SAMPLE CHAPTER

From *Using E-Learning*

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CHAPTER 1: THE POTENTIAL OF E-LEARNING

E-learning has been hailed as an educational breakthrough, a true synthesis of humanism and technology, the way learning will take place in the 21st Century, and the complete replacement for the obsolete classroom. Reports of 2000% return on investment have some executives swooning in their corner offices. Classroom instructors are writing their resumes and e-learning entrepreneurs are counting their stock options.

Yet the world of corporate training goes on much as it has for hundreds of years. People congregate in rooms to listen to and watch an instructor dispense wisdom.

Initial experiences with e-learning have shown all rational beings involved that (1) e-learning has enormous potential and (2) it is not a panacea. Corporate executives and managers are ready for a realistic, common-sense approach to deploying e-learning within their organizations. They demand to know the details and insist on looking behind the curtain. Investments in e-learning must pass the same gauntlet of concerns as other projects clamoring for organizational resources. This book will help you propose e-learning solutions that stand up to the critical scrutiny they are likely to receive.

Using E-Learning for Organizational Purposes

This book is about using e-learning, not just doing e-learning. E-learning works best as the means to an end, not as an end in itself. The cry of "Let's do some e-learning!" now draws a resounding reply of "Why?" Why indeed. For e-learning to make economical or educational sense it must be targeted to specific objectives.

Training managers, even zealous e-learning advocates, are recommending more of a surgical approach to e-learning deployments. Rather than promising to replace all conventional training with e-learning within six months, they now suggest targeting the 25 percent best suited for e-learning and ramping up an additional five or ten percent a year. Few talk about conducting all training by e-learning and many now gush over blended solutions that mix e-learning and conventional methods.

Managers seeking to employ e-learning today must do so with eyes wide open. They must take a realistic view of what e-learning can and cannot do for their organizations, its employees, and its customers. They realize that e-learning projects must be anchored on specific performance objectives that stem directly for sanctioned organizational goals.

The design, development, and delivery of e-learning must proceed with those corporate goals in mind. Projects will be evaluated, not based on smiley-face feedback cards, but on whether the original business goals were accomplished and the contribution of e-learning to those goals is clear.

E-learning can also be used to accomplish corporate objectives that could be accomplished by other means as well. The movement to e-learning can, however, may provide the necessary excuse or a catalyst for changes that you have wanted to make all along.

Redefining E-Learning As a Tool

There are key ideas about e-learning that need special emphasis, either because they correct widespread misconceptions or because they further the more sophisticated use of e-learning required to fulfill its promise. These key ideas include:

E-learning is not just courses. E-learning can be packaged in units other than complete courses and can be embedded in, blended with, and infused into other efforts. E-learning lets us deliver mini-courses, micro-courses, and nano-courses as we strive to develop truly reusable training components.

E-learning is not always a noun. E-learning is sometimes a verb, that is, a process. Sometimes it is an adverb, that is, a way of doing things. E-learning is not a particular program or a single technology. It is, however, a way of using tools and technology to effect learning.

E-learning is a collection of processes and technologies, which can be embedded in existing organizational systems and activities, including classroom training, online Help, performance support systems, and knowledge-management efforts. We can consider e-learning as a constituent in such efforts rather than just a standalone project.

E-learning is a solution in search of a problem. E-learning seldom works well when it is the end rather than the means. Organizations must focus on the ends of training before selecting e-learning as the means.

What E-Learning Can Do

The accomplishments of even early, crude e-learning projects are impressive. E-learning can accomplish many different corporate, learning, and personal goals. It is important that we understand the potential benefits of e-learning so that we can choose the ones to initiate and sustain our e-learning project. In this segment, I briefly identify potential benefits of e-learning. In subsequent sections of this book, I show how to achieve these benefits.

Note: In this book, when I say that e-learning can offer some benefit, I mean that the right type of e-learning, if well designed and executed, can accomplish that benefit. I do not mean to imply that just doing something in e-learning guarantees that result.

For the Organization That Uses E-Learning

E-learning offers an array of benefits to organizations that use e-learning to train their employees and customers. Some of these improve bottom-line profits

directly while others make long-term contributions to the intellectual capital of the organization.

Increase Sales

By making free or low-cost e-learning courses available to customers, an organization can attract and retain customers. The offer of free training will attract potential customers to the organization's Website and entice existing customers to renew contact. Such courses, by better educating customers on the use of products, can inspire trust and demonstrate the value of advanced features available through upgrades and add-on products. Making such substantive training available can win attention in the industry and demonstrate a progressive public spirit.

Internal training can increase sales too. By reducing the time required to train an entire sales force, e-learning will enable the organization to get its products to market sooner and hence have a longer sales cycle. Better trained sales representatives can more fully answer questions from customers and are more likely to sell newer, more advanced, higher-margin products.

Increase Speed and Flexibility

To thrive in business today, organizations must be nimble. They struggle to bring products to market quicker. They must rapidly adopt new methods, find new markets, and shed old biases. Such shifts require periodically training masses of people. E-learning can be deployed to the whole organization at once and does not require booking auditoriums, making travel reservations, or training large numbers of trainers.

Improve Workforce Performance

By improving knowledge, skills, attitudes, habits, and methods of workers, e-learning makes the organization more effective and more efficient. But any form of training could do that. E-learning can be especially effective when it provides just-in-time, just-enough, just-for-me learning that keeps learners on the job more of the time and that enables them to quickly identify and fix problems that hold up production or lead to costly errors.

Reduce Time-Off-Job for Training

In many complex, rapidly changing businesses, employees must spend considerable time in training. Time off the job is a major drain on the effectiveness of their organizations. E-learning can help by providing custom-tailored training that requires less time to take, by eliminating the time required to travel to the site of training, and by breaking training into short segments that learners can fit among their regular work duties.

Recruit and Retain Better Employees

Even in tough economic times, recruiting and retaining the best employees is hard. Salary is not the only reason talented individuals choose one company over another. Other reasons include concerns like potential advancement, work hours, and ability to spend time with family. E-learning can provide the training

people need to advance while not requiring unnecessary travel that would require overtime for them to complete a backlog of work or require them to spend more time away from their families. These reasons apply especially to overworked, stressed-out, travel weary corporate trainers.

Initiate and Nurture Knowledge-Management Efforts

Training educates individuals. Knowledge management educates the entire organization. By providing universal access to uniform, high quality training, e-learning becomes a powerful tool for knowledge management. And because e-learning uses some of the same computer and network technologies such as electronic libraries, best-practices databases, and competency assessment, it can readily form the core of an organization's knowledge management efforts.

Advance Targeted Individuals

Many organizations seek to advance targeted individuals within their ranks. These organizations may be trying to fill critical vacancies for managers or technical staff. Or they may be trying to redress inequities in the number of women and minorities in higher positions.

Because self-directed e-learning does not require a quorum of students to form a class and does not require waiting for a class to begin, it is ideal for helping targeted individuals acquire the advanced skills and knowledge they need to advance rapidly without having to sacrifice the time on the job they need to gain the experience and credibility their new positions will require.

Support Those with Disabilities

Many organizations in the U.S., Canada, and Europe are struggling to make their job positions available to those who suffer from common disabilities such as deafness, blindness, or mobility limitations. In the U.S., the federal government and organizations that do business with the federal government are required under laws and regulations such as Americans with Disabilities Act, the Telecommunications Act, and the 1998 amendments of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act to provide equal access to job positions and information technology resources for those with disabilities.

E-learning, with its ability to use multimedia and to interface with assistive technologies such as screen readers, helps make training accessible to many more than could benefit form classroom training. The anonymity of e-learning also lets those with disabilities choose whether to reveal their disability to the instructor or fellow learners.

For the Training Department

Training departments benefit, in their own ways, from a shift to e-learning. E-learning can help them operate more efficiently, train more effectively, and position themselves more appropriately within the larger organization they serve.

Cut the Costs of Training

The ability of e-learning to cut the costs of training is well documented. Reductions in costs of 50% or even 90% are not hard to find, especially when training a large number of people who would otherwise have to travel to take the training and who already have computers and network connections. E-learning eliminates the need for travel and greatly reduces facility costs.

Train Neglected Learners

Not everyone has access to classroom training. Not everyone learns effectively in the classroom setting. E-learning can provide an alternative for delivering training to:

Remote learners who cannot afford the time or cost of travel to attend conventional training

Busy learners who cannot fit a conventional class into their schedules

Learners who travel and cannot be at the site of training when it occurs

Shy learners who fear embarrassment by an aggressive instructor or classmates

Learners with language difficulties who cannot understand a fast-talking instructor and who are self-conscious about speaking out in class

Learners with disabilities

For all of these learners, e-learning can provide an alternative that fits their abilities, schedule, and budget.

Revitalize Classroom Training

Far from killing off classroom training, e-learning is adding new life to this venerable institution. Web access from the classroom adds a wealth of resources, stimulates interactivity, and supplies current information to make each classroom session different from the last. And collaborative media like e-mail, chat, and discussion forums extend conversations well beyond normal class hours.

Revamp the Training Department's Image

In many organizations, the perceptions of the training department are years or decades out of date. Often training departments are perceived as technophobic reactionaries whose primary method of delivery involves hour-long lectures spoken in a monotone in front of overhead transparencies each sporting exactly five bullets. E-learning forces the organization to take a fresh look at training and the department that produces it.

Implement Instructional Strategies

E-learning is highly flexible and theoretically agnostic. The constraints of the classroom format or students expectations for the form of training may have limited your use of training strategies or discouraged you from employing better models of learning. E-learning provides a new opportunity to do it right. And e-learning offers new ways to monitor effectiveness so you can quickly adjust your designs and document your successes.

Become a Profit Center

Many training departments are using the shift to e-learning as an opportunity to redefine themselves as profit centers within their organizations. Because e-learning can be delivered less expensively and tracked automatically, training departments find diminishing resistance to shifting from an overhead model to a charge-back model of accounting the costs of training. Some departments are exploiting e-learning's ease of delivery to make their e-learning courses available to their customers, vendors, and industry groups for a fee. Needless to say, jumping from the cost to the revenue column on the organization's balance sheet does wonders for the stature of the training department within the boardroom.

Align Training with Business Purposes

Some training departments are going further. They are using the movement to e-learning as a chance to align their efforts with the basic goals of their organization. By anchoring e-learning projects to clear, sanctioned business goals and by carefully tracking results, these departments demonstrate their direct contribution to the organization's goals.

For Organizations Selling Training

E-learning offers new business opportunities for organizations that sell training. These may be training and consulting firms or internal training departments that are accounted profit centers.

For organizations providing training in esoteric fields where there is little competition, e-learning offers vast new markets. Training providers are not limited to geographic regions. They can provide training to 24 time zones as easily as to one classroom. They can offer training 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Because the delivery costs of e-learning are low, training providers can recoup their investments by training ever larger numbers of learners.

Some organizations, however, are finding that in their market they cannot make money selling e-learning courses directly. Either their potential customers are not ready for e-learning or the number of potential learners is not high enough to justify developing e-learning courses. Still, such organizations are finding a place for e-learning in their business model. Some use it to promote their existing offerings. They may provide a short e-learning course for free on their Web site. Such a loss-leader draws people to the site and lets them sample the quality of training available form the firm. At the end of the free e-learning course, learners may be invited to enroll, for a fee, in the vendor's classroom courses.

Other organizations are using e-learning to add a competitive edge to their existing offerings. They may use e-learning to preview the classroom course or to provide a job-aid to help learners apply what they learned in the classroom to situations they encounter back on the job.

For Trainers as Individuals

Classroom instructors have reacted in a variety of ways to e-learning. Some have welcomed it as the next evolutionary step while others have expressed fear,

loathing, disgust, disdain, or indifference. While many fear that e-learning will eliminate their jobs as stand-up teachers or eliminate what they enjoy most about that job, most are coming to realize that e-learning can make their jobs easier, more rewarding, and potentially more lucrative.

Reduced Tedium

Even the best instructors tire of teaching the same course over and over again. They pray for a student to ask an original question and even welcome the rush they get when the projector bulb burns out. E-learning can take over those tedious duties of teaching routine material. E-learning does not get bored or impatient. It does not wonder to itself, "Why can't these people understand this material? I've explained it 138 times already!"

Liberated from teaching routine factual and procedural matter, the e-learning instructor can focus on interacting with learners in creative games, role-playing exercises, and other activities that benefit from the instructor's technique and experience.

Reduced Travel

As an instructor, your first few out-of-town training assignments may seem like a paid vacation. After several years of frequent travel, you are begging your boss not to make you leave frozen Minnesota to teach for a week in Hawaii. A request to go to Paris prompts you to threaten resignation.

Many instructors cite the requirements for frequent travel and time away from their families as a major drawback of their job. Several training managers have confided that the burnout rate for trainers who travel is two or three time higher than for those who can hug their family every night.

E-learning can eliminate the need for instructors to travel to the site of training. I have conducted training for learners in Stockholm without having to leave my house in Boulder, Colorado, at a savings of two travel days and a whole lot of jet-lag. And because trainers and facilitators can be anywhere, they can more easily squeeze in vacations and other personal time. When asked why he was interested in e-learning, a corporate trainer replied, "To get a life."

New Careers

Many classroom instructors are in search of new careers. They love teaching, but do not want to move into the management of training. E-learning offers another career track where they can apply their communications skills and their knowledge of instructional design. E-learning is a new field rife with opportunities to break new ground. Creativity counts for more than seniority, a melodious voice, or a pretty face.

For Learners

For learners (and those who pay the costs of their training), e-learning offers a more efficient and convenient way to acquire skills and knowledge. Some of the advantages for learners are:

Less time required for training. Properly designed e-learning, supplemented with multimedia, can teach more efficiently.

More time spent learning. With e-learning, learners just log in and go. They do not have to drive to the airport, fly across the country, rent a car, check into a hotel, grab a few hours sleep, drive to the training center, park the car, find the room, and wait for the class to start.

Pace tuned to the learner. E-learners control the pace of their learning. They can go as fast as ambition or curiosity impels them. They can repeat difficult sections they want to master fully.

Training tailored to personal needs and interests. Learners can choose which topics to study in detail and which to skim. They can skim a topic at the beginning of a course and then come back and study it more carefully once its value becomes obvious.

Training more easily fit into a busy, irregular schedule. E-learning can be taken anywhere there's a computer connected to the Internet. Learners can learn while in their offices, in a corporate training center, from home, or from a laptop in a hotel room while traveling.

E-learning especially benefits motivated learners striving to meet their own business or personal goals.

For Users of the Organization's Products

E-learning enhances the experience of using many products on the market, especially knowledge products such as computer software, communications devices, and electronic equipment. These benefits splash back onto the vendors of such products in the form of increased sales and reduced support costs.

The availability of simple tutorials, guided tours, and other usage-aids ensures that customers can make immediate use of a product and painlessly progress to using advanced features. By integrating training, documentation, and support to produce electronic performance-support systems, we add practical value to products.

What E-Learning Cannot Do

One of the first steps of any successful project is setting realistic expectations. Although e-learning can work miracles, it cannot work all miracles at once. Nor is it without costs, not the least of which is the requirement to think about training in new ways.

Deliver All Advantages At Once

E-learning can do all of the wonderful things we mentioned earlier, but it cannot do them all simultaneously on a single project. We must understand that there are tradeoffs among the benefits of e-learning. For example, if we want the deeper learning possible with rich collaboration among fellow learners, we may have to sacrifice the ability of learners to set their own pace and agenda. The use

of rich media will require fast network connections, which may rule out learners whose travel computer has only a slow modem.

Deliver Advantages Without Cost

E-learning can save vaults of money, … sometimes, and usually only after a sizeable upfront investment. The low delivery costs of e-learning are usually purchased with high development costs. Many of the costs of e-learning may be hidden. These may include the money learners must spend to upgrade their computers and the time they spend downloading and installing necessary software.

Two hidden costs are risk and anxiety. Like all endeavors that depend on imaginative applications of rapidly advancing technology, e-learning projects have an element of risk. Even the best managed projects sometimes fail. E-learning pioneers must have the self-confidence and organizational support to withstand such failures.

The other hidden cost is the anxiety of teaching in new ways. Classroom training benefits from hundreds of years of evolution and refinement. Learners and trainers fully understand how classroom training works. For e-learning, no such uniform model exists—or is even possible given the rate of advancement of e-learning. All this change and uncertainty is stressful to all participants.

Deliver Advantages Without Fundamental Change

We can implement e-learning to carry on the old ways of training, but merely mimicking what has worked in the past will not realize the full potential of e-learning. To achieve the full advantages of e-learning, we must be prepared to change:

- **How we package and deliver training**. More and more training will be created in modules, which buyers of training or even individual learners can mix and match for specific learning goals.

- **The people we employ**. E-learning, at least at its current state of development, requires strong technical skills as well as fundamental knowledge of instructional design. It craves innovative designers who go beyond imitation of established forms of training.

- **The way we think about training**. For hundreds of years education and training have been activities we pursue at the beginning of life or at the beginning of a new job. We must now think of training as a continual, daily (or hourly!) activity.

- **Delivering knowledge solutions**, not just training courses. Solutions may require integrating collaboration systems, information repositories, best-practices databases, and other components not traditionally thought of as training. Training is no longer a self-contained activity.

Your Turn

At the end of each chapter, you will find an opportunity to adapt what you just read about to your situation. By completing these activities you assemble your personal plan for using e-learning.

You can write your answers right in the book. If you are squeamish about defacing such a fine book, photocopy the "Your turn" sections. The copyright police will not e-arrest you. Or, you can download a copy of all the "Your Turn" sections from this book's Web site (www.horton.com/using) and print them out.

How Can E-Learning Help My Organization Deliver Training?

Worksheet 1-1 lists the ways that e-learning can benefit organizations that use it. Which of these benefits is important to your organization? Identify the ones that are important to your organization and assign them a numerical priority.

Worksheet 1-1: Benefits for organizations using e-learning.

Benefit	Important to your organization? (yes/no)	Priority
Benefits to the organization as a whole		
Increase sales		
Increase organizational speed and flexibility		
Improve work performance		
Reduce time-off-job for training		
Recruit and retain better employees		
Initiate and nurture knowledge-management activities		
Support fast-track and affirmative-action programs		
Open job positions to those with disabilities		
Benefits to the training department in particular		
Cut the costs of training		
Train those not well served by conventional training		
Revitalize classroom training		
Revamp the training department's image		

Benefit	Important to your organization? (yes/no)	Priority
Implement particular instructional strategies		
Become more of a profit center		
Align training with business purposes		

How Can E-Learning Benefit Individuals?

E-learning can benefit those who take training, those who conduct training, and those who use products supported by e-learning. Worksheet 1-2 lists these individuals. For each group of individuals, specify what you feel will be the main benefit of e-learning.

Worksheet 1-2: Benefits for individuals using e-learning.

Group	Main benefit
Instructors, trainers, and teachers	
Learners	
Users of products supported by e-learning	

What Fundamental Changes Will E-Learning Require?

To achieve the benefits of e-learning people in your organization will have to make fundamental changes in the ways they create, deliver, and possibly think about training. In Worksheet 1-3, list a few of these changes and who must make them.

Worksheet 1-3: Fundamental changes required to implement e-learning

Change in the way training is created, delivered, and thought about	Who must make this change?