

# **E-Learning revisited**

## **Introduction**

E-learning is a very vast subject with immense potential and has caught the fancy of technology companies and educational institutions like never before. Clearly it is one range of technologies that has evolved to maturity very quickly since the deployment models are highly service oriented (read 'brick and mortar'). Read on to know more about the fascinating world of e-learning which impacts our daily e-lives like never before.

## **Technology groups**

E-learning consists of several sets of technologies for design and creation of content, hosting and proliferation of content, learning management, assessment tools and a range of plug-ins and tools to enhance the learning process. The interesting part however, is to think of e-learning beyond classrooms and when you do that, even a humble browser, social bookmarking tools, blogging tools, presentation tools, IM tools, Document management tools, become e-learning enablers.

Using this analogy, let us list some of the popular tools e.g. Delicious, Firefox, Google Reader, Skype, Wordpress, Moodle, Audacity, YouTube, Slideshare, Wikispaces, Snagit, VoiceThread, Camtasia Studio, Zoho Suite, Elluminate, Basecamp, Joomla!, Wink, Dokeos, Photostory, Blackboard, Super, WebEx etc. As we can see, they fulfill several niches in the learning process – developing basic content, adding multimedia, organizing the information, converting the data into convenient formats, sharing through collaborative platforms that are easily replicable into learning platforms etc.

Other than the above listed tools and technologies most of which are public domain or free, there are several more serious mainstream learning platforms that are developed by e-learning companies for their proprietary use – in India there are several such companies such as Educomp, Edurite, Aptech, NIIT, Manipal, 24x7 Learning, MeritTrac, 24x7Guru, Raptivity, Epistreme, Globarena, Think Brik etc – such companies combine their own proprietary systems and technologies listed above to offer a range of 'service products' to learners.

## **Market positioning**

Companies in the E-learning space straddle one of more logical groups depending on the technology strengths they possess – the more traditional older players are more focused on leveraging tools and developing content whereas the newer players grow their technology with the penetration into certain segments.

E-learning companies are positioned at young learners (K-12), colleges and universities (e-varsities), third party learning services (skill development for everyone), public private initiatives (social education initiatives run by NGOs) and industry specific learning that are run either by industry groups / associations or private organizations.

However, E-learning continues to be an evolving space and it is hard to slot companies into a specific part of the value chain – so at one end of the spectrum we would find strong education brands like NIIT and Aptech while a lot of the new players are positioned as niche providers lower down in the value chain as content developers and service product companies. At the other end of the spectrum, there are again large managed services providers and hosting companies that manage these large infrastructures.

## **Future trends in E-Learning**

The traditional approach of E-learning has been to provide learners with a Virtual Learning Environment and offer a range of services that are more aligned to the institution rather than the learner since the emphasis was structured around courses, timetables and testing. However, current trends indicate the move towards creating E-learning communities – good examples for this are Teachade's teacher community and Globarena's [www.evarsity.in](http://www.evarsity.in) which is a career community. Another interesting example is Elgg, which is a social networking software for education and provides each user with a range of tools to create, publish and maintain their 'learning landscape' and also do podcasts.

So, while the emphasis is still on E-learning, it is also meant to get learners to collaborate more meaningfully rather than a 1:1 relationship with the institution. Another such concept that is fast catching on is Edu-blogging which has been used very effectively to get learners to collaborate and work together for a common learning goal. Even sites like Flickr are finding use in E-learning through a creative common licensing program that allows users to share digital assets for presentations and coursework.

## **In summary....**

E-learning will continue to have a keen contest between the quality of the tools and delivery platform to the content itself. Added to this is the novelty and innovativeness of the service model that will continue to attract learners. So with plenty of E-learning, career managers and placement support, we will have a hard time to make optimal choices! So, if you want to beat the recession, keep in touch with your E-learning....

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