

LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

# Keeping Up With the **PACE OF CHANGE**

By Paula Ketter and Ann Pace



There have been a multitude of changes in technology in the last 10 years, and that has sparked major changes in learning design and delivery. Where will mobile learning end up as a training tool, and what role will the virtual classroom play in the future of learning?

Technology suppliers have had a pulse on these changes and have made major strides in helping learning professionals find efficiency and effectiveness in their learning by using these new paradigms.

### ○ **Element K**

More than ever before, there is a craving for blended learning, mobile learning, social learning, and improved accessibility to learning (technology-enabled learning), according to Dave Snider, senior director of marketing for Element K. That desire for more technology-based learning channels has kept suppliers on their toes in the last several years, forcing them to find new and innovative ways to meet market demands.

One of those new innovations is “Real World Blended Learning Subscriptions,” a solution that is designed to reflect how learning professionals implement training in the real world. The subscriptions are made up of multimodal content, delivered via portals. Users have access to more than 2,200 e-learning courses, with corresponding instructor manuals, student workbooks, and delivery guides.

“There are postclass support tools that are delivered online in hundreds of different topical areas, including professional and management development, desktop applications, web and media design, and entry-level information technology skills. It is a way of addressing a learning need in a world where blended learning has a big advantage, because you don’t have to spend all of your time in the classroom or online. Learning professionals are responsible for delivering the training, and this product gives them a lot of good guidance and a lot of flexibility in how to do it.”

A new mobile learning platform that incorporates leadership and sales-related content—because those are the audiences determined to benefit the most initially from mobile delivery—will be delivered optimally on mobile devices as part of a customer’s subscription. The content is “unlocked” for mobile delivery through a new Element K

Mobile Learning Enablement service, established to remove the burden of setting up and administering mobile learning technology for Element K content subscribers.

Social learning and improved accessibility to technology-enabled learning are accommodated through a more robust LMS. “We have evolved the administrative side of our learning management system, which is called KnowledgeHub, to be able to configure the student site to allow for more customization, such as highly flexible home page design, or grouping students in certain ways to facilitate optimal messaging,” Snider adds. “We combine that with what we call ‘single sign in’ so if users sign in to their corporate intranet, they can have a button that gets them to their learning instantly. This is not new—we have made enhancements over time—but the concept of getting people to their learning very quickly and easily to do exactly what they need without a lot of barriers has been a focus of ours.”

To meet customer expectations and stay on top of the ever-changing technology landscape, Element K works with clients to understand their needs, test different concepts, and beta-test solutions before they hit the market. A customer advisory council helps Element K with customer analysis on products and services.

### ○ **Intellum**

According to global e-learning provider Intellum, knowing where the learning technologies industry is moving and developing products that meet customer expectations as they evolve is critical to supplier success.

“Economic conditions over the past couple of years have brought a tremendous amount of uncertainty to companies,

which has in turn been passed on to suppliers,” says Chip Ramsey, Intellum’s co-founder and CEO. “These circumstances, combined with the proliferation of cloud computing, are creating a world in which long-term contracts and lengthy implementations are no longer practical.”

Ramsey notes that while social networking and mobile learning are hot topics today, next year may bring new trends, so suppliers must learn to anticipate such trends and adapt quickly. “What makes today’s environment different is that the barrier to entry is being increasingly lowered, which in turn will allow new suppliers to emerge, forcing everyone to innovate,” Ramsey adds.

Intellum serves hundreds of clients with students located in more than 50 countries and in operations including manufacturing, finance, media, real estate and construction, security, retail, healthcare, telecommunications, and consumer goods.

Part of Intellum’s role as a supplier is to provide its many clients with best-in-class learning technologies. One way the company is fulfilling this role is with its fully hosted, on-demand learning management system Rollbook, in which customers have shown a growing interest during the past year.

Ramsey explains Rollbook’s unique features that distinguish it as a best-practice LMS platform. “Rollbook allows companies to pick a monthly plan (based on user count) and then literally sign-up and begin utilizing the system within minutes instead of months. Better yet, there are no contracts or long-term commitments required. Customers are billed on a monthly basis and have the flexibility to scale up or down, or even cancel at will.”

As far as the future of learning technologies, Intellum is optimistic that it is primed and positioned to deliver valuable solutions that will satisfy emerging customer needs.

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“While it’s difficult to predict exactly what the specific technologies will look like, it’s almost certain that they will enable greater communication and collaboration across the organization,” Ramsey notes. “The most encouraging thing about the learning industry is that while the technologies will continue to evolve, the fundamental need to learn has and will always exist.”

## ○ Great Circle Learning

Changes in the learning profession are keenly seen in the learning technologies arena, where social, mobile, and informal learning has become all the rage. Great Circle Learning—creator of training document development platform LeaderGuide Pro—takes a unique approach to such change, claiming that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

“Increasingly, we see companies bringing trainers back into the learning scenario—even in the virtual environment,” says Nancy Michaels, executive vice president of Great Circle Learning. “But placing trainers back into the mix isn’t enough. To be effective, trainers need to know exactly what they must say and do, along with when, where, how, and why.”

Great Circle Learning has responded to this customer trend by expanding its LeaderGuide Pro family of products to include E-LeaderGuide Pro, which allows trainers to create and use consistent, professional e-leader guides in their virtual training sessions.

Michaels explains that as trainers continue to play a significant role in the new learning frontier, LeaderGuide Pro will evolve to meet their needs. “Like LeaderGuide Pro Plus, our new E-Leader software prompts for important information, facilitates content chunking, and provides visual cues to build leader guides that are clear, thorough, and easy to use in live training sessions—virtual or traditional.”

## ○ Intrepid Learning Solutions

The technology boom has changed the way people socialize, collaborate, and learn, and that has certainly kept suppliers busy as they attempt to keep up with the changes and the pace of those changes.

“The new now of business requires efficiency and effectiveness, so there is a greater focus on doing things better and at a lower cost,” says Brian Taliesin, director of product management at Intrepid Learning Solutions. “More consumer technologies and experiences are being brought into the workplace, so the traditional way of providing training is no longer acceptable.”

Taliesin admits that this technology growth has increased

suppliers' responsibility in showing customers how to use products and services more efficiently and effectively in the workplace. "I think the suppliers should be contributing to the overall conversation by providing research and thought leadership," he adds. "I don't think we have the luxury of Apple—who can just put an iPad out there and expect people to figure out what to do with it. It shouldn't be technology for technology's sake. We should be looking at the business reason or business context surrounding the product or service. We should be showing how the people, process, and platform interact to create the most successful outcomes."

A few years ago, Intrepid realized that there was a need to allocate instructors and materials efficiently and cost-effectively, so it created "the Intrepid Scheduling System." There was also a need to reduce travel, so Intrepid revamped its virtual classroom services to help clients make their remote learning events more effective.

Technology will continue to change at a rapid pace. New devices or new ways to use those devices for learning will continue to move learning into a whole new paradigm.

"From the back-end computing component, I think there is going to be a lot more in the area of semantic search engines coming into the learning organization," Taliesin adds. "Corporations are no longer going to have to spend hours typing in metadata, descriptions, and other components with regard to content. In the next two years, computers are going to be able to read through those materials and do a collaborative search that will recommend continuous learning and expert assistance to the user."

Learning professionals are already transitioning from being the experts on topics to being the facilitators of knowledge.

"My sister is a teacher of gifted students near Kansas City," explains Taliesin. "A long time ago she told me that her role is to help her students discover new pathways to knowledge. I think learning organizations are already starting to transform to become more harvesters and farmers of information, not classroom presenters. I see Intrepid helping those organizations transform from reactionary training organizations into agile learning organizations."

## ○ Learning Tree International

Training can happen anytime, anywhere, thanks to learning technology suppliers such as Learning Tree International, a hands-on training provider that caters to management and IT audiences. Since its beginnings in 1974, Learning Tree has watched the learning industry change in significant ways and has developed products to respond to this evolving environment.

"Innovative technologies have extended the training environment beyond the classroom walls so that online participants can fully participate in real-time instructor-led training," says Nicholas R. Schacht, Learning Tree International's president and CEO.

Schacht explains that to determine customer engagement, develop relevant courses, and create best-practice learning technologies, Learning Tree captures feedback from its stakeholders through a combination of Level 1 and Level 2 course evaluations, market surveys of topic preferences, and detailed customer focus groups that discuss key elements of the company's products and approaches.

"In addition to our proven course development practices, Learning Tree has always been at the forefront of developing and applying new technologies in the classroom to improve learning effectiveness and efficiency," Schacht adds. Examples include the MagnaLearn instructional enhancement technology, Learning Tree's RealityPlus immersive management courses, and Learning Tree AnyWare, an online training solution that connects participants to a live classroom.

Schacht anticipates that the need for organization-wide communication and collaboration across disperse, multinational teams will drive a greater business demand for innovative training technologies in the future. "The next generation of live, online training will incorporate enhanced audio and user-controlled video streams to better connect participants to the live classroom and to each other.

"Learning Tree is now pioneering the use of technology-enabled learning support processes, using tailored information systems to monitor and track learner application of new knowledge and skills in the workplace. We expect this approach to become easier and more transparent as workflow processes and systems evolve and become more integrated in the workplace. Finally, we expect cloud computing to increase the availability of all types of training to learners regardless of geography."

## ○ What will the next 10 years bring?

The pace of change in technologies has been overwhelming for some in the learning profession. Just as we began to understand what mobile learning could do for just-in-time informal learning, social media exploded onto the scene.

Learning professionals need to stay current with the tools and technologies, because the new generations in the workplace are going to expect it.

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*Paula Ketter is editor of T+D; pketter@astd.org. Ann Pace is an associate editor for T+D; apace@astd.org.*

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