

The problem with eLearning

Thomas Ng, founder of Genashtim explores why eLearning hasn't picked up its pace in Malaysia.



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- Been in eLearning industry since 2004.
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1 MISUNDERSTANDING OF WHAT eLEARNING IS

eLearning has been around for decades, and for most people, their understanding of eLearning is rather dated. This is not a surprise as many eLearning offerings today are still merely access to online content. They might claim "interactivity" but it is interaction with a platform, not with an instructor/facilitator, or other learners. This one-way delivery of knowledge, which is learning-in-isolation, tends to be less engaging and hence less sustainable. I call this eLearning 1.0.

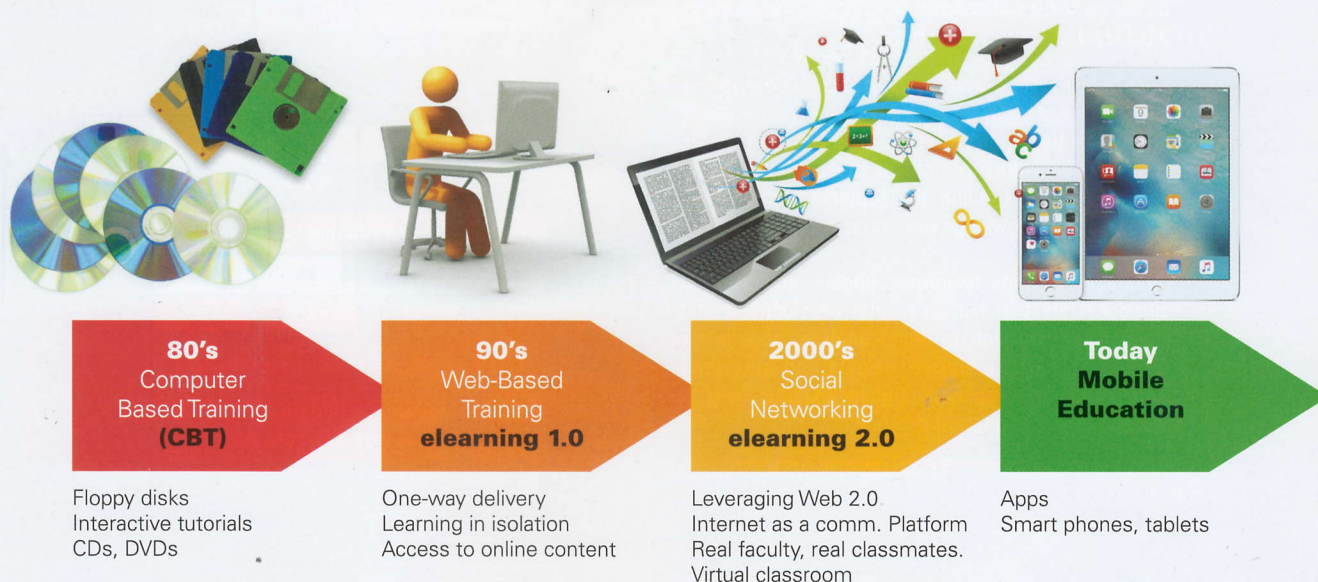
Many people think that MOOCs (massive open online courses) is THE current eLearning platform. But MOOCs

can be also static one-way delivery courses, with traditional course materials like filmed lectures, readings, and online exercises. I would refer to these as eLearning 1.0 platforms.

eLearning 2.0 is when you add interactive user forums (often called discussion boards) to support community interactions between learners, instructors or facilitators, teaching assistants, to forge a collaborative learning environment. But this will mean that every course will have a set start and end date. But during this time, there is flexibility on when and how often you access the learning. The discussion boards are asynchronous. So there is no set time that you need to be present.

Adoption of eLearning in Malaysia has been lagging behind the West and also behind some other countries in the region. There are a number of reasons for this:-

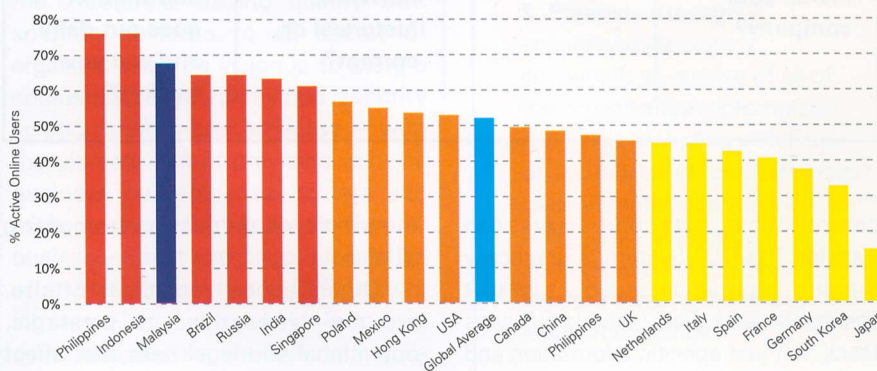
DISTANCE LEARNING – ONLINE LEARNING – VIRTUAL LEARNING



In my 11 years in trying to promote eLearning, these are some of the objections that I have come across:-

"Our people are too busy to do this."	Meaning no time to have any training and development at all?
"Our people lack the discipline for self-learning."	Meaning lack of discipline is part of your corporate culture?
"Our people are not tech-savvy."	If you can use a smart phone, you can do this.
"We have tried and it failed."	How would the future of your business be if you only try anything once? Furthermore, eLearning has evolved. You perhaps tried eLearning 1.0.
"Not everything can be learnt by eLearning."	Totally agree, but it does not mean nothing can be learnt by eLearning.
"eLearning will not work in Malaysia; people here are more face-to-face."	I like this one the most. Look at the table below.....

Global Social Network Penetration



2 CUSTODIANS OF CONVENTION

This is a quote from Dr. Gary P. Hamel, who lectures at Harvard and London School of Economics. He is described by *Fortune Magazine* as "the world's" leading expert on business strategy".

"We are living in a world wherein we are shaken by change, not just stirred. Organisations begin to lose their impact when the rate of their internal change is slower and lags behind the rate of external changes. Many businesses cannot do much because their key people are prisoners or precedents, locked and jailed by their custodians of convention."

3 NOT REALISING THE RELEVANCE AND IMPACT

A. Practicality – business gets increasingly competitive and international. Your future leaders are in

the most critical parts of your business, serving your customers across time zones. Can you really afford to have them away at fixed times for days?

B. Logistics – road traffic is not getting better. Why not have your learners learn from where they are. For in-house programs, you will not need to worry about things like availability of training room, availability of the trainer. Then there are other variables like illnesses, the weather, acts of God, etc.

C. Speed – with eLearning you can roll out training programs to large numbers of participants, some of whom may be scattered across different locations, very quickly.

D. The Learner – the Generation Y (aged 16 to 35 in 2015), is a multi-tasking animal, who grew up with the internet. Sitting in a room full of people is probably not their preferred learning environment. I

was once questioned why would anyone attend a conference with a speaker in a hotel ballroom with 200 people – "have they not heard of Youtube?"

4 LACK OF AWARENESS ON RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

A. Cost – however you look at it, there are significant cost savings for moving to eLearning. There are hidden costs that are often not taken into consideration such as commuting costs, opportunity costs and infrastructure costs. Just because you have a training room in your office, does not mean that there is no cost.

B. Outcome – in an eLearning 2.0 environment, learners are required to post on discussion boards, which would gauge if they had understood the topic. They also contribute their experiences in relation to the topic, thus internalising and contextualising the learning. Every learner can also ask questions on every topic. This collaborative learning environment encourages user generated content (internationally), and creates an invaluable knowledge base.

This would not be possible in a classroom environment. In any case, does anyone actually check the outcome of sending someone for a classroom-based training? It has actually been suggested to me that this eLearning 2.0 is too stressful, and that learners prefer to spend a few days in a 5 star hotel, away from the hustle and bustle of work, and enjoy fine catering and a relaxed environment. I think this is well and good if that is what you and your stakeholders want.

The reality is that the world is moving forward with eLearning. In Singapore, in trying to accelerate things, the government has mandated that all government accredited training organisations must have 15% of their programs with blended learning by 2016, and 70% by 2020. And they are providing grants and subsidies for training organisations and companies to do this. 