroom.com	Mark Fitzsimmons	Director of Business Development
QualitE-Learning Assurance Inc. and FuturEd Consulting Education Futurists Inc. www.eqcheck.com; www.futured.com	Dr. Kathryn Barker	President
Sundance Consulting www.sundance.ca	Deb Kalyn	Director of Business Development
WATMEC Waterloo Management Education Centre www.watmec.com	Dale Wilcox	President
WORKINGFaster.com Inc. www.workingfaster.com	Rita Vine	President
Workplace Training and Services Inc. www.trainingforwork.com	Judith Bond	Director

Fifty-three percent of the firms were located in Ontario; twenty percent were from Quebec; and there were thirteen percent each from Alberta and British Columbia. A total of 15 firms participated in the case study interviews.

A majority of the firms selected, 73%, had 1 – 9 full-time employees; 20% had 10 -19; and, 7% had 20 – 49.

Market segments served included:
- 93% Corporate (private sector businesses)
- 87% Government (public sector – various levels)
- 53% Individual (Consumer, B2C)
- 40% Postsecondary (colleges and universities)
- 33% Military
- 27% K – 12
- 13% Other – non-profit; individual professionals.

Geographical markets served:
- 87% Canadian market (all / most provinces)
- 47% United States
- 33% Ontario
- 27% The World / International
- 20% European Union
- 13% Quebec
- 13% Other – Africa; Vietnam

Information and communications technologies (ICT) available in the workplace include:
- 100% personal computers, workstations or terminals
- 100% e-mail
- 100% Internet
- 87% network
- 53% wireless network
- 40% intranet
- 13% electronic data interchange (EDI) not on the Internet
- 13% electronic data interchange (EDI) on the Internet
- Other: 13% groupware / conferencing tools; virtual classroom; FTP (file transfer protocol); and 7% learning management system (LMS); virtual private network (VPN).

All of the respondents indicated that 100% of the people in their organization had access to a personal computer, e-mail and the Internet for their work. All but one organization had a high-speed Internet connection and all indicated that it was very important to critical for their business. Some respondents noted that it is also essential for their clients to have high-speed access for tasks like

exchanging large files, project management and collaboration, and using Web-conferencing with voice over IP (VoIP).

Results

Answers to the questions asked of the respondents form the basis of the results. An initial summary of answers is followed by quotes selected from among the answers provided. The respondents speak for themselves. The complete transcript of each interview is provided in Appendix B.

What does e-business mean to your firm?

Respondents were unanimous in their endorsement of the need for their firms to use e-business, defined as using the Internet to generate revenue and / or promote new business.

We have cut mailing and printing costs by about 80% by using the Internet to distribute our newsletter. (Dale Wilcox)

For us, e-business is one of many ways we satisfy the needs of our clients. (Jody Bruner)

It's a very important marketing tool for us. (Robert Abell)

E-business is not just sales, but a whole way of keeping in contact with clients, generating leads, and increasing sales. (Jay Bahlis)

E-business is the firm. E-business is our sole business; our delivery channel; and, one of our sales channels. (Jim Haufe)

For us, e-business means primarily the application of Internet-related technologies for business communications, marketing, and project management — both for internal use and with our clients. (Lorne Novolker)

A Web site is the minimum requirement to be in the e-learning business. (Ramona Materi)

E-business involves everything we are doing online, including all three of our related Web sites that provide secure customer interaction and online transactions. (Mark Fitzsimmons)

QualitE-Learning Assurance Inc – DBA "eQcheck" is e-business. E-business means advertising, registering clients, and providing services online. (Kathryn Barker)

We provide people with the ability to purchase our products online, hassle-free.
(Deb Kalyn)

Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business?

A capacity for e-business is generally regarded by the firms interviewed as the minimum qualification for doing business in today's marketplace. Reasons given for developing an e-business capability included:
- to better respond to client needs / provide better customer service;
- to save time and money / increase cost-effectiveness; and,
- to be able to market products / services more globally.

Since we're about "e-Learning", it only makes sense to do our business online. "Walk the talk." As well, we intend to become a global business and that's done most effectively and efficiently working online. (Kathryn Barker)

We developed our Web site to make things convenient for our clients.
(Jody Bruner)

We developed a capacity for e-business primarily because our clientele were all over North America and the World. (Jay Bahlis)

A capacity for e-business is clearly essential in today's marketplace. …our clients expect us to have the capacity to deliver services and content online. The advantages of adopting e-business are strong: it offers better, faster, more efficient ways of doing things. It enables us to operate as a bigger, decentralized organization, working in more places than would otherwise be possible, and to keep in closer touch with our clients. (Lorne Novolker)

We developed our Web site because we wanted to streamline the dissemination of information. (Teresa McGill)

We did 14 focus groups to refine the concept. Clients indicated that they wanted to subscribe online via the Internet and that they wanted to access individual modules of their choice. (Joanne Duchastel)

If you're in the e-learning business, it's simply expected. You have a business card, you have a Web site. (Ramona Materi)

E-business was a natural progression. We developed our first Web site in 1994 and within a couple of years had put tests online and started collecting data. We realized that people actually liked this – thousands of people were taking the tests. For better or worse, it became a necessity to invest further in developing our Web sites. (Mark Fitzsimmons)

We actually adopted e-business for increased cost-effectiveness. (Deb Kalyn)

Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?

A majority of respondents indicated that they had a formal plan or strategy. Others indicated that they developed their Web site based on marketing objectives and / or client needs.

Yes, our business plan is based on an e-business strategy. (Jim Haufe)

Yes. We have a formal strategy but it's not entirely documented. This is a plan that is always evolving and responding to the marketplace. (Lorne Novolker)

We have a marketing plan which is highly dependant on a successful e-business strategy. (Joanne Duchastel)

Yes, the online side of our business is definitely our focus at the moment, but we have to be fairly flexible in responding as we see new opportunities. (Mark Fitzsimmons)

Yes, we have goals for the next one to two years. (Deb Kalyn)

We have a formal business and marketing plan. The e-business part has evolved as part of our overall strategy in response to both client needs and available ubiquitous technology. However, technology is not a focus of our business plan. The technology is simply a means whereby Workingfaster.com makes its business happen. Our customers don't focus excessively on technology – just on getting things done. (Rita Vine)

Day to day we are always trying to figure out how to improve. (Robert Abell)

Yes, it's part of our marketing plan. (Jay Bahlis)

No, we develop our Web site features in response to client requests and needs. (Jody Bruner)

What guidelines or best practices did your firm use?

Respondents gave responses ranging from common sense to researching what others have done to conducting needs assessments and focus groups with their clients to develop their e-business capabilities.

Basically we did a lot of research. We have 20 years experience in training and performance development, and we polled both existing and potential clients on their thoughts. (Joanne Duchastel)

When developing our online course, we partnered with an experienced organization, Embanet. (Teresa McGill)

Good Web site design is the key. We involved professional designers. (Mark Fitzsimmons)

In setting up our Web site we used best practices for e-business. (Jim Haufe)

In terms of our "internal" e-business capacity, we just went with what we felt we needed and could support on our own. With respect to our e-business services, our clients and the marketplace in general have driven the development process. (Lorne Novolker)

We developed our approach based on what we knew about good e-learning, quality Web sites and search engine optimization. (Kathryn Barker)

Our application had to be user-friendly. We are in the people business. The application has to fit the look and feel of our company. Our key question is: "Does it fit how we work?" (Dale Wilcox)

On the product side, decision-making was based on existing marketplace standards, mainly for library use, and principally surrounding authentication of Web-based content products. Authentication standards for electronic products are very important, especially when transactions are involved. (Rita Vine)

What are / were the major challenges faced in developing an e-business capability?

Major challenges identified included:
- lack of knowledge of the required technologies;
- difficulty in getting good or impartial advice about what to do;
- lack of available and proven expertise; and,
- the costs and time required to develop e-business capabilities.

On the matter of payment processing, finding a reasonably priced service to handle online payments in US dollars is an ongoing challenge. (Rita Vine)

Quite simply time and money! (Robert Abell)

We had to set up an account and register a company in the US to be able to accept payments in US currency from US clients. Canadian banks were not very helpful. (Jay Bahlis)

We used the "if we build it, they will come" assumption in setting up our e-business Web site. But, we were immediately confronted with the adoption challenge. (Jim Haufe)

The biggest challenge is that technology is changing so quickly and can be prohibitively expensive and risky to adopt, especially for a small business. And yet, you must be innovative and responsive to emerging technologies or be left behind. (Lorne Novolker)

The biggest problem is lack of convergence of the different technologies. (Teresa McGill)

The major challenge was the lack of anticipated technology in rural areas, especially the lack of access to high-speed, always-on, Internet service. (Lynda Trommelen)

Technology, time and cost! Advertising and public awareness is a huge challenge for a new business concept. "Build it and they will come" doesn't work. (Kathryn Barker)

Understanding the technology and its implications was and continues to be a challenge. (Dale Wilcox)

Lack of expertise – for e-commerce
Expense – it was expensive to develop our e-commerce capability and expensive to maintain.
Risk – we were among the first to offer e-commerce capabilities. The model is still very new for most people.
Security issues – people are afraid to buy online.
Sustainability – everyone thinks that once you have your e-commerce site you are finished – in fact you are just beginning!
Viability – it takes time to develop e-business (Joanne Duchastel)

Our greatest challenge was finding a Web developer capable of producing the Search Portfolio. There were widely variable cost estimates for the work that was required. We received estimates ranging from $4,000 to over $100,000 based on the same specifications. (Rita Vine)

What criteria are used to judge the success of e-business initiatives?

Criteria used to judge the success of their firms' e-business initiatives mentioned by respondents included: sales, Web site hits / traffic, cost reductions, increased market reach, better customer service and the addition of new products and services to their core business.

Our main criterion is always return on investment. (Mark Fitzsimmons)

Revenue and increased public awareness are the main criteria we use.
(Kathryn Barker)

Our main measure is hits that turn into sales – really performance. (Robert Abell)

We have certain targets – e.g., maintaining contacts with clients, leads generation, and e-commerce – trying for sales that wouldn't have been generated otherwise. (Jay Bahlis)

Our criteria are sales, market penetration and return on investment. (Jim Haufe)

The two main criteria are volume of business and customer satisfaction. We are able to track how people have found us and how much traffic comes through the Web site. It's not just about new business. We are also looking at the level of customer service we can offer existing clients using the Web site and e-mail.
(Teresa McGill)

Our e-business initiatives are judged by two factors – lowering the costs of delivering service to customers and generating greater market reach. (Rita Vine)

We judge the success of our initiatives in a number of ways. We determine whether an e-business service makes us competitive by attracting prospective clients and winning new projects for us. Through client and team feedback, we learn whether our initiatives are having an impact on things like project management (positive or negative) and perceptions of the project's success. We also assess an initiative from a strategic point of view. Although it can be hard to measure and quantify the benefits of a new technology, we always have to ask ourselves what is the cost of not adopting it? And how well does it fit in with our vision of the company? At the end of the day we judge that the benefits of e-business outweigh the costs. (Lorne Novolker)

Our main measure is hits that turn into sales – really performance. (Robert Abell)

In what positive ways has e-business impacted your organization?

It's saving time and money although it cost lots of time to set it up.
(Teresa McGill)

It brings in potential customers and allows a relatively small company to have a relatively large footprint. (Robert Abell)

Being able to market to our US customers is the main positive benefit.
(Deb Kalyn)

It offers added value to partners and clients. (Jay Bahlis)

The development of e-business as a sales channel has been positive.
(Jim Haufe)

When used properly and implemented efficiently, e-business saves us money in terms of operating costs. It also generates revenue for us. It has enabled us to be in contact with one another anytime, anywhere. Individual staff and associates feel much more part of a team as a result. We can also accomplish much more with e-business than we could do otherwise. (Lorne Novolker)

We don't talk innovation – we do it! (Joanne Duchastel)

It's a way to have another distribution channel. Our online presence has led to sales around the world. (Mark Fitzsimmons)

It's far less capital intensive than starting a traditional business. (Kathryn Barker)

It has reduced training preparation and travel time for instructors. It has improved our capacity to deliver courses to remote geographic areas. Early indicators suggest that online courses have generated a larger percentage of repeat business than our instructor-led courses. The ubiquity of the e-program is a very important outcome. (Rita Vine)

It saves us a lot of time, especially when recruiting trainers for particular projects. (Judith Bond).

In what negative ways has e-business impacted your organization?

It takes time and costs money and there is the constant challenge to do it right! (Robert Abell)

Everyone knows what our pricing is. You can't hide from the competition. (Jay Bahlis)

Technology can cause headaches, especially when factors outside of your control (Internet down-time, viruses, temperamental hardware) unexpectedly interfere with your team's work. There are always hidden costs related to technology that you can't easily predict. (Lorne Novolker)

We lack financing. We lack time and energy to do everything we'd like to do. (Joanne Duchastel)

There are huge issues regarding the technology infrastructure, adequate resources and connectivity in the non-profit sector, especially in rural areas. (Lynda Trommelen)

Technology always has its challenges and sometimes fails. (Deb Kalyn)

It's very hard for a small business to keep up with all of the technologies in use by our customers, which are changing constantly. (Rita Vine)

How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit of your e-business?

Respondents whose firms deliver products online or derive significant business from their online operations use traditional ROI measures. Firms who use their Web site mainly for marketing or client support tend not to use a formal process.

Our basic measure is business that comes in as a direct result of our Web site. (Robert Abell)

Basically we know the cost of each element so it's a fairly straightforward process of comparing income to costs. (Jay Bahlis)

We're also aware that not every investment in e-business improves ROI in a way that's easy to measure – sometimes, the investment just makes our life easier than before. (Lorne Novolker)

We track investment versus sales and also the direct impact on the business. (Mark Fitzsimmons)

We monitor the classic ratio of cost inputs over revenue and how it shifts over time. (Kathryn Barker)

We look at the revenue and the actual cost to deliver our online products. (Rita Vine)

Our business is 100% e-business and we can track costs versus sales. (Jim Haufe)

What advice or lessons learned do you have for others wanting to use e-business?

I would advise them to consult with a specialist or to carry out independent research to help them envision an overall e-business strategy before investing too much time and money in piecemeal solutions. (Teresa McGill)

If you don't have the knowledge and skills to develop your Web site, find somebody who knows how to do it right. Then ensure you can be found by clients looking for your kinds of products or services. (Robert Abell)

Don't build it and hope that they will come. Respond to your clients.
 (Jody Bruner)

I think it's definitely worthwhile to get into e-business. You have to offer something unique. You have to know your audience and what they need. There is more to e-business and e-commerce than the technology. There are also the implications on the business side. It does take time – don't be discouraged. Don't think about it as short-term. Think of it as a two to three-year investment.
(Jay Bahlis)

The key lesson is that if I'm a training firm and I'm thinking of an e-business – fundamentally a new product in a new market space – I have to focus on how to sell not only the product but also how to directly influence change to an established (and, therefore, trusted) method of consuming my professional development. Until workplace and independent professional learners progress demographically to be naturally receptive to technology-based education, if e-learning is to be a significant part of your business, you had better figure out how to sell both. (Jim Haufe)

Make sure you are doing it for the right reasons. Think it through. Availability, security, and reliability are crucial. (Lorne Novolker)

If you're thinking about getting into e-business, hire or work with someone who is experienced and who knows something about the requirements. Your business can't afford to make a mistake. Have some ideas on what you want to do, then get advice. (Ramona Materi)

CAUTION! It's important to understand the magnitude of the commitment that is being made. Try to work with entities that are already established in a 'win / win' way. (Joanne Duchastel)

You can't use the "build it and they will come model". They (non-profit sector) don't even have the car to get on the highway. (Lynda Trommelen)

Keep it simple. Focus on exactly what you need to get across. People just want the information. (Mark Fitzsimmons)

If you want to do transactions over the Internet you need to benchmark best practices regarding security of financial transactions, intellectual property and copyright protection, and safe guarding client information. (Kathryn Barker)

Just have lots of patience and money. (Dale Wilcox)

One of the most important lessons we learned was to resist the allure of technology and to instead think about the audience. Carefully consider the technological capabilities of the customer. What are they comfortable with? What type of technology do they have? (Rita Vine)

Make sure your Web site is alive. (Judith Bond)

Are there any particular resources that you would recommend to others planning to develop an e-business capability?

We used the ASTD (American Society for Training & Development) and CSTD (Canadian Society for Training & Development) Web sites and their white papers on e-learning. The local technology council was a resource and networked me with people in the community who were involved in the technology. I also used the Health Canada and OLT (Office of Learning Technologies) site of HRDC (Human Resource Development Canada). (Linda Trommelen)

Read Jim Carroll's books — they're targeted at small business and have practical and useable advice. (Ramona Materi)

It (e-business) is a specialist area, so it pays to work with others who know how to do it.   Pay-per-view organizations like Overature are helpful. We recently also signed up for MS Submit, which is a Web site analysis and submission service that appears to be quite powerful. (Robert Abell)

Jakob Nielsen's usability guidelines - **www.useit.com/alertbox/**.
Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability by Steve Krug.
Look at other Web sites; collect ones that you like and ones that you don't, and learn from them. (Jody Bruner)

Initially on e-commerce we went with VeriSign for processing. They have white papers and a lot of other information about transaction-processing on their Web site. Trade magazines are another good source of information – many have ratings and comparisons of suppliers. (Jay Bahlis)

Is there anything else that you think might help others develop successful e-business initiatives?

You've got to "walk the talk".
Our whole life is predicated on the idea that the Internet is going to work. I'm not so sure that it will continue. I find the prospect of failure frightening. I can foresee a day when we may all have to pay more for a better service. E-business is not going to get cheaper. Also, you still have to use good business practices.
(Kathryn Barker)

Do a needs assessment and a realistic plan before launching the project. Recognize that acceptance by people and their readiness to embrace the technology is not always strong and can scuttle the best plans – e.g., the use of groupware tools. (Linda Trommelen)

Developing an infrastructure for e-business is merely one part of the challenge. Gone are the days when "if you build it, they will come." Appropriate marketing is essential to help customers find you and your products. Although Internet marketing is not always the best way to proceed, entrepreneurs need to have some understanding of search engine optimization and how to market using the Internet – they have to do some key words buying to have their Web site found by others. (Rita Vine)

It's not about the technology. If there ever was an organizational change it's e-learning. (Jim Haufe)

It's harder for smaller businesses to implement and manage e-business than for larger ones. We have to be pickier in our choice of technology (and technology companies) and more strategic in its usage. We must be completely flexible and be ready to adapt to whatever the client has or needs by way of e-business.
As far as advice goes, think things through and learn from experience. Don't go up looking for a fastball, you'll often get a curve. (Lorne Novolker)

Internships programs can provide expert help at relatively low cost. Think about your local college or university. Many young people are Net savvy and can be a big help. (Ramona Materi)

I strongly advise that people investigate the various options for key words pay-per-click referrals. (Robert Abell)

Conclusions

Developing an e-business capacity is seen as a necessary challenge by respondents.

> *Our Web site legitimizes who we are. Using the tools that are part of today's workplace puts us in today's workplace. This is a subtle message requiring the Web site.* (Judith Bond)

There are few guidelines and no "cookie-cutter" models of what is required for a successful e-business. As one respondent noted:

> *The e-side of business is a bottomless pit – you just don't learn about e-business until you are in it. Bottom line, e-business is not for the faint-of-heart. You have to be really brave and fearlessly visionary. You have to have an eye on the long-term.* (Kathryn Barker)

One respondent who serves the non-profit sector, primarily in rural Ontario, noted that this sector is lacking in up-to-date technologies and technical expertise. As well, in rural areas, this is combined with a frustrating lack of access to broadband Internet services.

There were a set of common challenges identified which include:
- the cost and time required to develop an e-business capability;
- the constantly changing, rapidly evolving nature of the technologies being used;
- difficulties in finding reliable and validated information and expertise;
- the costs and complexities associated with online transaction-processing, and,
- raising awareness and acceptance of all things "e", especially e-learning.

Online Resources

Canadian Society for Training and Development (CSTD)
www.cstd.ca

COMET - Commercial Education & Training Sector Information
http://strategis.gc.ca/comet

Canadian Training Solutions for Workplace Learning
http://strategis.gc.ca/training

SKILLNET.CA
http://skillnet.ca

Student Connections
http://studentconnections.ca

Office of Learning Technologies
http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca

EDUSPECS
www.eduspecs.ca

Canadian e-Business Initiative
www.cebi.ca

Ebiz.enable
http://strategis.gc.ca/ebizenable

American Society for Training & Development (ASTD)
www.astd.org

Appendix A: Interview Checklist

Private Sector Educational Services E-Business Case Studies Interview Checklist

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Position / Role: _____

Phone: _____ **E-mail:** _____

Web Site: _____

Date: _____ **Time:** _____ **Duration:** _____

Background

The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of the factors that lead to the adoption or non-adoption of e-Business by private sector education and training firms with a view to determining how to encourage more firms to adopt e-business. E-business is defined operationally as using the Internet to generate revenue and / or promote new business.

This project is being conducted by the Canadian Society for Training and Development (CSTD) with financial assistance from Industry Canada.

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
   ____ Yes - please describe briefly.
   ____ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

Organizational Profile

i. Approximately how many full-time employees does your organization have?
    a. __ 0 b. __ 1-9 c. __ 10-19 d. __ 20–49 e. __ 50–99 f. __ 100–299
    g. __ 300–499 h. __ 500+

ii. Which of the following market segments does your organization sell to?
    a. __ K – 12
    b. __ Postsecondary (colleges and universities)
    c. __ Corporate (private sector businesses)
    d. __ Government (public sector – various levels)
    e. __ Military
    f. __ Individual (Consumer, B2C)
    g. __ Other: Specify _____

iii. Which of the following geographical markets does your organization sell to?
    a. __ Canadian market (all / most provinces)
    b. __ Ontario market
    c. __ Quebec market
    d. __ United States, US
    e. __ European Union, EU
    f. __ Other: Specify _____

iv. Which of the following information and communications technologies does your organization currently use? Check all that apply.

    a. __ personal computers, workstations or terminals
    b. __ e-mail
    c. __ wireless network
    d. __ Internet
    e. __ intranet
    f. __ extranet
    g. __ Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) not on the Internet
    h. __ Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) on the Internet
    i. __ network / information security technology (e.g., firewall, anti-virus software, access control)

j. ___ other: specify _____

v. What percentage of the people in your organization have direct access to a personal computer / workstation / terminal for their work?
    a. ___ 0 % b. ___ 1 – 25% c. ___ 26 – 50 % d. ___ 51 – 75 % e. ___ 76 – 100%

vi. What percentage of the people in your organization have direct access to e-mail for their work?
    a. ___ 0 % b. ___ 1 – 25% c. ___ 26 – 50 % d. ___ 51 – 75 % e. ___ 76 – 100%

vii. What percentage of the people in your organization have direct access to the Internet for their work?
    a. ___ 0 % b. ___ 1 – 25% c. ___ 26 – 50 % d. ___ 51 – 75 % e. ___ 76 – 100%

viii. Does your organization have a high-speed, always-on, Internet connection?
    ____ No
    ____ Yes

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

Appendix B: Case Study Interview Transcripts

Automated Learning Corporation

Name: Dr. Robert Abell

Position / Role: President

Phone: (613) 271-4414

Web Site: www.automatedlearning.com

_____

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

It's a very important marketing tool for us. We are currently engaged in a major revamp of our Web site to incorporate additional marketing features.

We make use of Overture "pay-per-click" ads to drive potential clients to our site. We don't have online payment yet as we are dealing with corporate customers and the credit-card volume is not there. Most deal in Purchase Orders. There are no cheap plans to handle a low volume of online transactions.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

E-learning is a business predicated on being online. We need the global reach. We need to be found from the U.S., Singapore, and anywhere in the world. We have used e-business tools like e-mail, word processing, and computerized accounting since 1981.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
    ___ Yes - please describe briefly.
    ___ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

We don't have a "formal" plan but have ongoing development of all of our systems. Day to day we are always trying to figure out how to improve.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

Being in the business, we had considerable previous experience in graphic design and communication and information management. We also monitor current newsletters and publications on relevant topics related to online business practices.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

Quite simply time and money!

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

Our main measure is hits that turn into sales – really performance (of the Web site).

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: It brings in potential customers and allows a relatively small company to have a relatively large footprint.

Negative: It takes time and costs money and there is the constant challenge to do it right!

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

Our basic measure is business that comes in as a direct result of our Web site.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

If you don't have the knowledge and skills to develop your Web site, find somebody who knows how to do it right. Then ensure you can be found by clients looking for your kinds of products or services.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

It (e-business) is a specialist area, so it pays to work with others who know how to do it. Some of our alliance partners have contributed their knowledge and skills. Pay-per-view organizations like Overature are helpful. We recently also signed up for MS Submit, which is a Web-site analysis and submission service that appears to be quite powerful.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

I strongly advise that people investigate the various options for key words pay-per-click referrals.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's extremely important. We are constantly uploading and downloading large files with client sites. It's also essential for delivering our online courses.

BNH Expert Software

Name: J. (Jay) Bahlis

Position / Role: President

Phone: (514) 745-4010

E-mail: bahlis@bnhexpertsoft.com

Web Site: www.bnhexpertsoft.com

___

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

E-business is not just sales, but a whole way of keeping in contact with clients, generating leads, and increasing sales.

We have three e-business initiatives: 1) a newsletter, by subscription, for existing clientele; 2) a free e-learning assessment – to generate leads (we also give free access to our online tools for a limited period); 3) e-commerce – we sell products via our Web site.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

We developed a capacity for e-business primarily because our clientele were all over North America and the World. We have been doing e-commerce for about a year and a half. An important factor is that we have a very special targeted market.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
    ____ Yes - please describe briefly.
    ____ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

Yes, it's part of our marketing plan. We have a three-pronged approach. We use what we have to try to leverage the approach by partnering with other organizations. We invite others to publish in our newsletter. We also use our e-commerce feature to sell our partners' products.

There is definite room for improvement in what we do.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

We used an informal strategy based on looking at what other organizations had done. We don't have deep pockets and were looking for strategies that were affordable. Reference sites included LMS (learning management system) and e-learning companies and the ASTD (American Society for Training & Development).

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

We didn't have many technical challenges. We are a software firm and so were able to build what we needed in-house. The challenge was mostly determining what we needed to do and how to best do it.

For example, we had to set up an account and register a company in the US to be able to accept payments in US currency from US clients. Canadian banks were not very helpful. We had to find out mostly on our own how to do it and had a lot of administrative aspects to deal with.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

Our strategy is based on our marketing plan. We have certain targets – e.g., maintaining contacts with clients, leads generation, and e-commerce – trying for sales that wouldn't have been generated otherwise.

Our e-commerce is on the edge of viability and we are planning to stick with it. It hasn't delivered what we were expecting. We need to continue to experiment with changes in the way we do business.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: It offers added value to partners and clients.

Negative: Everyone knows what our pricing is. You can't hide from the competition. Putting the prices on the Web site may also deter someone from calling you. We are going to revisit our strategy – we're still learning as we go.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

Basically we know the cost of each of the elements so it's a fairly straightforward process of comparing income to costs.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

I think it's definitely worthwhile to get into e-business. It gives more reasons besides information for people to come to the Web site. You have to offer something unique. You have to know your audience and what they need. There is more to e-business and e-commerce than the technology. There are also the implications on the business side.

It does take time – don't be discouraged. Don't think about it as short-term. Think of it as a two to three-year investment.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

Initially on e-commerce we went with VeriSign for processing. They have white papers and a lot of other information about transaction-processing on their Web site. Trade magazines are another good source of information – many have ratings and comparisons of suppliers.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

We were at an advantage because we are very comfortable with the technologies. You definitely need someone on-board who understands the technologies.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's very important for our work. We use a virtual classroom application for our client demos. It's really a great time and money saver. We also run Webinars, one or two per month, on areas related to our expertise. They give us "qualified" leads.

Bruner Business Communication

Name: Jody Bruner

Position / Role: President

Phone: (416) 781-0141

E-mail: jody@brunerbiz.com

Web Site: www.brunerbiz.com

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

For us, e-business is one of many ways we satisfy the needs of our clients. For example, we allow our clients to register for courses online and order self-directed books. Our Web site is mainly a marketing tool. And we have a mailing list of some 3000 for our electronic newsletter.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

We developed our Web site to make things convenient for our clients. We're finding now that people would like to be able to pay online, but we don't have enough demand for it – we're not there yet – maybe in a year. We can't build it and hope that they will come.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
    ____ Yes - please describe briefly.
    ____ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

No. We develop our Web site features in response to client requests and needs.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

We used common sense. We read a lot of Jakob Nielsen on Web site usability. Our Web site is successful for us because it promotes a lot of business. The Web site gives a lot away and draws traffic.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

We used a common sense approach and used students and freelancers to add little increments to the Web site at a time. We review and update the Web site three times per year—every time we publish our online newsletter. It's important to keep it fresh and updated and you need somebody who can update it affordably.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

We look at how the Web site is helping grow our business. We feel it's working when prospects have been to the site and call to get prices and / or book dates.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: The Web site has contributed to business growth and it shows clients that we are listening to them.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

We don't quantify the benefits.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

Don't build it and hope that they will come. We are still learning. Respond to your clients – e.g., the TakeAQuiz feature.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

Jakob Nielsen's usability guidelines - **www.useit.com/alertbox**.

Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability by Steve Krug.

Look at other Web sites; collect ones that you like and ones that you don't, and learn from them.

Think about the reader or the user – what would they want?

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

No.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's absolutely vital!

CE Network, Inc.

Name: Jim Haufe

Position / Role: Vice-President

Phone: (416) 444-3637

E-mail: jhaufe@cenetwork.com

Web Site: http://www.cenetwork.com

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

E-business is the firm. CE Network is an e-tailer of online learning. E-business is our sole business; our delivery channel; and, one of our sales channels.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

Content Alive (a related business) was providing education development services and was aware of changes in technology and saw the Internet as a potential vehicle for educational content delivery. Content Alive began to explore models for an e-learning business focussed on mandated continuing education, a very clear measurable and defined set of market requirements for learning. Financial services and real estate, which have a lot of individual entrepreneurs, were selected and CE Network was born.

CE Network's mission is "to be the leading provider of learning products in the mandatory continuing education market." An objective of CE Network is to provide, via online learning, continuing education opportunities comparable or better than those that would typically be provided by a large corporation to its employees. The 24 x 7 nature of the e-learning service is an important benefit for busy professionals.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
    ____ Yes - please describe briefly.
    ____ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

Yes. Our business plan is based on an e-business strategy. We use e-commerce as one of our sales channels.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

With respect to developing our learning products, we used instructional design and product development best practices. In setting up our Web site we used best practices for e-business. For sales, we used well-established direct marketing and direct selling strategies.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

We used the "if we build it, they will come" assumption in setting up our e-business Web site. But, we were immediately confronted with the adoption challenge. Initial sales were disappointing and we realized that, similar to any other product or service, we needed an effective sales and marketing strategy to present the value proposition of our product to potential customers. After various marketing and selling experiments, we noted that the strongest results were achieved by actively going out into the field. Once the relationship is established, telephone sales, direct marketing and e-commerce can further drive the market.

The main challenge is about adoption – about getting people to change behaviours.

Another challenge that we faced was launching at the height of the Internet "bubble". We were being painted with the brush of "fly-by-night" operators – there was a credibility issue that had to be addressed by our marketing.

There was the challenge of keeping the technology as simple as possible for our customers. We wanted the customer focus to be on the product and the e-learning experience with our company.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

Our criteria are sales, market penetration and return on investment.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: The development of e-business as a sales channel has been positive. We started off seeing very low online purchasing volume. It was very negative the first while, but this caused us to look at the problem. This led to the direct sales approach which has contributed to the growth in the e-business.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

Our business is 100% e-business and we can track costs versus sales.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

The key lesson is that if I'm a training firm and I'm thinking of an e-business – fundamentally a new product in a new market space – I have to focus on how to sell not only the product but also how to directly influence change to an established (and, therefore, trusted) method of consuming my professional development. Until workplace and independent professional learners progress demographically to be naturally receptive to technology-based education, if e-learning is to be a significant part of your business you had better figure out how to sell both.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

No. We were well-versed in good business skills.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

It's not about the technology. If there ever was an organizational change it's e-learning.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's critical for us and essential for our customers.

DocworksCPTI Inc.

Name: Lorne Novolker

Position / Role: Vice President of Learning Solutions

Phone: (514) 736-1654

E-mail: lnovolke@docworkscpti.com

Web Site: www.docworkscpti.com/

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

E-business, like e-learning, means different things to different people. For us, e-business means primarily the application of Internet-related technologies for business communications, marketing, and project management—both for internal use and with our clients.

Some examples of how we use it include:
- E-mail for communications
- MSN Messenger and NetMeeting for maintaining live contact between colleagues in Toronto and Montreal and with our associates working remotely
- A secure FTP (file transfer protocol) site that project team members can use to back up, store and exchange large files
- A Virtual Private Network that connects remote users to our intranet in the Toronto office
- A Web site for marketing our services and products
- A secure Demo site that provides clients and prospects with access to selected projects that we have completed or that are in progress.
- Remote access

But E-Business also means major new business opportunities for DocworksCPTI. We have developed expertise in a variety of services for which there is a strong and growing demand: learning strategy, e-Learning design and development, LMS/LCMS development, and online testing tools, among other things. We have also taken the initiative to develop our own suite of learning management tools.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

A capacity for e-Business is clearly essential in today's marketplace. Not only do you need it for all of the reasons cited above (communications, marketing, project management) but our clients expect us to have the capacity to deliver services and content online. The advantages of adopting e-business are strong: it offers better, faster, more efficient ways of doing things. It enables us to operate as a bigger, decentralized organization, working in more places than would otherwise be possible, and to keep in closer touch with our clients.

Some of our e-business initiatives were driven by the needs of our clients, and others we adopted when the technology became available and affordable. Some initiatives (such as our project management tools) simply evolved as a result of our own management experiences.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
    ___ Yes - please describe briefly.
    ___ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

Yes, we have a formal strategy but it's not entirely documented. Some elements of it are documented in our company policies for staff and associates. Other elements, especially those related to our services and products (and the marketing of them), are a key part of our business plan. This is a plan that is always evolving and responding to the marketplace. For example, we have just launched a custom learning management system (LMS) called Learningworks Suite in response to our clients' requests for a simpler, less expensive solution for delivering and managing their e-Learning initiatives. The needs of our clients have dictated the features and configuration options in our LMS.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

In terms of our "internal" e-business capacity, we just went with what we felt we needed and could support on our own. We did not use any benchmarks or best practices, just the advice of our own networking consultants and common sense. Our own experience managing large projects with clients and resources in remote locations has greatly influenced our decisions as well.

With respect to our e-business services, our clients and the marketplace in general have driven the development process.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

The biggest challenge is that technology is changing so quickly and can be prohibitively expensive and risky to adopt, especially for a small business.

From a management perspective, the crux of the problem is this: how do we, in a cost-effective, controlled manner, keep up with mainstream and emerging technologies while controlling costs for ourselves and our clients?

Another challenge is that developing e-business is a somewhat trial and error process. There are always some ideas that turn out to be duds; you may try things that don't work. And yet, you must be innovative and responsive to emerging technologies or be left behind.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

We judge the success of our initiatives in a number of ways. We determine whether an e-business service makes us competitive by attracting prospective clients and winning new projects for us. Through client and team feedback, we learn whether our initiatives are having an impact on project management (positive or negative) and perceptions of the project's success.

We also assess an initiative from a strategic point of view. Although it can be hard to measure and quantify the benefits of a new technology, we always have to ask ourselves what is the cost of not adopting it? And how well does it fit in with our vision of the company?

We weigh the pros and cons, successes and war stories. At the end of the day we judge that the benefits of e-business outweigh the costs. We are going to keep moving forward with e-business and will always try to find new ways to keep improving our business.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: When used properly and implemented efficiently, e-business saves us money in terms of operating costs. It also generates revenue for us. It has enabled us to be in contact with one another anytime, anywhere. Individual staff and associates feel much more part of a team as a result. We can also accomplish much more with e-business than we could do otherwise – as our clients see for themselves.

Negative: Technology can cause headaches, especially when factors outside of your control (Internet down-time, viruses, temperamental hardware) unexpectedly interfere with your team's work. There are always hidden costs related to technology that you can't easily predict.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

We don't have a formal process. In general, we take our time selecting new technologies, especially hardware. The positives for us usually outweigh the negatives. If a newly-adopted technology creates more of a headache than not, or if it fails to add the value we expected, then we consider the alternatives and take decisive action. We're also aware that not every investment in e-business improves ROI in a way that's easy to measure – sometimes, the investment just makes our life easier than before.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

Make sure you are doing it for the right reasons. It should be an investment to add value, perceived or actual, for you and/or your customers. Think it through.

We also feel that the more you and your customers depend on your e-business capacity, the more important it is to have the resources in-house to keep your e-business systems running smoothly, especially during peak periods. Availability, security, and reliability are crucial.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

There is nothing specific we can recommend.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

It's harder for smaller businesses to implement and manage e-business than for larger ones. We have to be pickier in our choice of technology (and technology companies) and more strategic in its usage. We don't adopt a new technology just for the "whiz bang" effect; it has to add a tangible value to the way we operate. That also holds true 100% for our e-business solutions as well. We must be completely flexible and be ready to adapt to whatever the client has or needs by way of e-business.

As far as advice goes, think things through and learn from experience. Don't go up looking for a fastball, you'll often get a curve.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's essential! In fact, we now include it as a condition in our contracts with associates – you must have a broadband connection to work with us.

Gandy Associates

Name: Teresa McGill

Position / Role: President

Phone: (416) 533-1933

E-mail: teresa@gandy.ca

Web Site: www.gandy.ca

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

E-business means any business activity we carry out electronically. For example, we use our Web site and e-mail for marketing and customer support. We don't have e-commerce capability at this point. For us, e-business also includes e-learning via our 'blended' course, Language for Leadership, where the online component provides an added modality for supplementing our classroom training.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

We developed our Web site because we wanted to streamline the dissemination of information. It has saved us a lot of time and money by cutting down on mail-outs and has enabled more potential clients to find us via Internet searches. We also felt it was important to have a Web site for credibility.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
   ___ Yes - please describe briefly.
   ___ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

No. Although we have a formal business plan, it needs to be updated to include our e-business endeavours.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

When developing our online course, we partnered with an experienced organization, Embanet. We have attended workshops on e-learning best practices and have become involved in Industry Canada's Technology Roadmap for the Language Industry.

Regarding our Web site and future e-commerce capabilities, we have mainly used existing sites as models, making note of features we like such as online request forms. As we move to the next level, we plan to take a more formalized approach.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

The biggest problem is lack of convergence of the different technologies. For example, I use an electronic database for customer contact and it doesn't link to e-mail. We really need an integrated database; not having that is a real headache! We tried to have one custom-designed, but the consultant we hired lacked the necessary skills. Our own lack of technical expertise makes it difficult even to do a good job of hiring a technical specialist.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

The two main criteria are volume of business and customer satisfaction. We are able to track how people have found us and how much traffic comes through the Web site. It's not just about new business. We are also looking at the level of customer service we can offer existing clients using the Web site and e-mail. This applies both to the process of administering training and to the actual training itself.

We also consider efficiency to be a major criterion for success, measured in terms of saved time and money. Having the Web site, e-mail and an online course saves us a lot of time, enabling us to connect with clients more efficiently. For example, we have saved a considerable amount of time and money in recent years by replacing info-pack mail-outs with a simple e-mail message containing a link to our Web site.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: It's saving time and money although it cost lots of time to set it up. The impacts are mainly positive. The whole electronic suite, especially e-mail, has streamlined the customer service side of the business.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

We haven't carried out any formal analysis.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

I would advise them to consult with a specialist or to carry out independent research to help them envision an overall e-business strategy before investing too much time and money in piecemeal solutions. Knowledge of technology needs to be high on their list of lifelong learning topics.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

No.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

I would encourage people who haven't done so yet to develop a Web site. As a language specialist I would say "Keep it simple!" Use plain language, clear navigation, and simple elements – graphics, colour, uncluttered layout. Don't use distracting Flash and other graphics/animation technologies simply for the effect (unless that's the business that you're in).

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's very important!

Ingenia Training and Consulting International

Name: Ramona Materi

Position / Role: President

Web Site: www.ingenia-training.com

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

Ingenia has a Web site and an e-electronic newsletter. I think of e-business more as an activity for retailers or for people selling set training courses or products. A Web site is the minimum requirement to be in the e-learning business. We use our Web site mainly for marketing and promotion. Ingenia sells custom services, not products. The projects we are involved in are complex and generally large scale; clients hear about us through presentations, articles or referrals, not by hunting on the Internet.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

If you're in the e-learning business, it's simply expected. You have a business card, you have a Web site.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
   ___ Yes - please describe briefly.
   ___ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

Yes, Ingenia has a business plan and marketing plan, which includes plans for our Web site and our complimentary e-newsletter.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

Ingenia reviewed the sites of our competitors (this was in 1996) and also engaged a Web designer to build our Web site.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

We haven't had a real demand from our clients — Ingenia's work is custom, so it's seldom replicated. The costs and time to develop e-business capabilities are challenges. It's a business development thing. Your company has to have the time and develop consistency to go to the next level, which in the training world would include selling courses or products on the Internet.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

Not applicable (n/a)

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: n/a
Negative: n/a

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

n/a

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

If you're thinking about getting into e-business, hire or work with someone who is experienced and who knows something about the requirements. Your business can't afford to make a mistake. Have some ideas on what you want to do, then get advice.

Check out competitor Web sites, join an association, network and find out from others what they have done. There's no need to reinvent the wheel. Develop your plan and then implement it.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

Read Jim Carroll's books – they're targeted at small business and have practical and useable advice. Lots of resources exist – the trick is to access them. Check out government programs as well – you may get funding help.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

Internship programs can provide expert help at relatively low cost. Think about your local college or university. Ingenia has had great success hiring co-op students from marketing and business programs. Many young people are Net savvy and can be a big help.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's essential just because of the need for quick access. Because of our specialized services, Ingenia uses consultants from across Canada. We use PalTalk to conduct virtual meetings and Groove to store files and manage the calendar for the Ingenia virtual team.

JED New Media

Name: Joanne Duchastel

Position / Role: President

Phone: (514) 289-1800

E-mail: info@jednm.com

Web Site: www.jednm.com; www.jedlet.com

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

We're a custom development house. We decided about two and a half years ago to come up with an e-tutorial product that we called a JEDlet, meaning small, practical and down-to-earth. We perceived that the market was investing a lot in infrastructure, but that there was little professional Canadian content available. We positioned the JEDlet as a complement or supplement to other classroom or distance learning initiatives. We assessed that there is a market for short, precise, self-launchable e-learning content that can be produced at relatively low cost and which functions at low bandwidth.

We also have quite an extensive channel partner marketplace.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

We did 14 focus groups to refine the concept. Clients indicated that they wanted to subscribe online via the Internet and that they wanted to access individual modules of their choice. Our original concept was to have the JEDlet library only available through an annual license. We were encouraged by our customers to create an e-commerce, B2C (business to consumer) model where learners subscribe directly online.

An e-commerce site allows us to brand the JEDlet as a unique offering and have learners see the value of this approach.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
    ____ Yes - please describe briefly.
    ____ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

We have a marketing plan which is highly dependent on a successful e-business strategy. We currently get over 1000 hits per week of new visitors and are working hard to get more. Issues are how to measure visitor feedback and how to get various levels of government to buy into e-business are the real issues. "Innovation" in training is more talk than walk in many municipal, provincial and federal / territorial governments.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

Basically we did a lot of research. We have 20 years experience in training and performance development, and we polled both existing and potential clients on their thoughts. We read many industry reports and due to limited research and development budgets, had to act quickly and efficiently to develop our e-business capacity. We decided to target North and South America and thus to offer JEDlets in English, French and Spanish. Some unique features:

    a. We allow the customer to choose "knowledge nuggets" one at a time rather than bundling them.

    b. We also apply an ISBN number to all the products.

    c. We used an e-business "packaged solution" (Microsoft) rather than develop a custom one (less expensive, less flexible).

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

Lack of expertise – for e-commerce
Expense – it was expensive to develop our e-commerce capability and expensive to maintain.
Risk – we were among the first to offer e-commerce capabilities. The model is still very new for most people.
Security issues – people are afraid to buy online.
Sustainability – everyone thinks that once you have your e-commerce site you are finished – in fact you are just beginning!
Viability – it takes time to develop e-business

All of these are real barriers. I certainly would not encourage people to head into it without a great deal of study and reflection.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

Basically sales: revenue and profit leading to viability. Intangibles are nice too, including: testimonials, linking client training and performance mandates to their organizational accomplishments, working with experts and other trainers, making a name for quality, innovation, creativity at JED New Media, highlighting Quebec and Canadian talent and sharing our expertise with younger entrepreneurs, AND being part of the whole ITC wave that is transforming our world. It's exciting!

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: We don't talk innovation – we do it! We're on the ICT (information and communications technologies) train. We are moving mountains – we're on the leading edge and working very hard to add real and perceived value.

Negative: We are too soon. We lack financing. We lack time and energy to do everything we'd like to.

The pick-up on e-learning is slow – no one knows about it, or they've spent a fortune and received little benefit, or they just don't care!

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

ROI is long-term, and includes both the initial investment and ongoing infrastructure costs (banking, marketing, and network charges, to name a few).

You need lots of activity to make an e-business activity really successful. The e-commerce site is just the beginning. You have to learn how to manage channel partners, build customer service, protect confidentiality, work with banks, etc.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

CAUTION! It's important to understand the magnitude of the commitment that is being made. Try to work with entities that are already established in a 'win / win' way.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

Suppliers were a main source of our information together with Web searches. It's a continuous process that never stops. I think I will build a JEDlet on building e-learning and e-commerce!

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

What I would really like to do is partner with an e-mentoring or e-training or a virtual classroom company so that people could pay to get time and advice from a personal tutor / trainer.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's essential! We host the e-commerce site ourselves.

Jolyn Enterprises

Name: Lynda Trommelen

Position / Role: Partner

Phone: (613) 372-2313

E-mail: lynda@kingston.net

Web Site: www.peoplepuzzles.net

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

We do HR Consulting; presentation of online courses in Management and Organizational Development; collaboration with clients and partners through the use of groupware and conferencing tools; and Web site development and management.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

I saw a really important need in the non-profit and health sector and had the skills and experience to do it. The focus was on filling a niche in this aspect of e-business.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
    ___ Yes - please describe briefly.
    ___ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

Originally we had a business plan, but it has turned out to be a guideline. When I first went into business, I thought we were going to be on the cutting edge of technology – that still hasn't happened. You can put it down on paper only to find that the support isn't there (with the clients). Our general direction is to provide HR and OD (organizational development) consulting services online when appropriate to client needs.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

We have a really good economic development group in Kingston that provides information including some free legal and financial counselling.

We based our business plan on the concept and success of knowledge organizations.

Our course development is conducted in line with adult learning principles and consistent with the CSTD's TCA (Training Competency Architecture).

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

The major challenge was the lack of anticipated technology in rural areas, especially the lack of access to high-speed, always-on, Internet service.

Many clients are still on modems so sophisticated technology is not appropriate.

Intranet development for education use in the health care sector has many problems related to under-funding and lack of appropriate technology and other resources.

Working as a small independent, it is very hard to compete with larger full-scale development firms, but many of those do not address the needs of groups that function at the low end of the spectrum – e.g., the non-profit sector.

There is also a lack of funding for technology in the non-profit sector with a result that there are many old, nearly obsolete computers without sound cards or modems.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

We track ongoing business and client referrals. We also do project evaluations.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: There is a huge need for what we do, especially in the non-profit sector.

Negative: There are huge issues regarding the technology infrastructure, adequate resources and connectivity in the non-profit sector, especially in rural areas.

Being small, we lack access to affordable ASPs (Application Service Providers) – e.g., a low-cost LMS (learning management system).

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

We always try to estimate some cost benefit for any project, but don't have a formal process for doing it at this point.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

You can't use the 'build it and they will come model'. They (non-profit sector) don't even have the car to get on the highway!

You need to go with people who have the capacity and are ready and able to move forward. Work with what you've got.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

We used the ASTD (American Society for Training & Development) and the CSTD (Canadian Society for Training & Development) Web sites and their white papers on e-learning. The local technology council was a resource and networked me with people in the community who were involved in the technology. I also used the Health Canada and OLT (Office of Learning Technologies) site of HRDC (Human Resource Development Canada).

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

Do a needs assessment and a realistic plan before launching the project.

Recognize that acceptance by people and their readiness to embrace the technology is not always strong and can scuttle the best plans – e.g., the use of groupware tools.

Partner to gain the skills and resources that you don't have.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

I would love to have a high-speed Internet connection and actually joined the technology council to try and promote it but it simply does not exist where I live.

Psychometrics Canada Ltd.

Name: Mark Fitzsimmons

Position / Role: Director of Business Development

Phone: (780) 469-2268

E-mail: mark@psychometrics.com

Web Site: www.psychometrics.com   www.careerid.com   www.testingroom.com

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

E-business involves everything we are doing online, including all three of our related Web sites which provide secure customer interaction and online transactions.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

E-business was a natural progression. We developed our first Web site in 1994 and within a couple of years had put tests online and started collecting data. We realized that people actually liked this – thousands of people were taking the tests. For better or worse, it became a necessity to invest further in developing our Web sites.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
   ____ Yes - please describe briefly.
   ____ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

Yes, the online side of our business is definitely our focus at the moment, but we have to be fairly flexible in responding as we see new opportunities.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

Good Web site design is the key. We involved professional designers. We wanted a system that was usable, fast, and secure and that would work on anyone's platform.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

Maintaining a focus was a challenge because there are just so many opportunities for doing different things (in the e-business Web site design). We have learned to keep it simple.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

Our main criterion is always return on investment. Our corporate Web site won an Alberta e-business award in 2000 - 2001.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: It's a way to have another distribution channel. Our online presence has led to sales around the world.

Negative: It's expensive, takes time and takes away from our other distribution channels.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

We track investment versus sales and also the direct impact on the business.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

Keep it simple. Focus on exactly what you need to get across. People just want the information.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

We used a professional Web development firm.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

Keep it simple and focussed.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

We couldn't do business without it anymore.

QualitE-Learning Assurance Inc.

Name: Kathryn Barker

Position / Role: President

Phone: (250) 539-2139

E-mail: kbarker@eQcheck.com

Web Site: www.eqcheck.com; www.futured.com

___

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

QualitE-Learning Assurance Inc – DBA "eQcheck" is e-business. E-business means advertising, registering clients, and providing services online.

However, the reality is that an element of personal contact is required, especially for the initial contacts.

E-business has turned out to be much harder than we thought. Nobody has had the time to become an expert; there's a lot of costly experimentation in developing an e-business. There is also the legal environment around certification systems that we have to deal with.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

Since we're about "e-Learning", it only makes sense to do our business online. "Walk the talk." As well, we intend to become a global business and that's done most effectively and efficiently working online.

One of the challenges is buy-in. How do you get buy-in to a new idea? We are finding greater receptivity in Europe than in North America.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
    ____ Yes - please describe briefly.
    ____ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

Yes.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

We developed our approach based on what we knew about good e-learning, quality Web sites and search engine optimization.

What you see on the Web site is the front-end; the back-end is still being developed. We needed a very strong back-end developer, but had problems finding the right one

as there is no way to check on their capabilities. We couldn't anticipate a lot of the needs. The e-side of business is a bottomless pit – you just don't learn about e-business until you are in it. Bottom line, e-business is not for the faint-of-heart. You have to be really brave and fearlessly visionary. You have to have an eye on the long-term. Don't quit your day job.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

Technology, time and cost! Advertising and public awareness is a huge challenge for a new business concept. "Build it and they will come" doesn't work. With a concept like eQcheck, you have to *push* the consumer into asking for it and *pull* the provider into knowing about and using it as part of their marketing.

E-learning is a huge power shift – it has everything to do with shifting power and change.

Governments are always holding out "special programs" to promote technology initiatives, but we didn't qualify for any. With the exception of a loan from the Business Development Bank, the programs that talk about innovation and technology seem to be largely an illusion when it comes to small, start-up businesses! As well, the programs that are supposed to support women entrepreneurs are more of a barrier than a help.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

Revenue and increased public awareness are the main criteria we use.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: It's far less capital intensive than starting a traditional business – it's really labour intensive, but not capital intensive.

We could probably do the business completely off-line, but that wouldn't be "walking the talk". It needs to be online to be credible.

Negative:

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

We monitor the classic ratio of cost inputs over revenue and how it shifts over time. We try to keep the process really inexpensive for clients – e.g., we allow self-assessment. This requires very little investment in terms of dollars by the client, but delivers a huge return in terms of knowledge for the client.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

Keep your day job – you had better have another source of income.
If you want to do transactions over the Internet you need to benchmark best practices regarding security of financial transactions, intellectual property and copyright protection, and safe-guarding client information.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

No. Probably the best resource is a good business plan model.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

You've got to "walk the talk".

Our whole life is predicated on the idea that the Internet is going to work. I'm not so sure that it will continue. I find the prospect of failure frightening. I can foresee a day when we may all have to pay more for a better service. E-business is not going to get cheaper. Also, you still have to use good business practices.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's absolutely essential for an e-business Web site. We don't send a digital version of anything to our clients; it is hyperlinked rather than downloaded.

Sundance Consulting

Name: Deb Kalyn

Position / Role: Director of Business Development

Web Site: www.sundance.ca

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

We provide people with the ability to purchase our products online, hassle-free.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

We actually adopted e-business for increased cost-effectiveness. It's easier for customers to order online. We wanted to make interactions with customers as easy as possible and outside of regular business hours. We developed the transaction capability three years ago.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
   ___ Yes - please describe briefly.
   ___ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

Yes, we have goals for the next one to two years:
1) Outsource transaction processing so we can accept both Canadian and US currencies;
2) Take some of our pamphlets and convert them to PDF format to allow ordering them online; and,
3) Develop an e-learning module based on one of our pamphlets.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

We did a lot of research and talked to a lot of Web people and relied heavily on the advice that they gave us.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

The major challenge was choosing the right Web developer; figuring out who to go with. We wanted a Web site that we could edit and maintain ourselves.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

We look at the number of orders we receive on the Web site compared to phone-ins. Most of our business now comes in through the Web.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: Being able to market to our US customers is the main positive benefit.

Negative: Technology always has its challenges and sometimes fails.

Overall, the positives outweigh the negatives.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

We look at the actual business generated through the Web, but don't have a formal evaluation plan. We couldn't reach our US customers any other way.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

We have only one piece of advice – research your Web developer and the technology that they use. Make sure that the technology being proposed is main-stream.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

Anyone planning on going down the e-business route should take a course in Web development or read about it so you can communicate with Web developers; ask the right questions and communicate your vision of what you want to do.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

No, we're still learning.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's very important! It's always on!

WATMEC Waterloo Management Education Centre

Name: Dale Wilcox

Position / Role: President

Phone: (519) 886-4740

Web Site: www.watmec.com

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

Complimentary reports on our Web site draw people to our mailing lists. We have cut mailing and printing costs by about 80% by using the Internet to distribute our newsletter.

We have eight companies directly linked to the public side of the Web site and currently offer around 25 different assessments, only six of which are not available online (video-based).

Our latest service is online evaluations. Course participants now complete course evaluations online and there is an automatic 30-day follow-up with the participant and her / his boss to assess implementation of the training on the job.

Basically the Web site means an opportunity to market our products and services differently.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

The world was changing and we felt we should as well. We recognized the value of e-learning for learning support and transmitting knowledge and the role of the online facilitator for challenging the learners.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
      ___ Yes - please describe briefly.
      ___ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

No. We have developed our capabilities based on opportunities as they present. We continue to try and find new online e-business or e-learning capabilities that make sense for our business.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

Our application had to be user-friendly. We are in the people business; people-skills development and people-centred. A lot of our people are not techies; they like face-to-face contact.

The application has to fit the look and feel of my company. For example, we don't bug our clients. Therefore, we try to make it (contact with the client) the client's choice. Our key question is: "Does it fit how we work?"

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

Understanding the technology and its implications was and continues to be a challenge. We also experience some internal resistance to using online technologies because we have a long-established traditional approach.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

We look at the results. When we evaluate learning support services, we ask are they as efficient as the old methods? Also, are they making sense financially?

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: We are definitely saving on marketing costs. It also led to a new-found interest in e-learning as a complement to our face-to-face training.

Negative: It requires just as much and more work. Also, the move to online learning will probably wipe out parts of our business as competitors will put similar courses online for lower cost than we can deliver them face-to-face.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

We measure the cost benefit of online marketing.
For training we measure whether the assessments are still showing that people are learning as before (in the face-to-face format).

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

Just have lots of patience and money.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

Really understand what you want and be able to communicate that clearly to your Web developer.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

As noted above, just have lots of patience and money!

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

Our clients demand it!

WORKINGFaster.com Inc.

Name: Rita Vine

Position / Role: President

Phone: (416) 928-1405

Web Site: www.workingfaster.com; www.searchportfolio.com

___

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

Our business is Internet research skills training for business and information professionals. As part of our suite of product and service offerings, we deliver a program of online asynchronous courses on different Web research topics. We also sell an e-enabled Web-based enterprise search product, the Search Portfolio, which is a licensed desktop of the 100 top starting points for searching the Web, handpicked by information professionals and librarians.

The Workingfaster.com and Searchportfolio.com Web sites are key to marketing our services.

At the present time, we use PayPal for some of our payment processing from US clients. However, since almost all of our business is B2B (business to business), we are able to handle most credit card transactions over the phone or fax or e-mail.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

Two things led us to adopt e-business: 1) In the training marketplace, there was strong pressure to offer distance learning programs as well as our existing instructor-led programs; and, 2) In the Web search marketplace, customers were asking for continued access to our recommended Web resources. As a result, we developed an electronic Web-based product to do that.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
   ____ Yes - please describe briefly.
   ____ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

We have a formal business and marketing plan. The e-business part has evolved as part of our overall strategy in response to both client needs and available ubiquitous technology. However, technology is not a focus of our business plan. The technology is simply a means whereby Workingfaster.com makes its business happen. Our customers don't focus excessively on technology – just on getting things done.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

Our guidelines were largely partner-driven. For example, we developed our online asynchronous courses because we found a partner association that was interested in becoming involved in online learning.

On the product side, decision-making was based on existing marketplace standards, mainly for library use, and principally surrounding authentication of Web-based content products. We follow standards wherever possible. Authentication standards for electronic products are very important, especially when transactions are involved.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

Our greatest challenge was finding a Web developer capable of producing the Search Portfolio. A big part of the problem is that Workingfaster.com is staffed by managers and librarians, not programmers and it is a challenge to select and verify what technology is appropriate.

There were widely variable cost estimates for the work that was required. We received estimates ranging from $4,000 to over $100,000 based on the same specifications. There's also the problem of selecting a developer who was going to stick around for a while and be there to guide us through initial deployment and problem-solving.

On the education side we encountered challenges when making decisions on the appropriate technology to use for asynchronous courses, particularly those where an interactive component was required. We explored several resellers of Web-based teleconferencing and "Webinars" and found that many make unrealistic performance promises about Web seminars and voice over IP (VoIP) telephony.

Another challenge was discovered when marketing the same instruction program offered via both online and classroom delivery. We discovered that people expect to pay less for online courses than for face-to-face delivery; and they register later, which has compelled us to alter our practices on course cancellations.

On the matter of payment processing, finding a reasonably priced service to handle online payments in US dollars is an ongoing challenge.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

Our e-business initiatives are judged by two factors – lowering the costs of delivering service to customers and generating greater market reach.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: It has reduced training preparation and travel time for instructors. It has improved our capacity to deliver courses to remote geographic areas. Early indicators suggest that online courses have generated a larger percentage of repeat business than our instructor-led courses. The ubiquity of the e-program is a very important outcome.

Negative: It's very hard for a small business (even one that focuses on technology topics) to keep up with all of the technologies in use by our customers, which are changing constantly.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

It is difficult for a small business to accurately evaluate or quantify these benefits. We look at the revenue and the actual cost to deliver our online products. With an online product like the Search Portfolio, our ROI increases with every new customer signed on to the service. In addition recurring revenue from subscription renewals is an important factor in our ROI, as the costs to process a subscription are far lower than those required to get the initial business.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

One of the most important lessons we learned was to resist the allure of technology and to instead think about the audience. Carefully consider the technological capabilities of the customer. What are they comfortable with? What type of technology do they have? We have benefited from deploying at a low technological level to start and watching the results.

Those on the technical and development side are light-years ahead of even the leading-edge user community.

We have also learned to think about what our customers are truly buying. For most of our products and services, they are buying simplicity and time savings – just enough to save themselves some time. We're primarily in the business of saving time, not selling competencies.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

We were surprised to learn how much technical skill you required, particularly in html and basic programming, in order to direct e-business initiatives, Until you know at least a little bit about the technologies and information architecture, it would be almost impossible to effectively troubleshoot programming issues with outsourced developers. It would also be extremely difficult to judge the quality of outsourced developers without a minimum of technical capability.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

Developing an infrastructure for e-business is merely one part of the challenge. Gone are the days when "if you build it, they will come." Appropriate marketing is essential to help customers find you and your products. Although Internet marketing is not always the best way to proceed, entrepreneurs need to have some understanding of

search engine optimization and how to market using the Internet – they have to do some key words buying to have their Web site found by others.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's essential! We couldn't do our work without it.

Workplace Training and Services Inc.

Name: Judith Bond

Position / Role: Director

Phone: (416) 533-2456

E-mail: jbond22@rogers.com

Web Site: www.trainingforwork.com

---

1. What does e-business mean to your firm – i.e., what types of e-business initiatives, if any, is your firm engaged in? (If none, go to question 5.)

There are two things we do with our Web site. People can contact us directly through the Web site and they do. These are mainly queries and requests for information. We send people to the Web site when they are meeting us for the first time. We do the same when hiring a trainer. We ask them to look at what we do and tell us where they think they fit in.

The Web site helps brand our business although it is mainly informational. Requests come in from all over the world including researchers in the area of workplace education. For example, as a result of a request, we did an article on diversity in the workplace for a US magazine.

2. Why did your organization develop a capacity for e-business – i.e., what were the factors or circumstances that led your firm to adopt e-business?

It was largely serendipity. We didn't have a budget, but worked with a training group who developed our initial Web site. If you can work out a trade of services, go for it. We started relatively early and got a good Web address. We did a lot of research proposals and use the Web a lot for proposal development and realized early on the power that it gave us.

We are staying with our current Web site because it does what we need. We are mainly face-to-face trainers working with people who prefer face-to-face training.

Basically, we needed to do it (develop the Web site). We saw the value of having our information online and saw the need for a Web presence as important for our business.

3. Does your firm have a formal e-business strategy or plan?
    ____ Yes - please describe briefly.
    ____ No – How is your firm's e-business capacity being developed?

No. It's on our list to take another look at the Web site and its functioning.

4. What guidelines or "best practices" did your firm use as a benchmark or as a guide for developing its e-business capacity?

We used common sense. We used what we knew about clear language design to develop our framework for what we wanted. We looked at a lot of Web sites to find out what we liked and what we didn't like. We used the same best practices that we use in our regular business.

5. What are / were the major challenges or barriers faced by your firm in developing an e-business capacity?

1) Money – We traded content expertise for technical development expertise.
2) Time – We don't have an IT specialist or someone dedicated to the Web site.
3) Making sure the Web site accurately represents what we can do – transferring accountability to the Web site. We want people to come away with new knowledge as a result of visiting our Web site.

6. What criteria are used to judge the success of your firm's e-business initiatives?

We keep track of the kinds of questions and hits we get. We also use the Web site as a tool to help potential clients and others understand who we are.

7. In what ways, both positive and negative, has e-business impacted your organization?

Positive: It saves us a lot of time especially when recruiting trainers for particular projects. We need to have a Web site; to be online.

Negative: The costs are the only negative.

8. How do you evaluate / quantify the cost-benefit / ROI of your e-business capacity?

We don't formally. It's kind of hit and miss. We track interesting hits from the site. We have never taken a look at what might happen to our business if we closed the Web site.

Our Web site legitimizes who we are. Using the tools that are part of today's workplace puts us in today's workplace. This is a subtle message requiring the Web site.

9. Based on your experiences, what advice or "lessons learned" would you have for other education and training firms who may wish to develop or enhance an e-business capacity?

Keep it simple. Use clear language.

Don't use dated material. Make sure your online material doesn't stale date and is going to withstand time. Make sure your Web site is alive.

10. Are there any particular resources or references (books, Web sites, agencies, suppliers) that you found especially helpful and would recommend to others planning to develop e-business capacities?

Take a course on the technology to be able to talk to designers. Be very clear about what you are going to use the Web site for. Look at a lot of other Web sites. If you are going to be selling stuff, it will be quite a lot more complicated.

11. Is there anything else about your organization's use of e-business that you think might help other education and training firms develop successful e-business initiatives?

No.

12. How important is having a high-speed Internet connection for your business?

It's absolutely essential.