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Book Facts

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www.bozarthzone.com

How to Buy It

- www.pfeiffer.com
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e-Learning Solutions on a Shoestring

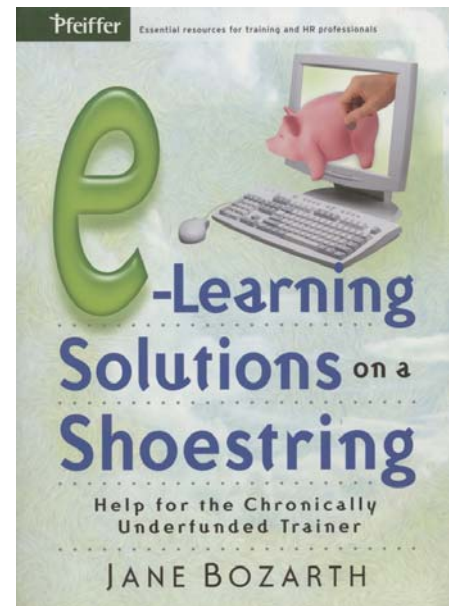
By Jane Bozarth

Overview

e-Learning Solutions on a Shoe String: Help for the Chronically Underfunded Trainer provides tips, ideas, shortcuts and insights for developing effective e-learning without breaking the bank.

The 12 chapters in *e-Learning on a Shoestring* provide guidance, advice, and counsel on creating and purchasing low cost e-learning solutions. The book highlights strategies that can save your organization tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of dollars in unneeded and unnecessary e-learning products.

This book is written by a practitioner who has spent almost two decades in the field of training and development where her specialty is finding low cost ways of creating or purchasing quality e-learning



You Probably Have More Tools Than You Think

Before rushing out and buying expensive e-learning development tools, conduct a technology inventory to see what tools you have available.

You may already have some simple tools that will go a long way in creating effective e-learning. Here are a few tools you may want to see if you already own.

1. Digital Camera
2. MS PowerPoint
3. MS Paint
4. MS Photo Editor
5. Adobe Acrobat
6. Screen Capture Software
7. Word Processing Software
8. Headset
9. Scanner
10. Microphone
11. CD Creation Software

12. Web Conferencing Tools (Centra, NetMeeting)

Understanding what you have in terms of technology is an important first step in developing inexpensive e-learning.

Too often trainers purchase software that has the same capabilities as software they already own.

After taking inventory of what you have, make sure you venture out of your office and down the hall. You'll be amazed at the goodies you will find around the office.

Building Simple Pages and Programs

In approaching e-learning on a shoestring, especially of the do-it-yourself variety, try to start small. One of the most basic places to begin is with tools that you already have.

It seems safe to assume that if you are already involved in training, you probably know something about MS PowerPoint.

PowerPoint can be an effective tool for creating effective but inexpensive e-learning. The tool has a number of features that can go well beyond lists of bullets.

Hyperlinking—PowerPoint lets the designer create and insert customizable buttons to link to various slides within the presentation or to an external web site or other file.

Animations—PowerPoint has several tools that can be used to animate objects within your e-learning lesson. Use of animation can include things like moving chart elements or illustrating a sequence of steps in a process.

Sound Effects and Narration—Many different sound effects are available though PowerPoint and you insert them as you would a photo or a piece of clip art. Narration can be done with an inexpensive microphone.

Video—Adding a video clip to PowerPoint is a simple process but will dramatically increase the file size. This constraint needs to be considered.

Publishing PowerPoint to the Web—Several methods can be used to publish a PowerPoint show as a self-contained web page, including the option contained in PowerPoint itself.

A Word of Caution: A distressing but increasingly common problem is the poorly designed classroom PowerPoint show uploaded to the web and called “e-learning.” E-learning programs, regardless of cost, still need to provide sound instruction.

Enhancing Basic Programs

When developing e-learning inexpensively, avoid creating a text-only wall of words. Take advantage of the many free and low-cost tools that add visual interest, interactivity, and media to e-learning programs.

Some of the free solutions you can add are:

- **Free Clip Art**—Available at a number of web sites.
- **Free Design Templates**—Many of these pre-developed templates look great and are time-savers when trying to develop the “look and feel” for an e-learning program.
- **Free Interactivity Tools**—Dozens of sites offer free tools from games, to file management programs to flowcharting software.

- **Free Agents**—These are little characters that interact with the learner. Microsoft offers several animated, talking characters that can be used to create training agents for use in web pages.
- **Free Windows MovieMaker**—This program allows you to create professional-looking customer video complete with animated titles and credit slides.
- **Free Microsoft Producer**—This PowerPoint add-on allows the user to capture and synchronize slides with audio, video, “talking head” presentations and other images.

“If you are new to the idea of creating from –scratch web pages, you may be surprised to learn that it is not necessarily an expensive undertaking.”
-- Jane Bozarth.

“Take advantage of the many free and low-cost tools that add visual interest, interactivity and media to programs.”
-- Jane Bozarth

Creating Low Cost Collaboration

Good e-Learning is more than just PowerPoint slides! It involves collaboration and interaction between and among learners.

Collaborative tools add interest, facilitate engagement and build a sense of community. The great news is that many are free or almost free.

Here are some different tools that can be used to help facilitate collaboration”

- **Chat**—This allows number of people to interact live at once. Many programs include a chat, too, including the free Yahoo and MSN groups.
- **Webcams**—Web cameras can add an interesting wrinkle to online collaboration. They can be used to broadcast information from experts and some providers offer video chat for free live AOL’s IM.
- **Phone conferencing**—Conference calling provides a good opportunity for learners to hear each other and “humanize” the online experience. Your organization may already have conference calling capabilities that you may be able to use for “free.”
- **Audioconferencing**—Also known as VoIP or Voice Over Internet Protocol. It works like a conference call but is done online with a computer microphone.
- **Discussion boards**—Many sites provide free discussion board software that you can use for educational exchange of information.
- **Wikis**—These online tools allow people to not only post their own comments but to edit the comments of others.
- **Email**—Many people fail to utilize the most ubiquitous online tool of all, many messages, ideas and concepts can be conveyed through email and learners already know how to use it.

“Collaborative strategies and tools add interest, facilitate engagement, and build a sense of community.”

-- Jane Bozarth

Buying Off-The-Shelf Courses

Often, when you consider the time to learn how to use an e-learning development tool, the time needed to actually develop the tool and the level of quality you are able to achieve given your knowledge of the topic, it might make more sense to purchase an off-the-shelf tool.

If you do decide to purchase a tool, there are several tips for keeping the cost reasonable.

- 1) **Limit Licenses**— Vendors often use a sliding scale of costs based on the number of potential learners. Keep it low at first. You can always buy more later.
- 2) **Share Licenses** – See if you can partner with another unit or department to share development tools.
- 3) **Use Demo and Trial Periods** – Be sure the product really does work for you, your infrastructure and your learners.
- 4) **Check with your IT Folks** – Your information technology personnel can tell you if a product will work in your environment, make sure you check with them to avoid buying something the vendor “thinks” will work in your environment.
- 5) **Narrow the Vendor Field** – Concentrate on quality rather than quantity of vendor relationships. Working with a few quality products is less expensive in the long run than trying to juggle dozens of different agreements.
- 6) **Negotiate**— Remember, everything is negotiable.

“Sometimes, even in the face of meager funds, it makes more sense to try to find the means of buying an off-the-shelf (OTS) product.”

-- Jane Bozarth

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About the Author

Jane Bozarth has been a training practitioner since 1989. A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she also has an M.Ed. in training and development/technology in training from North Carolina State University and is pursuing a doctorate in adult education. Her training career began as staff development specialist with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services; she then served as training director for the North Carolina Justice Department. Her interest in online learning led to her current position as e-learning coordinator with the North Carolina Office of State Personnel's Human Resources Development Group.

Her specialty is finding low-cost ways of creating or purchasing quality e-learning solutions. She is a popular presenter and often appears at national events, such as VNU Learning's Training and Online Learning Conference and Expo and the ASTD International Conference and Expo, as well as many management and professional association gatherings. In addition to her regular column in *Training Magazine*, Bozarth's work has appeared in trade and academic journals, including the Creative Training Techniques Newsletter and the Journal of Educational Technology and Society.

Visit Jane at <http://www.bozarthzone.com> or contact her via email at jane@bozarthzone.com.

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