

# YOU DON'T NEED TO BE A TECHIE TO CHAMPION LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

You just need to make the most of what you've got, says Peter Gray.



There's something rather comforting about visiting trade shows such as Learning Technologies and the Learning and Skills Exhibition if you're 'trade'. That feeling as you put the visitor pass around your neck and launch forth into a world of colour and expectant sales-driven enthusiasts can be overpowering.

But will you find your Holy Grail? Will you recognise it when you do find it?

For thousands of L&D visitors and delegates it is the one time of the year when there's little choice but to connect with the technology. Will they leave the event a learning technology champion, or will they leave with a sense of bafflement at the huge array of resources on offer – and little clue as to whether or not it can help?

Of course, you might also be a little less romantic about it all and simply say to yourself: "I wonder how quickly I can ease my conscience at having 'done the show' before returning to the office and the real world of L&D." That would be a real shame. Every savvy visitor knows progression is not just about adding the latest learning tool to your organisation's electronic armoury.

## RUTHLESS PRIORITISATION

The trick is to maximise your time and budget and approach such events as opportunities to learn how to capitalise on the technologies in which your organisation has *already* invested. It is about urging everyone in our community to think again about their investment in L&D and HR software solutions.

The recent PwC Global L&D Benchmarking Study [http://download.pwc.com/ie/pubs/2012\\_building\\_the\\_key\\_skills\\_for\\_the\\_future.pdf](http://download.pwc.com/ie/pubs/2012_building_the_key_skills_for_the_future.pdf) points to some clear current trends, which to some of us solutions providers are not entirely new. But the fact that one of the world's largest consulting organisations is waking up to what some of the smallest consulting organisations have been saying for years, is encouraging!

It would be churlish to regurgitate all of PwC's mighty thunder here, but there are some key findings and statements in the report which cannot go unnoticed. Note the clear link between L&D and the business case in declarations such as: *'L&D investment is now being focused and prioritised on a smaller number of key areas that are expected to have the greatest impact on business performance.'* And in affirmations such as: *'Technology continues to play a huge part in L&D'*.

There are a couple of common themes emerging from the study that confirm some concerted efforts to elevate L&D as a strategic priority. For example, the *'ruthless prioritisation'* in areas having most business impact, also that *'there is increased focus on spend and value for money. Efficiencies are being sought'*.

### WRING OUT EVERY LAST DROP OF VALUE

Businesses are currently faced with huge change and transformation issues. They are keen to explore avenues that amplify their L&D initiatives. They need to get more from less. This should fuel a strong desire to find additional and alternative ways to maximise existing solutions rather than commit to new and expensive initiatives. Especially since, all too often, such investments may well return little more to the business than current applications.

The trend towards blended learning continues apace and learning technology has a huge impact on the blend in itself. Surely no one would deny that in the last two or three years, technology has provided us with a new range of incredibly cost effective, intuitive and user-friendly interfaces which consign the 'old LMS' to the bin marked 'Great Ideas We had Back Then'.

This is why learning technologies are so inspiring. The challenge is to ask the right questions of yourself and the business, and find the latest and most cost effective solutions to achieve the answers – in the form of highly targeted L&D initiatives.

The most cost effective solutions can mean different things to different people. To those who already have a significant investment in technology, it means wringing every last ounce of value out of the original investment. To those who have yet to invest, it means identifying suitable technologies and integrating them into L&D initiatives and business objectives – these are your lucky days!

### WHAT USED TO COST 100K, NOW COSTS 10K

L&D budgets are under huge pressure.

**By all means assess the learning technologies you think you want and identify what is on offer. But bear in mind that strategic gains can be made by re-evaluating what you already have.**

There are more and more vacant L&D desks. All too often there's a prevailing sense from the boardroom that L&D should be happy with its low profile within the business.

There has never been a better time to identify return-on-investment-focused integration projects bringing together and leveraging existing systems into a single log-in environment, thereby creating a much more engaging online workplace than previously thought possible. Such projects are increasingly the norm.

For a few thousand pounds it is now possible to achieve what was being offered for hundreds of thousands not that long ago, back when London's Olympic Park was only half built. It really is possible to provide your people (all of your people) with a single log-in user interface, diverse content, a complete tool kit of multiple evaluation tools, social interaction and collaborative learning, all for the price of the slightly above average company car.

Picking up on the company car analogy, it could be said that we're driving towards the digital dividend. It's about really making your digital currency work harder than ever. And this brings us back to the business case and the PwC study. The report mentions the concept of focusing L&D efforts and resources on a smaller number of priority areas through 'ruthless prioritisation'. Learning technology can very easily facilitate a widening of this ruthless prioritisation.

### ERODE YOUR ISLANDS OF INEFFICIENCY

We should be forced, quite rightly, to constantly assess the effectiveness of our investment in virtual technologies and content. But how do we do this? Has learning technology reached the point where we need to be geniuses to understand how we might get the most from it? The answer is no. We have long since passed the point where learning professional need to be technical gurus. It has become progressively easier for mere non-technical mortals to understand how to invest less and get more.

The often-quoted Josh Bersin recently referred to companies having built 'islands of inefficiency'. The islands comprise



multiple learning management systems, multiple training organisations with overlapping roles, and extensive vendor contracts that often buy the same or similar content across different functions.

The desire to create an ever more engaging online environment for our users to do all of their learning is driving a new process of integration – whereby we use the power of technology to knit together old and new solutions, with the ability to access any one of those tools or solutions via a single log-in. This is simply good common sense and good housekeeping.

The downturn in the economy needn't be the death knell for L&D budgets. The economic climate presents us with an opportunity to be better at what we do.

We can implement cost efficiencies without compromising our strategic learning investments. It is not only possible – it's a must.

Peter Gray is Marketing Director at The Working Manager Ltd.  
[www.theworkingmanager.com](http://www.theworkingmanager.com)  
 @workingmanager