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Developing Learning Activities And Simulations In E-Learning Content

By Dana Fine

What turns your best dress into a showstopper? Accessories. And what turns your online course content into dazzlingly useful learning content? Learning Activities. What is a Learning Activity? In e-learning content development, we use all forms of questions for test and quizzes:

1. Multiple correct, which presents a number of choices as answers to a particular question. There may be more than one answer to this question. The students chooses all answers that are correct.
2. Single correct, which presents multiple choices as answers to a particular questions. One answer of the possible choices is correct.
3. Item matching, in which there is one column of possible answers that relate to another column of questions. Item matching is commonly used for matching the correct term to the definition.
4. Fill-in-the-blank, in which the students enters the correct word or words that complete a sentence.
5. True/false, in which the student answers whether a statement is true or false.
6. Short answer, in which the student enters a one to two sentence answer to a question.
7. Essay, in which the student responds to a question with a page (or more) long response.

All of these question types are useful for testing knowledge gained from taking a course, as well as testing the level of knowledge prior to a course. In addition, such questions are useful in the course itself as learning checks. The learning check enables the student to determine whether he understands the material. Most companies consider these questions to be adequate learning activities. However, learning activities can be much more. Learning activities that are simulations can involve the student and give him a safe environment in which to practice skills gained through the course. .

Learning Activities are interactive activities that help to explain concepts and involve the student with hands-on learning. This may include all forms of drag and drop questions (one to one correlation, many

to one correlation) as well as interactive ordering of graphics or text, and finally, simulations.

An IDC article and survey, *Technology-Based Simulations: Cloning the Work Environment for More Effective Learning*, June 2004 by Michael Brennan, states, "By 2008 the use of simulations will quadruple.... Simulations provide a parallel universe in which employees hone their skills... Innovative companies have realized this, and others will follow."

Simulations are currently the most expensive learning activity. Simulations must be individually designed and programmed. For example, suppose you have a sales course in which you are testing the sales student's retention of the message that the company wishes to deliver to its customers. You could do a question workshop: several questions that give situations requiring an action in multiple correct or single correct formats. Another, more entertaining, method would be to have the sales person run through a scenario in which he indicates what he would do to sell his product. The learning activity indicates whether the customer would buy this product based on those actions. This feedback

could be indicated by a graph indicating customer readiness to buy. It could also be complimented by video, in which the customer appears aggravated when the sales person gives his message incorrectly and pleased when the sales person gives his message correctly.

Online courses are taken privately and at the student's convenience. If the student requires several attempts with a particular scenario, praise the student for continued effort and eventual competency.

Adding humor to simulations and learning activities is essential yet can be controversial. As the simulation developer or content developer, you do not want to add any humor that could be perceived as offensive, sexist or worse, unfunny. To extend our sales example, when the sales person is unsuccessful at selling his product in the learning activity, you would not want your customer video or simple animation of the customer to offend the sales person. Yet you want him to laugh and try again. Perhaps the customer morosely shaking his head and leaving the room, with text indicating how the sales call went dreadfully south would be acceptable and could be done in a humorous fashion. You would not want this animation to be disturbing - the customer should not shake his fist and yell for a restraining order against the sales person, for example.

In the past, I participated in designing a simulation of patient anesthesia. The computer program consisted of a patient on the operating room table and two dials that the student could turn. One dial administered oxygen, the other dial administered anesthetic. The patient's parameters could change (height, weight, age). As the student administered the anesthesia, a graph showed the patient's stats. If you administered too much anesthesia the patient would die! It was a great simulation, but scary. The death knell of the patient was accompanied by funeral music. . Ouch!

On the other hand, sometimes we encounter simulations and learning activities that add nothing to the content or the course. They are superfluous, added to maintain interest. You must be very careful in these instances. If you want to add something to maintain interest, it should still be useful and explore some aspect of the topic. A Flash movie of interesting fractals may be colorful and fun – useless in a course that is not about fractals, art or Flash. For example, suppose you are teaching contractual document details. You can still relate the content of the course to a learning activity in which the

student must put the correct elements from a list into three different types of contracts. As dry as you may think detailing the elements of a contract might be, if you add audio that indicates whether the addition was right or wrong, you can keep your student's interest. "Wrong!" can be contrasted with "Oh, not that element, it does not belong" said in a beautiful feminine voice. The second response can add a smile and cause the student to remember how the contractual elements are added to a contract. A booming male voice that states, "You sir, are correct!" can bring that same acknowledgement.

In conclusion, questions and quizzes while useful are not the end of interactivity. We need to provide the means for simulations inside online courses to provide the hands on learning that students need. Through clever activities that allow seeing the consequences of your actions on the simulation model, we can provide activities that enable retention of material and practice. If these activities lead the student to greater understanding, we have provided not only an entertaining activity but also great value for our online courses.

Dana Fine is a Senior Instructional Designer at SyberWorks, Inc. SyberWorks is a custom e–learning solutions company that specializes in learning management systems, e–learning solutions, and custom online course development. Dana is also a frequent contributor to the Online Training Content Journal.

Business Simulations - The Next Generation Of Corporate Training?

By Gabriel Adams

Business simulations - the next generation of computer games, or the next generation of corporate training? Well, perhaps they are both.

Business Simulations are essentially computer "games" which are designed to replicate a certain aspect of your industry, and are used for training employees, honing your skills, or learning new ones.

There are many different types of business simulators - here are a few, just to give you an idea of how business simulations can help you in your business.

Role playing simulations – Role playing programs allow your employees to interact with a "person" on the other end of a "phone". Role playing simulations are ideal for phone sales, call center employees, customer service employees, secretaries, etc.

Leadership Training Simulators – Business simulators can also be used to train your leadership staff in leadership principles. These programs will teach you leadership principles, then allow you to test your skills by making a series of real world like decisions.

Employment Simulators - Ever wish you could find a shortcut to hiring the right people every time, without getting any incompetent, lazy, dishonest employees? With an employee assessment simulator, you can do very in–depth assessments of employees before you hire them.

There are many other types of business simulators. Virtually every aspect of a business, from product development to legal compliance, can be improved in your company with business simulators.

Of course, a business simulation will not replace real world experience, but simulators can assist you in making employees more prepared for real world experience. Plus, errors made on the simulators won't cost you a penny.

Business simulations can be integrated into your company in many ways. Some are designed to be used before the employee is hired. Others are designed for use in the initial training program, while others can be used for ongoing training or pre-advancement training.

If you want to improve your employee training, try business simulations!

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