

2002

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Simonson, Michael, "Online training in an online world" (2002). *Fischler College of Education: Faculty Articles*. 132.
https://nsuworks.nova.edu/fse_facarticles/132

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

Online Training in an Online World

Michael Simonson, Co-Editor

Co-Editor

Curtis Bonk just released the results of an interesting and comprehensive study on online learning in the training sector, titled "Online Training in an Online World." This study complemented a study reported on in 2001, titled "Online Teaching in an Online World" that dealt with the educational community. Bonk's study is quite complete and the results reported are interesting to those involved in managing and delivering distance education.

The study was conducted during the late spring of 2001. Surveys were returned by 201 corporate trainers, instructional designers, training managers, and Chief Learning Officers. Respondents represented a broad range of industry types who were active members of training or online learning programs.

The survey confirmed that the Web is flourishing as a training delivery mechanism, even though it was reported that interest in e-learning significantly exceeded commitment to it. Respondents noted various organizational support and cultural resistance problems that were inhibiting the adoption of e-learning in the private sector. Barriers identified by Bonk included perceptions of high cost, need for extensive instructor training, limited technical support, and a general lack of bandwidth and

hardware. Many indicated that their organization was outsourcing aspects of their online training, most often the content and delivery system, and were blending online training with face-to-face instruction.

Respondents expressed a high demand for tools that fostered interactive feedback and assisted in assessing the online learner. Also considered important were instructional experiences that were relevant, interactive, and offered the learner choices. Student exploration in courses, case-based learning, and problem-based learning experiences were thought to be effective instructional approaches. Inappropriate activities for online instruction were discussions, lectures, role-playing, and group discussions.

Motivational techniques were also examined in Bonk's study. Effective motivational strategies were job reflections, team projects, and guest mentoring. Less favored were social icebreakers, peer reviews, and display of learner projects online.

Respondents felt that the demand for web-based training would escalate, and that there would be important and significant increases in offerings of web-based training. Cost efficiencies and positive returns on investment

were credited for training organizations moving into online instruction. Interestingly, most of the organizations represented by the survey's respondents did not conduct formal evaluations of their online courses or programs, and those that did used mostly low level satisfaction questionnaires. Finally, many expressed dissatisfaction with low course completion rates.

Bonk's sizable paper is available online, and is loaded with interesting and valuable information for the corporate trainer involved in online instruction. It is highly recommended.

It is also important to acknowledge Les Moller, the guest editor for this issue of the

Quarterly Review of Distance Education. Dr. Moller has worked for almost a year to put together an outstanding issue. You will enjoy it. Those interested in editing an issue of the Quarterly Review should contact the editors with a prospectus that indicates the theme, 6-8 possible articles, and potential contributors.

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