BLOGS AND WIKIS AND GEN Y — OH MY!

Technology's Impact on Training

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I n today's business environment, the winners who will emerge from the current economic downturn are those who can leverage the use of technology in every part of their organization. It used to be that technology was the responsibility of IT; now it's everyone's responsibility. With globalization and the demographic changes impacting our workforce (the YouTube generation), technology's impact on training is nothing short of transformational. No longer will we wait to go to class to learn new skills.

Trainers in the insurance industry must learn the new tools of the trade to interact and collaborate more effectively with today's learners. Subject matter experts need to take advantage of these technologies to efficiently transfer knowledge to the next generation. "Since Gen Y grew up on the Web, they're going to be the driving force behind the way the Web of the future is shaped. What Gen Y wants from the Web will be the Web." Learners young and old will be tested in this new Web 2.0 world. Those who will succeed will adopt a wide range of technical skills required in a wired world. How would you rate your "use of Web 2.0 technology" skills?

Talk the Talk

For those just joining the Web 2.0/e-Learning revolution, a few definitions might be helpful (all definitions are from Wikipedia, the examples help to illustrate the concept):

A **blog** (a contraction of the term "Web log") is a Web site, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. As of December 2007, blog search engine Technorati was tracking more than 112 million blogs. Insurance Information Institute blog: www.iii.org/insuranceindustryblog/.

A **wiki** is a page or collection of Web pages designed to enable anyone who opens it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community Web sites. The collaborative encyclopedia Wikipedia is one of the best-known wikis. Wikis are used in

business to provide intranets and Knowledge Management systems. In fact, you can up your own wiki – for free at www.wikispaces.com/

Video podcast (sometimes shortened to vidcast or vodcast) is a term used for the online delivery of video on demand. The term is an evolution specialized for video, coming from the generally audio-based **podcast**.

Are you smarter than a fifth grader? Well maybe not this one — check out this awesome Aussie "screencast" (a type of video podcast that follows screen activity) on how to set up a blog: http://michaelmagrath.wordpress.com/.

Asynchronous learning is a teaching method using the asynchronous delivery of training materials or content using computer network technology. It is an approach to providing technology-based training that incorporates learner-centric models of instruction. The asynchronous format has been in existence for quite some time; however, new research and strategies suggest that this approach can enable learners to increase knowledge and skills through self-paced and self-directed modules completed when the learner is prepared and motivated to learn.

Most colleges and universities who offer online learning courses use the asynchronous learning method and a learning platform (like www.blackboard.com) to manage classes and interactions of students and instructor.

Electronic learning (or e-Learning or eLearning) is a type of education where the medium of instruction is computer technology. No in-person interaction may take place in some instances. E-learning is used interchangeably in a wide variety of contexts. In companies, it refers to the strategies that use the company network to deliver training courses to employees.

The domain of e-learning with video production capabilities is now an effective way to deliver soft-skills training in the areas of customer service, negotiations, and critical thinking. One of the benefits of video is the ability to demonstrate appropriate behavior and techniques. The International Insurance Institute is in the process of creating interactive online video programs for their most popular classroom courses. These programs will offer a cost-effective means of participating in their highly popular courses from anywhere in the world.

The AICPCU/IIA is using electronic learning to deliver content from its suite of traditional certificate and designation programs. With more than 2,700 educational objectives (learning objects) identified in the curriculum, covering a wide range of technical insurance topics, the Institutes is repurposing course content into self-directed learning modules to cover technical insurance knowledge gaps quickly. www.aicpcu.org/comet/comet_index.htm.

RSS is a family of Web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works — such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video — in a standardized format. An RSS document (which is called a "feed," "web feed," or "channel") includes full or summarized text, plus metadata such as publishing dates and authorship. Web feeds benefit publishers by letting them syndicate content quickly and automatically. They benefit readers who want to subscribe to timely updates from favored Web sites or to aggregate feeds from many sites into one place. RSS feeds can be read using software called an "RSS reader," "feed reader," or "aggregator," which can be Web-based or desktop-based.

Business Insurance online has a brief description on how to get started with RSS technology: www.businessinsurance.com/cgi-bin/page.pl?pageId=273.

Old media is adopting new-media techniques to capture the attention of Gen Y. One example is "My Times," which consists of customizing a page to deliver the content a reader is interested in from the *New York Times*: www.nytimes.com.

The term **e-Learning 2.0** is used to refer

to new ways of thinking about e-learning inspired by the emergence of Web 2.0. From an e-Learning 2.0 perspective, conventional e-learning systems were based on instructional packets that were delivered to students using Internet technologies. The role of the student consisted of learning from the readings and preparing assignments. Assignments were evaluated by the teacher. In contrast, the new e-learning places increased emphasis on social learning and use of social software such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, and virtual worlds such as *Second Life*.

NBC's entry into e-learning includes their "iCue" Web site, a collaborative learning community that incorporates gaming, discussion, and video resources in a safe, student-friendly online environment. www.icue.com/.

A **social network** service focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services are Web-based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services.

The Society of Insurance Trainers & Educators (SITE) is launching its own peer-to-peer networking tool called "SITEconnect," where members can share resources that will help their organizations improve business results through learning. A big part of this new social network will be sharing Web 2.0 resources and educational materials that can be applied to learning in the insurance industry. SITE: www.insurancetrainers.org.

Enterprise 2.0 is a term sometimes used to describe social and networked changes to the enterprise, which often includes social software. Enterprise Web 2.0 sometimes describes the introduction and implementation of Web 2.0 technologies within the enterprise. Social networking capabilities can help organizations capture unstructured "tacit" knowledge. With tacit knowledge, people are not often aware of the knowledge they possess or how it can be valuable to others. Tacit knowledge is considered more valuable because it provides context

for people, places, ideas, and experiences. Effective transfer of tacit knowledge generally requires extensive personal contact and trust. Creating online internal social networks can help organizations capture this tacit knowledge.

So how do you embark on the journey to learning Web 2.0? As a Chinese philosopher once said, "A journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step." If you are not curious, become curious, because "only the curious learn . . . and only the resolute overcome the obstacles to learning." — Eugene S. Wilson.

Web 2.0 is everywhere! Every department within the insurance organization is seeing the impact of new technologies on their businesses. If you have been "tuned out" to this fundamental change in the business environment, then you're at risk of falling behind in your career and your business is at risk of losing ground to competitors. Gen Y employees entering our industry are going to expect to use the same types of tools at work as they used to learn through high school and college. Smart employers will adopt these new technologies to engage and retain these new entrants into the workforce.

"The Innovation economy is coming. It will bring sweeping global change that affects everyone . . . Those who embrace innovation and adapt quickly will win." — James Canton

As a professional in the claims industry, are you ready to embark on your Web 2.0 learning journey? Check out this free class to learn and apply some of the technologies discussed in this article: http://workliteracy.ning.com/. ∎

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