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eLearning - *An Effective Way to Build Sales Skills*

Introduction

The expression "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water" holds a warning for those thinking about eLearning. The power of eLearning as a vehicle for learning and skill development is unparalleled. eLearning provides access to learning that in other circumstances might be totally inaccessible. eLearning has the potential to be the educational equalizer — fast, up-to-date, and effective. In addition, it provides immediate access and does not take users away from their clients or desks for large blocks of time.

But even though eLearning satisfies many needs of today's learners, it still is not meeting everyone's expectations.

Why isn't eLearning achieving its extraordinary potential?

We feel there are three key factors:

1. The quality of much of the eLearning available has been disappointing. Much of the product is no more than "page turning," similar to what is found in electronic books. With a few exceptions, electronic books are a poor excuse for a good hard-back or soft-back book or training materials because electronic books lose the training impact.
2. Often there has been no strategy for successful implementation, promotion, or feedback.
3. The over-hyped, over-promised Silicon Valley dream has contaminated almost everything connected with a dot.com.

But if we let the dust of the imploded dot.com eBusiness model blur our vision to the enormous potential of eLearning, we will deprive ourselves and our learners of the most important learning resource available to them. There have been few real revolutions in learning, but eLearning is certainly one of them.

By creating the right vision of eLearning, training departments can lead the way. They

can use eLearning as the vehicle for continuous learning, improvement, reinforcement, and self- and managerial coaching. There is a lot of good content available. The key is to create the best eLearning training methodology. It is not the content so much as the medium that constitutes the revolution. Good eLearning actually makes for better, clearer content.

Here are the rules we have used to deliver eLearning in the sales and sales management world that has proven to be easily accessible, high quality, high impact, and used enthusiastically by learners.

eLearning rules

- **Interactive** — effect behavior change
- **Substantive** — real core content, not watered down
- **Modular** — bite-size chunks
- **Crystallized content** — clear learning points for each module including both bad and good choices so that learning is reinforced
- **Intuitive** — easy to navigate
- **Enriching** — include an enrichment section comprised of brief lectures, examples, and/or takeaway tools
- **Integrated/blended** — relevant and linked to non-eLearning curriculum as appropriate

eLearning allows trainers to become coaches by letting them focus on application. It puts the responsibility of learning in the hands of the learners. It blends with full seminar training, fills curriculum gaps, and at times, substitutes for classroom training altogether. Most importantly, it lets classroom time be used to maximize human interaction to apply new information, develop skills, and coach as opposed to just delivering a boring lecture. eLearning changes behavior. It lowers costs. It allows users to never stop learning and improving.

We used our eLearning as part of our accredited Consultative Selling course at a top-tier Ivy League business school in 2001. The results were consistent: 100% of the students preferred the blended solution and given the choice would not take the course without the combined components. 51% went through the eTraining more than one time. Using eLearning before and after the course allowed us to shorten the number of classroom days, increase the number of students from 15 to 20, and increase interactivity.

The benefits of eLearning are clear. eLearning offers a new, more effective way to learn.



