

Fiona Leteney

Feel the difference

Success comes from careful implementation

In my past few columns I have been reporting on feedback from the questionnaire published in May's edition of *e-learning age*. I have been gathering anecdotal evidence on how organisations are using the e-learning standards Aicc and Scorm for interoperability, and whether they have faced any challenges.

Today, I have two mini case studies to present.

Both organisations are experienced in the industry and wanted to transfer e-learning courseware from one learning management system (LMS) to another, but both had quite different experiences.

Case study 1

Huthwaite International is a well respected sales training organisation and was an early adopter of e-learning back in 2000. Before the term blended was invented, Huthwaite did it. Rob Taylor, the company's project manager, asked a content provider to create some courseware in Flash to add value to a four-day sales training course, with a view to reducing the number of days in the classroom. Understandably, clients did not want their sales people off the road for too long.

The blended approach was achieved successfully, although Huthwaite started by using one of the very expensive LMS's hosted externally by its content provider. As time went by, the company realised it did not need all the Rolls Royce functionality it had initially specified. Although the company was not using it, it was still paying for it. After two years, Huthwaite decided to transfer its existing content to another, more affordable, Aicc/Scorm compliant LMS.

This is one of the benefits of e-learning

interoperability standards. The ability, in theory, to interchange products relatively easily. We will see later that this is not always as straight forward as it seems.

When Huthwaite was relatively confident in the e-learning medium and could see its benefits to the business, it decided to host the LMS internally. Subsequently, it started to create its own content using a server-based authoring tool and learning content management system. This was an essential progression as being international meant content needed to be translated into half a dozen other languages.

Initially, there seemed to be a problem tracking the new content, but following support from both the LMS and authoring tool creators, Taylor admitted he had not included the right piece of code in the lessons that allowed scores to be picked up. Once that piece of code was added, the system worked fine.

Case study 2

My second case study shows a different experience. The learning and development department of a public sector organisation, which chooses to remain anonymous, had been using externally hosted e-learning quite successfully for a number of years. However, it wanted to integrate the LMS with the internal HR system so decided to buy-in an LMS and host it within the firewall.

Following some research, looking at both functionality and cost, the organisation decided to use the LMS provided by the same company that provided the HR system and classroom training databases. Although there were other products of a similar price and functionality, it was assumed, from the integration point of view, that using the same


software company would be most sensible.

The technology partner used by the HR/LMS supplier to install its systems had never previously implemented the LMS module and had limited experience with e-learning. Understandably, the supplier occasionally struggled and consistently referred to the manual for inspiration.

Finally, the system was set up but, unfortunately, went live without any Scorm tracking. It has continued this way for the past four months. Both systems and all the e-learning products were considered to be Aicc/Scorm compliant. So how and why did this happen?

The public sector organisation has now engaged an experienced e-learning company to try and sort out the problem. Without knowing the details, I cannot say for sure that this is what happened, but one issue that has tripped up a few people in the past is where the content is housed in relationship to the web server. I wait with interested to see how this case is resolved.

It is not only a matter of purchasing Aicc/Scorm compliant products, but there is also the need for organisations to employ experienced people to implement them. Huthwaite benefited from the support provided by its suppliers because both parties were e-learning companies first and foremost. Using big household name companies may seem a comforting way forward, but you should always check on what support is available by asking existing users of their e-learning products.

If anything strikes a cord in either of these case studies, contact me at: leteney@bizmedia.co.uk 

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