

PathFinder RapidLearn: A new approach to courseware

As many of you know e-learning has become a large and fast growing market that drives more and more web development every day. As a company, we are often asked to build content that must inform, educate and certify skills in a compelling and creative way. Using PathFinder Portal Technology, a revolutionary new approach is available, that we call RapidLearn.

The Traditional Approach

Traditionally, the process of building courseware or e-learning content has been a sequential effort involving a team. The team typically includes a subject matter expert (SME), an instructional designer (ID), a web developer, and a project manager. Together these people design an instructional plan and follow a circular or “Waterfall process”. This process often has many checkpoints, review cycles, and testing cycles to ensure that the courseware is complete, instructionally sound, interesting and working well.

Challenges with this Approach

This approach provides many benefits:

- It ensures that your content is instructionally sound
- It closely involves the subject matter expert (SME) to keep content current
- It ensures that your resulting training, both works and tracks correctly, within your management system
- It ensures that your content uses the graphic standards, language, colours, and fonts of your corporate branding

Time is often the enemy of a training program. As time marches on, the business challenge continues to grow and often the training problem itself will change.

For example; suppose your job is to build a sales certification program for a major new product release. You need to reach out to large numbers of sales people and resellers quickly. But, you also know that six-to-nine months from now there will be an update release and probably new features and pricing. By the time you get your course published will it be out of date? Also, the product managers (SME's) are busy—how can you get enough of their time? You need them now.

This example is common in nearly every organisation. Sometimes the problem is product launch, other times it is a new regulation, a merger, or a major new corporate initiative. There are two aspects to the time challenge:

- **Time to build:** can I build the content fast enough to meet the business demand?
- **Shelf life:** will the content be current and relevant long enough to justify the investment?



Technology Integration Adds Time And Complexity

In addition to the time required to develop courseware, there is the time needed to integrate, test, produce and launch courseware. Some companies require integration courseware into their learning management system (LMS). This process alone takes weeks and sometimes requires specialised technology skills—even if the courseware is AICC or SCORM compliant. If the IT group is busy, this process may take 30 days or longer to complete.

RapidLearn is a whole new category of content that can be built in days. With RapidLearn, you can author content, using instructional templates, graphics, fonts, and images developed by AccessAcademy's Design Team.

Unlike traditional e-learning, RapidLearn programs can be developed so quickly that they can be considered disposable. If the business problem changes, you can afford to take them off line and re-do them easily.

RapidLearn builds on the established PathFinder Training Portal, competency assessment and tracking system in conjunction with Microsoft PowerPoint. This gives your subject matter experts the ability to use existing content in PowerPoint and we transfer this to flash presentations and add sound, assessments, and animations. With this approach, users familiar with PowerPoint can publish to the web in days. We provide your corporate templates and the only training you may require is some features of PowerPoint.

We enhance this with a similar approach by letting developers capture actual screen shots and mouse movements to quickly build instructional content focused on PC and web applications. Instead of telling someone how to use a software application, RapidLearn empowers our instructional designer to simply show them precisely what to do.

This tool follows a similar approach: give a Subject Matter Expert access to a simple, easy-to-use tool that enables them to build content quickly. Content is published in a Flash format and can then be modified and extended by our developers when necessary.

Our instructional designers and web developers still build templates, graphics, logo's and fonts that are shared among your content publishers. Actual content development is done by your subject matter experts, our web designers then transfer this to Flash within one working day, removing the bottleneck experienced with the traditional development approach.

What is the role of the Instructional Designer?

The biggest criticism of this approach comes from the traditional instructional designer. "You mean we are going to let subject matter experts develop their own training content? They have no background in instructional design. What if they just develop rapid "junk" that has no instructional impact?"

This is a fair criticism. However, in practice, what we find is that the instructional designers still play a critical role. In some organisations it is the ID who builds the templates, guidelines, and is responsible for the final edits to guarantee that content is effective and consistent. Subject matter experts need coaching and an outline to ensure that the content they build is easy to follow, jargon-free, and written in language easily understood by the audience. These guidelines should come from an ID and the web publisher.



AccessAcademy's role in the process is to build the templates, processes and coaching tools that let you build content quickly and effectively. Our role is also to add assessments and publish content that is developed quickly by others.

When do you use RapidLearn?

Does RapidLearn replace more traditional approaches to e-learning? We believe the answer is no. Used appropriately, RapidLearn provides a range of solutions to critical problems but does not necessarily fit for every instructional challenge.

Bersin & Associates have developed a taxonomy that they call The Four Categories of Training. We break all information, skills and problems into four types of solutions as shown below. Any given problems can be approached in one of these four ways, depending on the specific business challenge and audience being addressed.

In this example, we look at four ways of handling a price change for the new Mini. Depending on the audience you are trying to reach and the goals of your program, you can approach this problem in four different ways:

Information Broadcast

Quickly tell everyone about the price change. You may not be interested in educating them about pricing in general, but it is critical to get the information out quickly. Perhaps it is the approach to use with sales managers. In this approach, often e-mail is enough or perhaps a conference call. RapidLearn fits well here.

Critical Knowledge Transfer

Quickly tell everyone about the new pricing, and make sure they read and understand it. In this case, perhaps targeting sales people, we want to know that each member of the audience understands the new price change. We would add an assessment, for example, to make sure the audience read the material and track who did not complete the material. This is perfect fit for RapidLearn.

Develop new skills

In this case, we want to make sure that individuals not only know that we changed the price, but also understand the entire pricing structure. In this approach, we teach the audience (perhaps authorised discount managers) about pricing in general, how the pricing structure works, and how to apply these skills to the new Mini pricing. This type of program warrants a traditional training program- either in a classroom or using more traditional development techniques.

Create Certified Competencies:

Finally for some audiences (perhaps product pricing managers) we may want to certify or measure that these individuals clearly understand the current and complete pricing approaches, standards, and practices. For this kind of certification program we want to develop skills, assess



them carefully and make sure they are current. This type of program is usually a blended program and may involve RapidLearn, traditional training, simulations, and exercises.

The important lesson here is that for any business problems you may use one or more of these approaches. RapidLearn then will be used, regularly and may replace or simply supplement other approaches.

How does e-learning affect our Organisation?

This new approach will have a dramatic effect on your organisation. If you are in a training function, you now have a new set of tools to use. You can start using the "Four Categories" approach to segment your training into categories and apply rapid techniques to time critical problems.

If you are an ID, these techniques free you to think more broadly. You should be developing templates, processes for editing publishing content, and creating a taxonomy and approach to decide when to use blended or other approaches.

How can I learn More?

We are a competency assessment and blended learning brokerage. This product is a culmination of two years development work from our original Training Management and Online Competency Assessment Tool – PathFinder.

RapidLearn is an exciting breakthrough. We look forward to working with you to develop your success in this fast growing new area.

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