

Practical guide to e-learning for industry

Interviewer: Jo Murray

Jo: *Welcome to the Knowledge Tree everyone. Today we're speaking with Dr. Neville Higgins, General Manager of 108 Pty Ltd. Neville, your Canberra-based company is the developer of the Practical guide to e-learning for industry, is that right?*

That's right. So how did you get involved in that project? It's as part of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework E-learning for Industry Project isn't it?

Neville: Well I've been involved in e-learning for about 15 years, and 108 Digital, is a relatively new company, we put together a tender with a lot of e-learning and multimedia expertise. So we are doing lots and lots of projects around Australia in e-learning currently, one of which is the *Practical guide to [e-learning for] industry*. I'd previously done some work for Jenny who's in charge of the national project and she asked me to quote on that job and 108 was successful in winning that project.

Jo: *OK...so who's the Practical Guide aimed at?*

Neville: The Guide is aimed at people in business, in industry looking to develop e-learning for their staff, and maybe their suppliers and even some consumers, but the idea is to provide them with a very practical way of getting into this type of training, to basically lay out for them the steps that they need to go through, to look at all the problem areas that are associated with e-learning and it is a journey that is quite fraught with difficulty for people who don't, who haven't experienced that. And there's a lot of problems to overcome, so we try to discuss those problems and overcome them.

Jo: *So why would a business in industry want to go down the e-learning path?*

Neville: Well if we talk about just learning or training within industry it's a very important component, I believe, for any business. There's plenty of research, and one study in the UK in particular, with small to medium sized businesses, that showed that training actually had the greatest effect on the bottom line for a business, up to five times more the effect than say of research and development. So it is a very important topic for organizations. So of course training is quite an expensive thing to do, if you're particularly, a large company, and e-learning obviously has a lot of benefits in relation to being a cost effective way of delivering training. Also you can get the same outcomes, educational outcomes as has been shown repeatedly in the research.

Jo: *Great, that's very informative... it gives us a lot to think about. What is particularly innovative about the way you've designed the Practical guide do you think?*

Neville: Well basically it's about distilling 15 years of my knowledge and my team's knowledge of how to do e-learning. We've been on the other side of the fence. Clients have basically asked us to develop lots of products. We see clients struggling with understanding how to do it and working with the supplier like us, so we've learnt lots of things over the years, so basically what we've tried to do is distill that knowledge into a real practical expose if you like on e-learning and how to implement it. There are literally millions of documents online about e-learning, so if someone is trying to find out about what to do, how to implement e-learning, they are just swamped with information. It's very hard for them to basically work out what's important and what's not. So what we've tried to do is actually pull out the wheat from the chaff, to really, basically, lay out the

process for them in a very simple way, to provide lots and lots of templates and proformas, for instance there is a proforma for request for tender, you know... things like that. So it really does have tools as well as provide the information. It's structured knowledge which is much more easy to digest than the unstructured knowledge that you find on the Internet.

Jo: *And it's got that lovely train map idea to help us find our way through it as well, hasn't it?*

Neville: Yes. Well it's a journey I believe. You go from your desire to get into e-learning to delivering a product to your staff. It's quite a journey, and it's like any journey you take, it's fraught with difficulties, delays, missed connections, lost luggage, all those sorts of things. So we're using the metaphor of an underground map, the London Underground because you can get on at any station, basically begin or end the journey at any point.

Jo: *That's a lovely metaphor. OK so you're obviously working at the nexus of e-learning and business so what do you see as the tensions in that nexus?*

Neville: I think it's very difficult for people within business to understand enough about e-learning to be able to justify it to senior managers. And that's a very hard thing to do, building a business case, looking at the return on investment, because it's those things that really will convince the accountants at the top of the company that it is worth going into e-learning. So that's one of the things that is a difficulty for them. The other thing is the tension in the traditional training environment, there is a big industry around the world in delivering training in an instructor-led way. Any training is good, provided you have got a good instructor. And these people are very used to delivering it that way, and it's quite difficult for them to change to becoming a facilitator, if you like, of training, and to develop and utilize e-learning packages. It's a change problem. It's about change management, changing your attitude and changing management attitudes to training.

Jo: *So I guess if we've got tensions, we've also got opportunities. What do you see the opportunities for businesses looking to move into e-learning?*

Neville: I think there are huge benefits. There are benefits for ...on the competitive side, for their bottom line. They can retain workers if they provide flexible learning. It allows them to be very flexible on how they deliver it, so that they don't... so they reduce the cost of training significantly, that's the cost benefit, so there are lots and lots of reasons for industry getting into this, and even the fact that it can help a company re-develop their whole structure and the way they do their business. One of the exemplars for this project has discovered, as they looked at the training, and as they looked at how this training was done, they realized they could improve the *process* in the workplace. And so the training was a catalyst for that process change, and therefore improving, if you like, the bottom line as well.

Jo: *And I believe the Practical guide to e-learning is in its first stage, and that people who are viewing this video and looking at the guide on the Internet will be able to provide some feedback? So there'll be a way for them to do that...*

Neville: That's right, this is the first stage, it's been a relatively short timeframe to produce this product, and of course we can see improvements and we'd love feedback on how it can be improved. It's hopefully a project that will have a life in terms of its

development, over many years and we're hoping that we can be involved in improving that product over time.

Jo: Great, well congratulations! It looks fantastic and I'm really looking forward to going and having a look through it myself. So thanks very much for speaking with the Knowledge Tree.