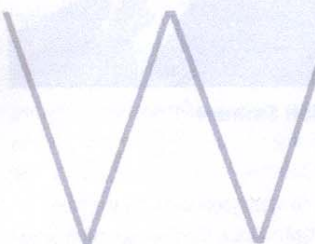


Fiona Leteney

It takes two to tango

As in other parts of life, communication is key to a mutually satisfying relationship.



With a column in a magazine I feel a little bit like Carrie Bradshaw the Sex in the City TV character. There are

some obvious differences: Carrie Bradshaw was a New Yorker and got to write about sex and relationships whereas the subject here is the e-learning standards for interoperability (AICC and SCORM). It isn't quite the subject I would chat about with three girlfriends in a Manhattan coffee bar or even a Salford Quays one for that matter. OK so here's the challenge, how to make e-learning standards interesting enough for you to finish reading the column and learn something too?

Carrie always starts the TV programme by setting herself a question. So here is mine created just so that you will finish the article: "Are there similarities between e-learning standards and sex?"

Strangely enough there are in fact more similarities than differences! Curious? Firstly are you an e-learning standards virgin? Well for the completely uninitiated, e-learning standards were developed to ensure that compliant courseware from any vendor could communicate with any compliant Learning Management System (LMS). In other words two entities communicating with each other; are you beginning to get my drift?

So having given it some thought here is my list of similarities:

- It is all about communication.
- Not everyone is experienced in the techniques.
- Experience matters.
- Not all the elements are needed every time, it depends on what is required.
- The communication is between two separate entities.
- Each entity has their own set of rules and requirements.
- The rules unfortunately can be interpreted differently.
- If each entity does not take account of the rules of the other – disaster can result.

See what I mean? It is this last point that I want to tackle now in more detail.

From the relationship point of view there are books and TV programmes that tackle the different rules that 'control' the behaviours of men and women. Knowing both sets of rules can help avoid a breakdown in communication and a strained relationship.

For e-learning standards and from recent experience I've realised that it is essential that Content and LMS Developers must know each other's rules. At the moment there is one LMS rule in particular, of which some content developers do not seem to be aware.

In SCORM 1.2 the LMS is required to set a lesson (or learning object) to 'complete' if no information is sent back to the lesson. However what happens if a student dips into a piece of content to have a quick look and exits almost immediately? If the content has not been written

with this LMS rule in mind and no data is sent back then the LMS is obliged to set the lesson to 'complete'. Reports will indicate that the student has finished the lesson successfully when in fact they have hardly even started; which obviously makes a mockery of the tracking system.

Yes I know it sounds ridiculous but for a LMS to be deemed SCORM compliant it must abide by this rule. Interestingly this is not a requirement of AICC content. However, it is easy enough for a content developer to provide a solution as long as they are aware of the rule in the first place.

My experience with the standards spans over five and a half years, during which time I've integrated a lot of content with a compliant LMS. However, if you are still sceptical and want to check out this requirement for yourself then the document to read is:

"SCORM_1.2_RunTimeEnv.doc - October 1, 2001 Page 3-26 under LMS Behavior".

So there we have it, there are similarities between e-learning standards and sex and the key one for the developer is "you need to know the rules that control the behaviours of both sides".

Another similarity on the list "Not all the elements are needed every time, it depends on what is required" is aimed at the e-learning buyer rather than the developer. How do you decide on what you need? Do you know what the options are? What questions do you ask those creating your content? Anyway that's a topic for another day so in the mean time, happy communicating!

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