



Unexpurgated Raw first draft: "The Author's Cut"

Implementing E-Learning

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Promotion

Promotion means getting the word out to prospects and consumers. The objective is to inform, persuade, or remind consumers about a product's attributes and availability.¹ Direct promotion includes personal selling, meetings, in-person demos, direct mail, direct email, and telemarketing. Indirect promotion involves publicity, newsletters, advertising, contests, and sales promotions.

Marketing is part of the job description of each of the 13 members of the Aspect Communications Learning Center. Creating a program or sales tool is only part of one's activity. Promotion is required to complete the job. Every Monday, team members submit a project plan that includes a section on marketing. Project managers describe upcoming marketing activities, such as writing an article, placing a banner ad on the intranet, offering gift certificates as prizes, publishing testimonials, or using direct mail.

How much should you invest in promotion? Think of it this way. If 20% of your people are not participating in a \$2,000,000 eLearning effort because they didn't know about it or weren't convinced it was for them, you're leaving at least \$400,000 on the table. But that's looking at it from a cost-basis. You don't go to the trouble of developing eLearning in order to break even. You're expecting a payback several times the amount you're investing. So maybe you're leaving \$1,000,000 in potential benefits on the table. Recognizing that real life is never this simple, wouldn't it be worth \$100,000 to put the full-court press on the non-participants in the form of publicity, email, hoopla, and a good sales pitch. Many companies wimp out, leaving it to memos and managers to spread the word. That's crazy. If your goal is increasing corporate profits, a dollar spent on publicity that brings more learners into the fold is just as well spent as a dollar invested in instructional design or computer hardware.

Proctor & Gamble invented product management and is renowned for its marketing expertise, so it's hardly surprising that P&G takes a marketing approach to eLearning. They enlist the help of the marketers when creating mailings and posters. ("Put the benefits up front.")ⁱⁱ

Timing

Launching a new program with lots of hoopla is easy. Maintaining momentum is hard. So many companies make the mistake of treating eLearning like a new baby in the house. There's celebration and a kick-off party. And then there's let down as eLearning fails to reach the unreasonably high expectations set for it. When senior management has spoken about how great it is, some employees will be trembling with fear that it may not work for them.ⁱⁱⁱ

When a heavily promoted effort fails, tomorrow's learners write off all eLearning as a flash-in-the-pan. Better to introduce eLearning as a business process with sustainable value. Use the hoopla when excitement wanes, not at the front end, when it's hardly needed.

Push/pull

A basic issue in the marketing design is whether we want the customer to come to us or we want to go to the customer.

When I was growing up, our family bought brushes from a door-to-door sales person, the Fuller Brush man. He came to us to sell his wares. Fuller was using what marketers call a "push" strategy.

In the same era, Saturday morning television shows were sponsored by cereal and hot chocolate companies. Kellogg's Sugar Corn Pops! Sugar Pops are Tops! N-E-S-T-L-E-S; Nestle's makes the very best; chaaaaaacolate. Kellogg and Nestle lured us to come to them to buy their products. They advertised heavily, a classic "pull" strategy.

K-12 schooling is push; independent study for a doctorate at Oxford is pull. eLearning can be marketed by push ("At 8:00 a.m. this Tuesday, all employees will take a mandatory program in work safety.") or by pull ("Learn what you need to do to be proficient in your job. Here are your choices.")

Laurie Bennett told us that most eLearning at Intel was self-directed. People are intrinsically motivated, so a primary marketing issue is keeping them informed of what's available. Her group has used the Intel intranet, distribution of articles, and demos to the training manager counsel to publicize learning opportunities. This is archetypal Pull.

On the other hand, making participation in eLearning a prerequisite to receiving a promotion is heavy-handed Push.

Typically, people love to buy but hate to be sold. Intrinsic motivation is stronger than imposition. Doing your own thing is more motivating than doing someone else's.

Describe the spirit of your intended promotion strategy. Is it “push” or “pull”? How does it mesh with your corporate culture?

Communications

A good marketer uses a variety of media to convey the message to consumers.

Convene the group that will be responsible for communicating with learners for a brainstorming session. Ask the group to brainstorm ideas for communicating with learners before, during, and after eLearning.

You probably came up with quite a list. Did it include newsletters, press releases, video interviews, local demonstrations, new-hire orientation, sales meetings, in-house advertisements, brochures, endorsements from grads, posters, table tents, small group sessions, live talks by managers and execs, voicemail, email, direct mail, contests, and previews of coming attractions?

What should you include in communications with learners? You'll remember to focus on your target segments and be true to your brand identity. Beyond that, you need to communicate about results. The half-dozen most important things to communicate to learners are:

1. What's in it for me.
2. What's in it for me.
3. What's in it for me.
4. What's in it for me.
5. What's in it for me.

6. What's in it for me.

Here are some of the means you will probably use to communicate with eLearners and others in the organization:

Icon and Tagline

An icon is a graphic symbol that can effectively characterize an organization, a project, or a product. Taglines are two or three word phrases that define and describe in order to add meaning and inject a sense of spirit. Together, they function as a clearly defined unit that speaks for the project.

Posters & Give-Aways

Visual information and physical reminders are critical to winning and keeping the 'hearts and minds' of the key stakeholders.

Briefing Kit

Face-to-face meetings are an essential part of the communications process. To ensure a consistent message is being delivered briefing kits are particularly useful.

This kit is typically composed of stand alone modules that can be mixed and matched to meet the needs of a particular target audience.

A typical kit might include: instructions on it's use; tips on running a Q&A session; frequently asked questions and answers; the business case for the project; the project's link to the corporate strategy; the vision and mission statements; anticipated company and personal benefits; videos; handouts; etc.

Newsletter

The written word is a powerful communication tool.

... point about P-G, communicate in a form they are used too....

All written communications though need to stand out from the other corporate communication vehicles. They should provide regular updates, stories, and interviews that highlight aspects of the project.

In addition, other topics might include: Q&A schedules; roll out schedules; names and profiles of key team members; lessons learned; relevant articles; glossary of terms; etc.

Videos

"If a picture is worth a thousand words, a video is worth millions"

Some would say that even more powerful than the written word are images and sounds that create an experience and draw viewers in. A series of videos might

be used to present the project's vision, keep it alive over time, and personalize the benefits for key stakeholders.

Specific videos might be developed to: present the business case in everyday words and pictures; provide the 30,000 foot view and then the 10 foot view; show the benefits; and, validate the benefits through 'person-at-work' interviews.

Demos

Since the underlying premise of e-learning is that technology enables greater efficiency and effectiveness, it can also be used powerfully for communication. For example, as e-learning becomes available an email could be sent out with key "marketing messages" about the benefits of the e-learning and a link to a website running a walk-through of e-learning in action.

Company Events

The ongoing company events - everything from town hall meetings to yearly status reports to weekly staff meetings - provide other forums for getting the message out about the project, the prototypes and the roll out.

This may seem like a no-brainer, but be sure your prospects are able to receive the communications you send them. A major insurance company was preparing to roll out eLearning to thousands of agents. Some agents had operating systems two generations back; others lacked sound capabilities. Many could not play a CD-ROM. These days, numerous firms are providing free PCs to agents and partners to insure they are compatible. Savings in printing costs more than pay for the hardware.

Promotion Tips

This is Business

Be clear that eLearning is a serious business endeavor. It is not a perk. It is not optional. It is not entertainment. Rather, it's a new way of doing business, it is required of those who expect to succeed, and it is expected to generate a profit.

IBM's Karen Kocher has seen 50 company eLearning programs in the last couple of years. Every winner introduced eLearning as a serious, new business initiative. The best sustain participation through continuous communication campaigns. Some have put tent cards on the tables in company cafeterias. Others send newsletters. One company advertised their learning programs with announcements stuffed in pay envelopes.

Channels. Retailing. What image forms in your mind? When I hear *retailing*, I used to think *store*. Then I attended a senior management pow-wow for top

retailing executives. They talked about integrating the store, the catalog, the call center, direct mail, and their online presence. Retailers generate profits by taking advantage of all the channels they can to stay in contact with potential customers.

Never assume that everyone receives messages the same way you do. A new corporate university had spotty attendance. When we snooped around as to why various employees were not taking part, we heard excuses like:

- “He doesn’t read his email.”
- “She checks our intranet about once a month.”
- “He never looks in his in-box.”
- “Her assistant screens out all routine messages.”

Just enough. When inviting people to participate in eLearning, keep in mind that you don’t have to tell the whole story. A short, crisp note can pack more punch than pages of course descriptions. Less is more.

Get blogged. Blogs (weblogs) are frequently “updated websites of personal ideas, thoughts, musings, news, information, or discussions of what one has eaten for breakfast.” They are informal, rapid-fire, and they have attitude. Macromedia just set up five blogs for sharing information with customers. “The important items -- the best Flash examples, the most interesting tips, the most pernicious bugs -- are passed through the developer community at blog-speed, which can be quite fast. The unimportant stuff isn’t passed around as quickly -- which of course is just how it should be.”^{iv, v}

Test, test, test. Direct mail/email are satisfying because it’s easy to track results. When you are ready to make a major announcement, test your invitation on a few dozen people first. Gauge their reactions. It is absurd to invest tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of dollars developing an eLearning program, only to have it fail because consumers didn’t receive the right message. Your time cannot be so valuable that you can’t find thirty minutes to improve the draw of the invitation to an event. Merely changing the subject line of an email or the first paragraph of a direct-mail letter can double their effectiveness. This is why direct marketing professionals advise you to make every mailing a test. The market tells you what it likes and your approach gets better and better.

Testimonials. Britney Spears endorses Pepsi, Michael Jordan praises Nike, and Bob Dole likes VISA. I don’t care. I don’t know these people. But if my neighbor tells me a new restaurant is great, I’ll probably give it a try. If a colleague extols the great deals and convenient flight schedules of Jet Blue airlines,

that's probably how I'll get to New York next time. We trust endorsements from people we know.

In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell talks about social mavens who have the ear of not the average thirty contacts but more like five hundred. Find these personally-networked individuals and treat them to preview courseware. Take testimonials from anyone who will give them. Videotape interviews with participants and their bosses; stream the tape on your intranet. Create a tape loop of testimonials and play it during conferences and sales meetings.

You might consider recruiting an **in-house sales person**. This sales person's role is not simply to maximize revenue. The eLearning sales person would not become HR's equivalent of the Avon Lady, knocking on doors in hopes of making a hit. More of the time would be dedicated to bosses than learners. In addition to presenting the product face-to-face, the eLearning sales person would make service calls, act as a high-level help desk, and investigate unmet needs.

"Coming attractions." NCR already had a satellite communications system into its domestic branch offices that became the backbone for NCRU-TV. Like attending a movie, the main show is screened after previews of coming attractions.

Training process leader Dan Gillis told us that Hershey Foods has had great success with **Lunch & Learn** sessions. Thirty or so people get together for an extended lunch break (an hour instead of 45 minutes) for eLearning show and tell, an introduction, and testimonials. Buzz from these sessions becomes contagious. Hershey also makes this eLearning pitch and introduction available as an agenda item for department meetings.

Open houses. To drum up business, NCR University conducts open houses (called "Open Days" in the U.K.) These events combine demos, refreshments, a reception, and contests to draw up to 80% of the employees in a given location to look at new developments at NCRU. Usage inevitably skyrockets following each open house. The more remote the office, the higher the level of participation in open houses.

What gets measured gets managed

Stu Tanquist, President, Express Learning, tells of a client who needed to increase utilization of an e-Learning program, which was a mandatory requirement designed to meet government regulations.

"Despite the organization's best efforts to increase understanding, communicate benefits, and promote accountability, they struggled due to a lack of buy-in from all levels of the organization.

In partnership with senior management, we established quarterly expectations and designed reports that illustrated completion rates by unit, manager and senior manager. The data was grouped to provide a side-by-side comparison within the management groups and to highlight those groups that were not meeting expectations. For example, a manager could view the "Manager Comparison Report" to see how he/she ranked in relation to the other managers. Within that manager's grouping, the report clearly communicated which areas of responsibility were falling below expectations. The different reports were respectively distributed to the units, managers and senior managers, including the CEO, on a quarterly basis.

This approach created both internal competition and accountability. Priorities shifted as employees, supervisors and managers strove to improve their rankings to 'beat the competition,' and to meet the increasing expectations of their superiors. As a result, the entire organization finished the year with a 94% completion rate."

Practical How-To Advice

You may have been wondering who's going to do all these marketing activities. It's not as if you can call your ad agency or a direct marketing company to market eLearning. To get things done, you're going to have to do a lot of them yourself. This is not as difficult as it may at first seem, particularly if you have a creative flair and can-do spirit.

In the upcoming sections, we are going to share the how-to advice we follow ourselves on:

- Writing advertising with impact
- Writing persuasively
- Igniting "buzz"
- Creating direct mail and direct email
- Selling your ideas

Wisdom from the greatest copywriter ever known

John Caples^{vi} is a legendary copywriter. For nearly fifty years, he wrote highly persuasive mail-order ads. David Ogilvy, author of *Confessions of an Advertising Man* and "At sixty miles an hour, the loudest thing you hear is the ticking of the electric clock" (for Rolls-Royce), says John Caples taught him most of what he knew about writing advertisements.

It is notoriously difficult to measure the impact of a Superbowl commercial or a billboard but direct mail it's ridiculously easy. In nearly fifty years of writing direct mail advertisements, Caples measured the effectiveness of every one! To

Caples, every ad is an opportunity to experiment. Why run one version of an ad when you can run two and learn more about what makes some ads work and others fail? Some ads are twenty times more effective than others that look very similar. Caples's classic book, *Tested Advertising Methods*, sets out to "explain the scientific principles of advertising that have been learned by advertisers who know by actual test what kind of advertisements sell the most goods, what headlines attract the most readers, which publications are best, and what kind of advertising illustrations and layouts are most effective."

If you want to write persuasive copy for a living read the book. If you need to get the word out in a convincing manner, take these principles to heart:

1. What you say is more important than how you say it.
2. The headline (the subject if it's email) is the most important element in most advertisements.
3. The most effective headlines appeal to the reader's self-interest or give news.
4. Long headlines that say something are more effective than short headlines that say nothing.
5. Specifics are more believable than generalities.
6. Long copy sells more than short copy.^{vii}

How to write persuasively

The most persuasive words in our culture are you, money, save, new, results, health, easy, safety, love, discovery, proven, guarantee. Use them.

Writer's block? Get into practice with this advice from Natalie Goldberg.^{viii}

- Keep your hand moving.
- Don't cross out.
- Don't worry about spelling, punc, grammar.
- Lose control.
- Don't think. Don't get logical
- Go for the jugular.

Want to improve your style?^{ix}

- Use strong verbs
- Detail!
- A specific always beats an abstraction
- Describe people and places in terms of motion
- Anglo-Saxon words are usually more effective than Romance-language-based words
- Look for likenesses, parallels, contrasts, antitheses and reversals
- In the second draft start deleting adverbs
- Borrow widely, steal wisely

How to ignite free word-of-mouth advertising (buzz)

Word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool. *The Anatomy of Buzz, How to Create Word-of-Mouth Marketing*, reports that two-thirds of people buying Palm organizers heard about them from another person. Friends and relatives are the number one source of places to visit, flights, hotels, and rental cars. Hollywood spends hundreds of millions of dollars promoting new movies but most consumers take the advice of people they know.^x

Why is word-of-mouth particularly important these days?

Noise. We receive more than a thousand printed and broadcast advertising messages every day. We tune them out to retain our sanity. But we don't turn out what we hear personally from friends and colleagues.

Skepticism. When a vendor speaks, our crap detectors go into overdrive. Only a third of the public believes software vendors. Drug companies? Less than a third. Car manufacturers? Less than one in five. And only 16% believe what they hear from an insurance company. Is it any wonder people turn to fellow humans for trustworthy advice?

Networked. We are wired. If you live in San Francisco and you're looking for a job, an apartment, a used lawn mower, a videocam, or advice on virtually anything, you tap into Craig's List, a free community bulletin board that has replaced the want ads. When I look for something esoteric in Berkeley, I ask for it in the Berkeley Conference on the WeLL. I used to have a personal network of maybe a hundred people; today there are a thousand people on my email list. Twelve thousand different people visit my web site every month. Anyone who wants to can connect to a large number of people.

Both bad and good referrals travel far and wide. Over the past five years, I've been the catalyst for hundreds of people buying Olympus cameras, Sony computers, and InfoSelect software. They have read the reviews on my website. Dozens of people have written to share their dissatisfaction with their DSL provider after reading my online screed, "Adventures with my monopoly ISP." (Search for "monopoly ISP" on Google, and my site tops the list.)

Half of the Fortune 500 have encountered complaint sites on the web. How many people have read the likes of starbucked.com, chasebanksucks.com, and AOLsucks.com. Untied.com has become a clearinghouse for complaints about United Airlines. The site has posted 4,091 complaints and received responses from United on 76 of them. We're not suggesting that disgruntled employees will set up a complaint site to critique your eLearning, just that when

something is very good or very bad, the word travels very quickly. The grapevine is automated.

What can you do to take advantage of buzz? Seed your messages at strategic points in the informal communication network. Give the word and maybe a sample to the natural talkers in the organization, the people who command respect and have large networks. Host sneak previews for influentials.

Many learning initiatives roll out all at once. This doesn't give buzz a chance to circulate. Roll out eLearning to groups most likely to be enthused about it, and give them a chance to spread the word.

Emanuel Rosen, the author of *The Anatomy of Buzz*, offers these six rules for buzz:

1. Keep it simple. Short, straightforward messages based on current beliefs have a better chance of replicating themselves.
2. Tell us what's new. Fluff doesn't travel well in the networks.
3. Don't make claims you can't support. Learning is not always easy.
4. Ask learners to tell you what's special.
5. Start measuring buzz. Ask learners what they'd heard in advance of their eLearning.

Listen to the buzz. Keep your ear to the ground and your eyes on the email.

Direct mail (and email)

The best advice on how to create compelling direct mail was written by Robert Collier, who sold books by mail during the Depression. Though written in 1931, Collier's advice withstands the test of time:

Find the thing your prospect is interested in and make it your point of contact, instead of rushing in and trying to tell him something about *your* propositions, *your* goods, *your* interests.

When you come down to it, isn't the prime requisite arousing in your reader the feeling that he must have the thing you are offering, or that he cannot rest until he has done the thing you are urging him to?

But if you want to sell goods, if you want action of any kind, base your real urge upon some primary emotion.

You know every man is constantly holding a mental conversation with himself, the burden of which is his own interests--his business, his loved ones, his advancement. And you have tried to chime in on that conversation with something that fits in with his thoughts. Look for news value!

The old gentleman who resigned from the Patent Office in 1886 because, as he said, everything had been invented, had nothing on most of us. There are times when we all begin to feel that mechanical equipment is about as perfect as man can make it.

Getting your reader's attention is your first job. That done, your next problem is to put your idea across, to make him see it as you see it--in short, to visualize it so clearly that he can build it piece by piece in his own mind as a child builds a house of blocks...

There are six prime motives of human action: love, gain, duty, pride, self-indulgence and self-preservation. And frequently they are so mixed together that it is hard to tell which to work on more strongly.

There is just one reason why anyone ever reads a letter you send him. He expects a reward. That is the key to holding his interest. All through your letter you keep leading him on, constantly feeding his interest, but always holding back something for the climax.

Every good letter contains these six essential elements:

1. the opening which gets the reader's attention by fitting in with his train of thought and establishes a point of contact with his interests, thus exciting his curiosity and prompting him to read further.
2. the descriptions, which pictures your proposition
3. the motive or reason why, which creates a longing in the reader's mind by describing--not your proposition but what it will do for him--the comfort, the pleasure, the profit he will derive from it
4. the proof of guarantee which established confidence
5. the snapper or penalty, which gets immediate action by holding over your reader's head the loss in money or prestige or opportunity that will be his if he does not act at once
6. the close, which tells the reader just what to do and how to do it, and makes it easy for him to act at once.

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost.
For want of a horse, the rider was lost.
For want of a rider, the battle was lost.
For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost.
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.^{xi}

For want of a persuasive announcement, many learning initiatives have foundered. When you have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in eLearning - or even a mere ten thousand dollars - it pays to refine the words you use entice people to participate. Until you've written and rewritten a direct mail/email invitation at least five times, you haven't tried very hard.

Dear Sir: Will you do me this favor?

Think of every property you could possibly desire in such a product or service. Think of everything you would like to have it do for you. Work out the ultimate ideal, then write a letter that stresses every desirable point of that ideal product. (Next day, cross out those that you can't claim.) Your job is to build a picture in his mind's eye of what he will get from your product or service.

Focus. Less is more. Email has worked best at Proctor and Gamble in recruiting people for learning. Rather than mail-blasting the world, they target their mailings very selectively. Recently they emailed only associate directors in the U.S.; another time it was only a certain level of management, no admin and tech people. Throughout P&G, email must be approved if it is being sent to a distribution list rather than a handful of individuals. Managers only receive a couple of emails a day from within all of P&G! Microsoft is in a stark contrast. They reportedly send each employee a thousand internal emails a year inviting them to training events; that's five invitations a day! No wonder those emails get scant response.

How to Sell

If you want consumers to buy your product, you're going to have to sell. The Learning Center at Aspect Communications recognizes that it had to sell employees on the rewards of training. When Aspect rolled out a new approach to learning, the Learning Center staff held demo parties at facilities around the globe for all employees to learn about the new e-Learning offerings. Daylong affairs, the demo parties featured food, drink, and prizes. People could drop by for a look at what's new or attend a group event. About half of Aspect's employees took part. In a similar vein, the Learning Center conducted a Sales Resources Fair at the firm's Global Sales Meeting and the sales training organization regularly holds contests of the month to promote new initiatives.

You don't have an eLearning sales force but some obstacles are only overcome by selling someone your ideas. Successful selling is a matter of perseverance and attitude. Sales trainer Larry Wilson counsels sellers that, "It comes down to caring about your customers. My purpose: I help people get the feelings they want -- soon." People don't buy our services, products, or ideas. They buy how they imagine using them will make them feel.^{xii}

Selling is incremental. Big sales are built on little sales. Psychologist Robert Ornstein writes that if people are asked to contribute to a good cause, twenty percent of them will.

Too trivial? Most people would balk at planning a 6' x 8' sign in their front yards. However, if you first convince them to put a 3" x 5" card promoting the beauty of California in their front window, a couple of weeks later, most of them will agree to put up the large sign.

When Jim Jones was recruiting support from well-heeled business people in San Francisco's Financial District, he would ask them to contribute to a good cause and that "even a penny would help;" sixty percent gave. Would they mind putting stamps on ten envelopes and mailing them? Eventually these people gave Jones tens of millions of dollars.

Frankly, if you run the numbers you might find that hiring a few inside eLearning account executives has a higher payback than broadening the curriculum.

Overcoming Obstacles^{xiii}

Senior executives from a variety of industries reported these barriers to implementing eLearning:

1. Time employees have available for training
2. Cost versus value
3. Difficulty in measuring results
4. Quality of learning content
5. Perceived difficulty of using such a system
6. Technology infrastructure
7. Internal resistance to using technology instead of face-to-face learning

Forum concludes that these factors are critical for eLearning success:

1. **Collaboration:** Technology should provide access to content *and* other people.
2. **Integration:** Learning solutions must be based on proven principles of adult learning that leverage multiple delivery media.
3. **Relevance.** Embedding learning into work processes results in significant and sustainable performance improvement for both the individual and the business.
4. **Fundamentals:** In their haste to adopt eLearning, some companies lose sight of the fundamental principles of adult learning and focus more on the technology involved. Technology, or any other deliver medium, is a means to deliver effective learning and not an end in itself.

Here's a Murphy's Law scenario. Let's follow a group of new hires who are eLearning to be customer service reps. What outcomes might we expect?

- 30% don't register or begin "compulsory" eLearning (ASTD, 2001).
- 20% experience technical difficulty (virus, connection, blue screen of death, no headset, etc)
- 10% are interrupted while trying to work at their desks and never return
- 20% hit a roadblock in the material they cannot overcome. If mentoring is an email that takes a day to respond, they drop out in frustration.
- 20% drop out because the content is irrelevant or redundant.
- 20% drop out because learning is a low priority compared to "real work." Managers reinforce this.
- 30% of what might be learned is squandered because people have not learned how to learn.
- 50% of what learning remained atrophies before being put into use. "The Forgetting Curve."

What's left? $70\% \times 80\% \times 90\% \times 80\% \times 80\% \times 80\% \times 70\% \times 50\% = 9\%$. Less than a tenth cross the finish line.

The selling task is to overcome these obstacles. You reverse engineer the problems to arrive at their solutions.

Obstacles come in two flavors. 1. Misunderstandings, which you overcome with explanation and clarification. 2. Conflict, which you resolve by going up a level to identify common interests.

Researchers tell us people are reluctant about eLearning because:

1. Didn't like it the first time.
2. Dislike change.
3. eLearning is not as good as a live workshop.
4. Don't want to go it alone, in isolation.
5. Prefer off-site workshops.
6. Added workload.

Here are some suggestions on how to clarify these misunderstandings with alternative points of view.

Didn't like it the first time.

"I don't like movies. I saw one last year. It stunk." Crazy? Of course. Movies are not all the same. There are good ones; there are bad ones. Some eLearning is good; some is bad. You can't judge either movies or eLearning from a single encounter.

Dislike change.

Like it or not, change is inevitable. The whole world is changing. Business is moving at an ever faster clip. You need to learn more. You

need to process information flying at you from all directions. eLearning is to help you keep on top of things. eLearning is a way of coping with change, not some useless waste of time.

eLearning is not as good as a live workshop.

“Watching football on television is not as good as sitting in the stadium watching the real game,” you say. Maybe so. But if you don’t watch televised games, you’ll miss a lot of your team’s away games. Without taped games, you won’t see games that take place while you’re tied up with other things. And what are the odds of getting good tickets to the Superbowl every year? Similarly, eLearning gives you a ticket to participate in distant workshops, to learn things on your own schedule, and to take part in events you could not afford to participate in live.

Don’t want to go it alone, in isolation.

Buying textbooks doesn’t mean the learning is all going to take place between the learner and the books. Classes, labs, and lectures accompany most textbooks. A computer is like that; it doesn’t shut out human contact. We’ve found it worthwhile to learn things at the computer with a buddy right beside us. We help one another over rough spots. And it’s simply more fun to include collaboration with others.

Prefer off-site workshops.

Off site workshops are great for thinking outside of the box, getting away from the day-to-day trivia of the office, networking with others in the organization, and maybe getting in a game of golf. A beach resort in Florida guarantees a full house in the dead of winter in New England. Off-site workshops are not particularly useful for learning about new products every other month, or certifying everyone in compliance with a new government reg, or learning a new programming language. eLearning isn’t a universal cure-all. Some places it’s great, others it’s unthinkable.

Added workload.

For most people, eLearning is more rapid than traditional learning because you can skip over what you already know and focus on what you need to learn. In the early days of eLearning, many companies expected to gain from shifting learning from workshops held on company time to at-home self-instruction conducted on employee time. This shortsighted approach usually backfires, increasing resentment more than it increases knowledge. It’s great that the people who would have been studying at home anyway now get electronic support. It’s not wise to try to force people to learn on their own time.

Overcoming the Knowing/Doing Gap^{xiv}

Why don't managers and employees fail to do what they know they should? And what can they do to close the gap and start executing?

Don't let precedent or memory substitute for thinking. No particular practice, in and of itself, is sacred. What is constant and fundamental are some basic business and operating principles.

Teaching is a way of knowing, and so is doing the work, trying different things, experimenting. As David Sun of Kingston Technology said, "If you do it, then you will know."

A number of years ago, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman talked about the virtues of a "ready, fire, aim" approach to running organizations. This principle of acting even if you haven't had the time to plan has two advantages. First, it creates opportunities for learning by doing. Without taking some action, without being in the actual setting and confronting the actual "part," learning is more difficult and less efficient because it is not grounded in real experience. Second, the idea of "firing" and then "aiming"—or doing and then planning—helps to establish a cultural tone that action is valued and that talk and analysis without action are unacceptable.

Actions, even those that are well planned, inevitably entail the risk of being wrong. If a company fails to provide "soft landings" for failures, people will so fear risk that they will become paralyzed. That is why firms that are better able to turn knowledge into action drive out fear. They don't go on missions to find who has erred, but rather attempt to build cultures in which even the concept of failure is not particularly relevant.

Fight the Competition, Not Each Other. The idea that the stress of internal competition is necessary for high levels of performance confuses *motivation* with *competition*. It is a perspective that mistakes internal competition and conflict, accompanied by a focus on "winning" internal contests, for an interest in enhancing *organizational* performance and winning the battle in the marketplace.

Organizations tend to measure outcomes instead of processes. We know what the quality of our outputs is, but we don't know why it is so good or so bad.

Leaders of companies that experience smaller gaps between what they know and what they do understand that their most important task is not necessarily to make strategic decisions or, for that matter, many decisions at all. Their task is to help build systems of practice that produce a more reliable transformation of knowledge into action ^{xv}

Packaging

People do judge a book by its cover. They judge software by the appearance of its box. Marketers are paying an increasing amount of attention to packaging their products. Once a functional wrapper or container for the product, packages today are billboards that identify and sell the product.

Keep the look of your packaging consistent. You want to reflect the consistent quality of the learning experience. You want to make it obvious that all these elements are part of the puzzle. Look at the graphic images of the major brands you come in contact with every day. FedEx, McDonald's, Shell - they are always precisely the right color. They are always perfectly rendered. You can recognize that Coke is "the Real Thing" from a block away. Express your image in the most professional manner possible.

Some eLearning managers have drawn the invalid conclusion that because learning is intangible, packaging doesn't matter. *Au contraire*. The fewer opportunities to show the product's package, the more important the package becomes.

Name Your Price

Employees pay a price for training even if it's offered for free. They may not pay in dollars but they always pay in time.

Non-marketers often make the mistake of thinking that price is related to cost. Indeed, governments are notorious for granting "cost-plus" contracts.

In a competitive environment, the optimal price is that which generates the highest long-term profit. Cost doesn't enter into the equation except that price better be enough to cover cost and reasonable profit over the long haul. Indirectly, cost is a factor because it determines the price floor of the competition, although either you or your competitors can initiate a relationship with a loss leader.

Time > money

Let's get into the shoes of our consumer, the learner. Sally wants to brush up on SPIN selling.^{xvi} She took a three-day workshop on SPIN two years ago, but her recollections have grown fuzzy and she thought she might want to use it in a call on an important customer next week. Here are her options. If you were Sally, which would you choose?

SPIN workshop	3 days
Buy & review SPIN book	3 hours
Take eLearning module on SPIN	2 hours

Watch in-house video of sales manager summarizing SPIN	20 minutes
Ask colleague in next cube what he remembers about SPIN	10 minutes

Here's the way Sally looked at it:

SPIN workshop	3 days	No time for this
Buy & review SPIN book	3 hours	A hassle. Also a non-reimbursable expense.
Take eLearning module on SPIN	2 hours	No, need brush-up, not the basics again
Watch in-house video of sales manager summarizing SPIN	20 minutes	Yes! This is what Sally will probably do.
Ask colleague in next cube what he remembers about SPIN	10 minutes	Maybe he has forgotten the key message -- or didn't get it right the first time.

- ⁱ Mark Clemente, op cit.
- ⁱⁱ Larry Greene, Proctor & Gamble
- ⁱⁱⁱ Karen Kocher, IBM
- ^{iv} Blogging Goes Corporate, Wired News, May 9, 2002, <http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,52380,00.html>
- ^v Jay Cross, "Blogs," Learning Circuits, April 2002. On the web at <http://www.learningcircuits.org/2002/apr2002/ttools.html>
- ^{vi} John Caples. (1974). *Tested Advertising Methods*, Fourth Edition. Reward Books.
- ^{vii} David Ogilvy in John Caples, op cit. page 1
- ^{viii} Natalie Goldberg. (1986). *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*. Shambhala Publications.
- ^{ix} from Oakley Hall. Quoted on Jay's writing page at jaycross.com
- ^x Emanuel Rosen. (2000) *The Anatomy of Buzz: How to Create Word-of-Mouth Marketing*. Doubleday Currency.
- ^{xi} Benjamin Franklin
- ^{xii} Larry Wilson and Spencer Johnson. (1986). *The One Minute Salesperson*. Quill.
- ^{xiii} David E. Simmons, The Forum Report: E-Learning Adoption Rates and Barriers, The Forum Corporation, Boston, 2000
- ^{xiv} Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton. (1999). *The Knowing-Doing Gap*. Harvard Business School Press.
- ^{xv} Synopsis in part from [MeansBusiness](http://www.meansbusiness.com). On the web at <http://www.meansbusiness.com>.
- ^{xvi} SPIN is an acronym for Situation-Problem-Implications. Developed by Huthwaite Group. See Neil Rackham. (1988). *SPIN Selling*. McGraw-Hill.