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Book Facts

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How to Buy It

- Call Allen Interactions at 800-799-6280
- www.alleni.com
- www.amazon.com

Michael Allen's Guide to e-Learning By Michael W. Allen

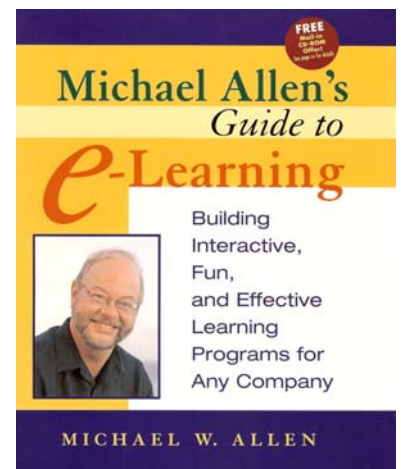
Overview

Michael Allen's Guide to e-Learning: Building Interactive, Fun and Effective Learning Programs for Any Company provides an intriguing and extensive look at e-learning.

It is a two-part book, combining a discussion of why e-learning is often so poor and the problems of breaking out of this tradition with a section on design, geared toward addressing some of the most powerful paradigms that work over and over again.

This book is not like other books on e-learning. It's neither a primer nor master compendium. It's not exactly a how-to book, although it does have lots of samples and examples.

It is a book that describes what works in e-learning and how to make your e-learning interactive, enjoyable and effective.



Effective E-Learning versus Ineffective—Pick One

The failure of so many e-learning applications to produce recognized results has led to some very wrong conclusions about e-learning.

Some popular but wrong conclusions are that e-learning is:

1. Boring by nature.
2. Difficult and time consuming to develop.
3. Not possible to cost-justify.

None of these conclusions are inevitable. Good e-learning is possible and practical.

E-learning can be cost-effective and very popular among learners. It can address some of the innumerable performance problems in organizations.

It can help us all achieve more of our potential. It doesn't do this often enough, of course, but, it's possible.

E-Learning is patient and treats all learners

objectively and fairly. It provides the same performance criteria for all learners.

Online learning saves money through low cost delivery, no or minimized travel, fewer instructors, automated administration, reduced need or elimination of classroom supplies.

Big savings have resulted from many applications of e-learning. Even taking full account of the development costs, e-learning has a big advantage in cost savings.

Human Resources Needed for e-Learning Design

People must be available to develop effective e-learning—not just documents.

Other than having a too shallow understanding of instructional interactivity, perhaps the biggest problem corporate teams have in producing high impact e-learning applications is the lack of sufficient access to key people. The people needed include:

- **Executives.** The vision and the business must guide the development project. Executives need to ensure post-training support is provided.
- **Performance Supervisors.** The people to whom learners will be responsible need to share not only their observations of performance needs but also help identify the interests of learners.
- **Subject-Matter Experts.** The designers must have articulate experts to help define what is to be taught and to ensure validity.
- **Experienced Teachers.** If the content has been taught previously, those who have taught it will have valuable insights to share.
- **Recent Learners.** Unlike experts, recent learners can remember not knowing the content, where the hurdles to understanding were, and what helped them get it.
- **Untrained Performers.** It's very important to test design ideas before e-learning applications have been fully built and the resources to make extensive changes have been spent.

"It is important not only to have the right people available but also to have them available at the right time."

-- Michael Allen

M&M: Meaningful and Memorable

Make no mistake! It is critical that learning experiences have two characteristics: They must be meaningful and memorable.

Meaningful

If a learner doesn't understand, then that learner will not gain from the experience. This is instructional failure. If learners don't see the meaningful implications of learning prescribed tasks, such tasks' applicability to their work or the advantages of a new process over the old, the learner experience is of little avail.

Well-designed e-learning has the means to be continuously meaningful for each learner. It can be sensitive to learner performance, identify levels of need and readiness, select appropriate activities, and engage learners in experiences that are likely to be meaningful.

Memorable

If meaningful experiences and the knowledge they convey are easily forgotten, or if learners don't think to apply them in the appropriate on-the-job situations, they might as well not have occurred. Thankfully, e-learning has many ways to make experiences memorable, such as using:

- Interesting contexts and novel situations
- Real-world or authentic environments
- Problem-solving scenarios
- Simulations
- Risk and consequences
- Engaging themes
- Engaging media and interface elements
- Drill and practice
- Humor

"You cannot learn someone. The challenge isn't a grammatical one; it's a logistical one."

-- Michael Allen

Primary Responsibilities of Learner-Interface Design

Learner-interface design carries many responsibilities. It is not only supportive of interactivity, navigation, and information retrieval, but also integral to the success of all components of the e-learning application. Briefly stated, the responsibilities of learner-interface design are to:

- **Minimize memory burden.** Except in cases of simulations, we are not generally interested in teaching learners to remember the details of the interface. Learner interfaces should be meaningful without having to memorize symbols, terminology and procedures.
- **Minimize error.** Good interfaces provide strong cues that help prevent errors.
- **Minimize efforts.** Ideally, learners can perform each function with a single command, whether it's a mouse click, keystroke, spoken word or other quick command.

- **Promote features.** The learner-interface design has a role in reminding learners of the features they can use. Hidden features obviously increase the memory burden and do nothing to promote features, but it isn't always possible to keep all features visible. Careful choices need to be made, as there are penalties for almost every compromise.
- **Contribute to the learning process.** The interface must do all it can to facilitate an optimally effective learning experience. The challenge is great, and every component must do its part.

Overall, learner-interface designs should keep learners in control and able to communicate comfortably with learning applications. Although a little anxiety and discomfort can actually be helpful for learning, they should come from the learner's desire to do their best and not from fear and frustration with the interface.

"Often, when laid out clearly, principles of good user interface seem simple and obvious, yet good design is clearly not simple and obvious in practice."

--Michael Allen

Instructional Interactivity

The purpose of instructional interactivity is to wrestle our intellectual laziness to the ground—to reawaken our interest in learning, strengthen our ability to learn, and provide an optimal environment in which to learn.

Instructional interactivity is NOT the same as:

- Navigation
- Presentation
- Buttons
- Scrolling
- Browsing
- Information retrieval
- Paging
- Animation/Morphing
- Video

Instructional interactivity can be defined as "Interaction that actively stimulates the learner's mind to do those things that improve ability and readiness to perform effectively."

Good interactivity:

- Causes learners to think.
- Helps learners synthesize new information and integrate their knowledge.
- Helps learners rehearse skills and prepare for performance.
- Promotes awareness of competencies, readiness, and needs.
- Contributes to self-confidence.
- Tests learner knowledge whenever they might like a progress check.

"Good design is essential for success but uncommon in e-learning."

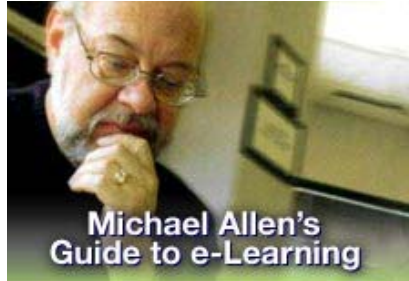
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About the Author



Michael W. Allen is the primary architect of Authorware, the founder and former chairman of Authorware, Inc. (which merged with Macromind/Paracomp to form Macromedia, Inc.), and the chairman and CEO of Allen Interactions. Previously, he was a principle tools architect and systems designer of Control Data's PLATO computer-based education system, used around the world. He is widely respected for his abilities to define, design, and build tools which allow creative individuals to harness the potential of evolving interactive multimedia technologies. In recent years, he has concentrated on creative application design and defining unique methods for developing meaningful and memorable learning applications which fully engage the mind.

He holds a PhD and MA degrees in educational psychology from the Ohio State University and BA degree in psychology from Cornell College. He was twice elected president of the Association for Development of Computer-Based Instructional Systems and is editor emeritus of the *Journal of Computer-Based Instruction*.

A frequent keynote speaker and widely consulted expert, he explains and demonstrates how interactive multimedia can be far more effective than is it typically is. "It's time for a reinterpretation of the literature and an evolution of common practice."

Visit Michael at www.alleninteractions.com.

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