



FAQ about this book

Decisions about technology and tools for e-learning are being made by managers and instructors who know little about technology, or by information technologists without the participation or benefit of educators. *E-learning Tools and Technologies* will give teachers, trainers, instructors, educators, administrators, and instructional designers the knowledge they need to pick tools and technologies that support their e-learning efforts. It will also help information technologists understand the e-learning tools they may be asked to help select, combine, and maintain.

This book represents the needs and viewpoints of consumers of these technologies. It will help consumers plan, select, and combine the tools they need for their individual projects. Readers will learn to identify the range of hardware, software, and services needed for e-learning projects, understand major categories of tools, see what each category produces, learn the major vendors in each category, and develop criteria for picking specific products. In addition, the book contains chapters to help readers combine separate tools into effective systems, ensure a rational purchasing process, and pick and implement e-learning standards.

The book is supported with a Web site containing evaluation checklists, design forms, tips and tricks, and an extensive list of e-learning tools.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

More and more technology is being purchased and used by people with little technical training or knowledge. The phase of techno-maniacal early adopters is passed. The people who are tasked with buying technology and getting it all working are not just information technologists but instructional designers, training department managers, school administrators, teachers, instructors, and trainers.

At the same time the complexity has increased. Those wishing to deploy e-learning must choose from hundreds of tools in many separate categories, including learning management systems, learning content management systems, authoring tools, and collaboration environments, all of which are evolving at a bewildering rate.

People who are not technology experts need a systematic way to identify the types of tools they need, find vendors, evaluate their products, and combine them into useful systems. This book fills that need.

It is essential to get purchasing decisions right the first time. These products are expensive and you must justify your decision. It is hard to switch once a product has been implemented and integrated into your operations. There will be less money available after your first purchase proves inadequate. And you may lack credibility the second time around.

Who should buy and read this book? Anyone involved in e-learning, that's who. Here are some specific groups and what we hope each will get out of this book.

Group	How they need and will use the book
Teachers, instructors, and trainers	To understand the technologies they are now required to use to deliver their courses over networks.
Instructional designers and course authors	To select tools and technologies to carry out their plans and designs for e-learning.
Managers, supervisors, and team leaders of training groups	To plan the mix of tools they need to create original e-learning or to convert their existing classroom training to e-learning.
University students in programs in education, instructional technology, related fields	As a textbook for a course in e-learning technology or as independent study of technologies that underlie their chosen field.
University and school-district administrators	To understand the technology they must purchase and install. Be able to communicate with their information technology specialists.
Executives, directors, and chief learning officers	To set policies and strategies for the technical infrastructure needed to support their e-learning, performance support, and knowledge management initiatives.

Group	How they need and will use the book
Information technologists	To broaden their understanding of tools and technologies so they can support their organization's e-learning, online information, and knowledge-management efforts.
Vendors of e-learning technology	To understand how their specific products fit into the overall scheme, to be able to discuss technology with buyers, and to better suggest solutions to buyers.
Subject matter experts who want to create a course	To help them figure out where to start and what tools and services they will need.

IS THIS JUST MORE HYPE?

This is a consumer's guide to technology—not a collection of press releases from vendors and researchers. No company has paid to have its products included in this book (Darn!). The mention of a product is not an endorsement and absence of a product is not a condemnation. All products have merit and all can be improved.

You'll find no science fiction here. All the tools and technologies mentioned here are commercially available products—except for those in the last chapter which unashamedly speculates on trends. Universities and research labs are working on neat ideas that someday might turn into reliable, easy-to-use products—but you won't find these ideas here.

This book will help you decide if you really need a tool and then arm you with facts and criteria to pick the best product.

WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT THIS BOOK?

In addition to its basic content, this book contains some extra goodies to enhance the reading experience.

- ▶ **Lists of potential vendors.** For each category of tools discussed, the book lists the major vendors and provide contact information.
- ▶ **Questions to make vendors squirm.** For each category of tools, the book lists questions potential buyers should get answered before signing on the dotted line.

- ▶ **Rants and opinions.** A cartoon curmudgeon pops up now and then to colorfully point out the limitations of current categories of products and to add a dose of appropriate skepticism.
- ▶ **Tips and tricks.** Although this is not a how-to book, it does include tips on using the major categories of tools. The authors offer their advice on how to get the most from a tool and how to avoid the most common mistakes new users make.

WHAT ABOUT A WEB SITE?

This book has its own Web site at horton.com/tools. There you will find the following items.

- ▶ **Lists of tools and vendors.** These lists are periodically updated so the material in the book remains current.
- ▶ **Design forms for picking and configuring tools.** These include forms for listing users' current tools and technologies; for cataloging the required hardware, software, and network connections; for combining software tools to create a complete system.
- ▶ **Spreadsheets** for evaluating tools, calculating amortized costs, computing return on investment, estimating download speeds, predicting needed storage space and connection speeds, and other common computations.
- ▶ **List of file formats** including the names, nicknames, extensions, and other interesting information about the file formats widely used in e-learning.
- ▶ **Updates** and new information to round out the material in the printed book.