

Computer Based Training—What, How, and When

Presented by Phillip Kerman (2 March 1999)

What

What makes it so good?

- **Consistent**—Putting your message on the computer screen assures consistency. Whether you're targeting employees, customers, or the public—a consistent message is heard.
- **Non-threatening**—Computer based training is free from issues such as “risk of embarrassment” and “fear of failure”. Go at your own pace, review as much as you wish.
- **Safe**—Physical and economic risks are removed with computer simulation.
- **Multiple media**—Appeal to all kinds of learners *visual, auditory, as well tactile*.
- **Return on Investment**—Costs of traditional training can include travel costs, time away from work, travel time, and lodging. Even if multimedia requires a great initial investment, this is returned over time as the software training is used over and over.

What it's not good for:

- **Portability**—Only as portable as a computer. Also, group situations don't support “sharing” a computer.
- **Teacher replacement**—Teachers, unlike computers, respond to questions (when asked explicitly or just sensed). Also, teachers can adjust to students' personalities or emotions.
- **Testing**—You can do it, but what's the point? Remember the idea is to teach, not “oust”. “Tracking” users is fine, but it's better to bring everyone up to the same level than simply removing the people who have yet to learn.

How

How is it delivered?

- **Format**—Usually CDROM (but not always). Technical issues are less significant than content organization.
- **Web**—You can deliver to the web... but remember, that doesn't mean you have to deliver to a “browser”. There are other interesting strategies including *Connected CDs* where media intensive content (audio and video) is on a CDROM and time-sensitive data is on the web.
- **Threaded discussions**—A good way to approximate the group learning model.
- **Pre-installed**—This approach “piggy-backs” a message with hardware.

How to make it work: make it fun!

- **Appealing and motivating**—What more could you ask for?

When

When is computer based training particularly appropriate?

- **Targeting many people**—Cost per person is reduced, thus justifying the investment.
- **Critical message**—Consistency is often critical, especially when a need to certify exists.

Other times:

- **Re-purposing** existing material.
- **Updates** are planned or expected.
- **Supplement** other training (e.g. a take-home CDROM adds value to traditional training).