THIS WEEK: Management Strategies

Learning Together: The eLearning Guild Annual Conference

By Bill Brandon

Boston, Massachusetts is known for rapid weather changes. In fact, extreme weather in the spring, around the time of the Boston Marathon, is certainly not news. This year was no exception, as The eLearning Guild's 2007 Annual Gathering and Learning Management Colloquium convened April 10 to 13. But although conditions outside the Sheraton Hotel in Back Bay daily seemed to go from sun to drizzle to snow and back again, the nearly 1,000 participatnts hardly noticed. We were busy.

This year's Meeting had the benefit of a compact venue for both the co-located events and the Expo. Participants didn't have to run a marathon of their own from one session to the next. The result was a conference in which participants and presenters were able to have much more focus, where energy levels were high, and where there was plenty of time for networking. In this summary of the event, I'd like to share with you some of my impressions of the attendees, the program, and the learning.

The attendees: Who was there?

It's the people who come to an event like this that multiply the value of the experience. No matter what we learn from the speakers, the networking and

Almost 1,000 people participated in the Guild's 2007 Annual Gathering held in Boston April 10 to 13 — over 30% growth in attendance from last year! Participants benefited from more than 100 content-rich sessions and lots of opportunity to network with their e-Learning peers. Almost 100 senior e-Learning executives also participated in the Learning Management Colloquium. Besides the dozens of sessions, attendees had ample time to talk to almost four dozen e-Learning product and service providers in the MainStreet MarketPlace Expo. Here's a summary of the event!

A publication of

exchange between members are critical to the success of a conference.

Karen Hyder, The eLearning Guild's Online Events Moderator and Speaker Coach, offers her personal observation about being in the same place as a thousand participants, an observation that most of the participants to whom I spoke would have seconded:

"It felt great. The Guild's Annual Gathering serves as an important balance to my normally remote and online work world. By spending time learning about what others are doing, and contributing what I've learned over the past year, I feel invigorated – ready to tackle this year's projects with new eyes and, in many cases, with new tools. I met with people whom I've wanted to meet and talk to, but we never had the time. More than eye contact and body language, I like to feel the learners' energy. As effective as I feel I am working and teaching virtually, 'Ain't nothing like the real thing!'"

Who came?

The conference attendees, speakers, and vendors came, literally, from around the world. In all, representatives from 18 countries attended. Job titles included everything from Chief Technical Officer and Chief Learning Officer, down to entry-level practitioners.

It was interesting to see how many of the "A-List" e-Learning bloggers attended the entire conference. Most of these were speakers, but not all. I've included links to some of their Weblogs in the sidebar on page 3. The bloggers even organized a "beer and blogs" informal event on Wednesday night – something we will probably see more of at future conferences.

Has the audience changed?

The audience at this year's event broadened from the intermediate level developers and designers who traditionally attend Guild events. The program attracted more managers than ever before, as well as more practitioners new to e-Learning. Over lunch both days, I met many instructional designers who are responsible for evolving their organizations' learning strategies from classroom delivery to online, informal, and integrated (blended) approaches.

What excited this audience?

The buzz in the hall on the breaks seemed to revolve around these themes:
- Certain tool updates (for example, Captivate 2, Flash 9)
- Panel discussions (rapid e-Learning tools, current technologies and practices)

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The articles in **Learning Solutions** are all written by people who are actively engaged in this profession – not by journalists or freelance writers. Submissions are always welcome, as are suggestions for future topics. To learn more about how to submit articles and/or ideas, please visit our Web site at www.eLearningGuild.com.

• Personal Learning Environments (PLEs)
• Integration of Web 2.0 tools into e-Learning solutions
• Peter de Jager's keynote on change

You can get a pretty good idea of the specific topics that generated a lot of interest by reading the Weblogs in the sidebar. In addition, there was a great deal of traffic through the Expo area. One change in the Expo this year was the number of companies offering off-the-shelf courseware. It seemed to me that more attendees were spending more time engaged with the vendors than in previous years. In part this was due to the layout of the exhibits area, but it was also due to the larger number of decision-makers attending.

The program

Content is king, and that's true for conferences as well as for Web sites. If, as Peter Drucker famously said, "Learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change," there was plenty for participants to process.

There was a total of 132 learning activities to choose from, counting all the concurrent sessions, the Learning Management Colloquium sessions, pre-conference workshops, and the general sessions. In addition, 85 "Breakfast Links" topics and two excellent lunches expanded informal learning and networking opportunities. And of course, there were dinner groups and session breaks for anyone with a strong drive to meet all of the other 999 attendees.

Although there were three tracks (instructional design; development, programming and tools; and tactical and project management) plus another track appropriate for all participants, the sessions fell into several major themes:

• Introductory content for designers and managers new to technology-assisted learning;
• More advanced theory and practice for designers who have some experience either in synchronous applications (the "virtual classroom" or "Webinars") or in asynchronous applications (self-paced e-Learning);
• Specific tutorials for developers in such areas as ActionScript, LMS implementation, and video;
• Conceptual sessions on new technologies and pedagogies, such as games and simulations, RSS, blogs and wikis, and social software;
• Focused sessions for managers on such topics as project management, budgets, metrics and return on investment (ROI), and strategic orientation of e-Learning to business outcomes.

The eLearning Guild's role

Of course, as the Conference hosts, The eLearning Guild staff was heavily involved in every part of the event. On Easter Sunday, two days before the first keynote, staffers began loading 1000 conference bags with over 70,000 pages of vendor materials and delegate packs. Thousands of copies of session handouts arrived in the breakout rooms by Tuesday night. Registration and the Information Desk began operation at 4 P.M. on Monday and continued daily through Thursday. Staff set up the e-Mail network, operated a "lost-and-found" service for the cell phones and laptops that went astray, and offered directions to session rooms. For the staff, each day started at 6 A.M. and ended around 9 P.M.

But as Steve Wexler, The Guild's director of research and emerging technologies, said, "The annual conference was a beautiful encapsulation of what makes eLearning Guild research – and the Guild itself – work so well: A gathering of people who are passionate about e-Learning, who are willing to share their loves and loathings, trials and triumphs. The energy from so many members, speakers, and vendors was palpable and the depth and breadth of information we exchanged was stunning. I felt privileged to share the latest version of the Guild's online interactive analytics and survey data with these members because it is in fact members' willingness to contribute to the survey data that makes everything we do possible."

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Sidebar *What are the bloggers saying about the Conference?*

Gabe Anderson: "Word of Mouth" http://www.articulate.com/blog/guild-conference-rapid-elearning-tools-panel/

Cammy Bean: "Learning Visions" http://learningvisions.blogspot.com/index.html

Jay Cross: "Informal Learning Blog" http://informl.com/

Stephen Downes: "OLDaily"
http://www.downes.ca/archive/07_04_11_news_OLDaily.htm,
http://www.downes.ca/archive/07_04_12_news_OLDaily.htm, and
http://www.downes.ca/archive/07_04_13_news_OLDaily.htm

Silke Fleischer: http://blogs.adobe.com/silke.fleischer/

Tony Karrer: "eLearning Technology" http://elearningtech.blogspot.com/

Tony O'Driscoll: "Learning Matters!" http://wadatripp.wordpress.com/

Mark Oehlert: "e-Clippings (Learning as Art)" http://blogoehlert.typepad.com/

Mark Prasatik: "Learning Next" http://prasatik.blogspot.com/index.html

Clark Quinn: "Learnlets" http://blog.learnlets.com/wp/?p=124

Brent Schlenker: "Corporate eLearning Strategies and Development" http://elearndev.blogspot.com/

Clive Shepherd: "Clive on Learning" http://clive-shepherd.blogspot.com/

Important announcements made by the Guild at the Conference

In addition to Steve's announcement of, and sessions on, the Guild's new research offerings, attendees learned about two Guild initiatives that further increase the value of membership.

The eLearning Guild Web site now contains a link to The eLearning Bookstore. Guild Associates, Members, Members Plus, and Premium Members can take advantage of 20% discounts on all e-Learning books they purchase from our bookstore partners, Wiley and Pfeiffer.

The eLearning Guild also announced its alliance with the EDTEC Department at San Diego State University. Beginning in the Summer 2007 term, dues-paying Members of The eLearning Guild will receive a 15% fee waiver when they register for distance courses that the Department of Educational Technology offers through the College of Extended Studies.

Next?

At the closing session, David Holcombe, President of The Guild, announced plans for the next two major conferences. The next Guild Annual Conference will take place the week of April 14, 2008, in Orlando, Florida. DevLearn 2007, the Guild's Conference and Expo for e-Learning developers, meets November 5 - 8, 2007, in San Jose, California. Heidi Fisk is accepting proposals to speak at this event; for details, see http://www.elearningguild.com/surveys/?sid=86.

We hope to see you at both events!

Author Contact

Bill Brandon is the editor of Learning Solutions e-Magazine. Contact Bill by e-mail to bbrandon@elearningguild.com

Discuss this article in the "Talk Back to the Authors" Forum of Community Connections (http://www. elearningguild.com/community_connections/forum/ categories. cfm? catid= 17& entercat=y). You can address your comments to the author(s) of each week's article, or you can make a general comment to other readers.

Additional information on the topics covered in this article is also listed in the Guild Resource Directory.

THE eLEARNING GUILD™

A Worldwide Community of Practice for e-Learning Professionals

The eLearning Guild is a Community of Practice for e-Learning design, development, and management professionals. Through this member-driven community we provide high-quality learning opportunities, networking services, resources, and publications. Members represent a diverse group of managers, directors, and executives focused on training and learning services, as well as e-Learning instructional designers, content developers, Web developers, project managers, contractors, and consultants. Guild members work in a variety of settings including corporate, government, and academic organizations.

Guild membership is an investment in your professional development and in your organization's future success with its e-Learning efforts. Your membership provides you with learning opportunities and resources so that you can increase your knowledge and skills. That's what the Guild is all about ... putting the resources and information you need at your fingertips so you can produce more successful e-Learning.

The eLearning Guild offers four levels of membership. Each level provides members with benefits commensurate with your investment. In the table you will find a comprehensive summary of benefits

offered for each membership level. To learn more about Group Membership and pricing, go to www.eLearningGuild.com.

Guild Benefits	Associate Free	Member $99 US	Member+ $695 US	Premium $1,695 US
eLearning Insider	✓	✓	✓	✓
Past Conference Handouts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resource Directory – Access & Post	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community Connections – Access & Post	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job Board – Access Jobs & Resumes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job Board – Post Resumes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job Board – Post Jobs	✗	✓	✓	✓
Learning Solutions e-Magazine	✗	✓	✓	✓
Guild Research – Standard Interactive Reports	*	*	*	*
Guild Research – Online Briefings	✓	✓	✓	✓
Guild Research – Archives	✗	✓	✓	✓
Guild Research 360˚ Report Purchase Discounts	✗	✗	10%*	20%*
Online Forums – Live Events	$	$	✓	✓
Online Forums – Archive	✗	✗	✓	✓
Annual Gathering or DevLearn Registration	$	$	$	1 year free
Learning Management Colloquium	Upgrade $	Upgrade $	Upgrade $	Upgrade $
Optional Workshop OR Colloquium Upgrade	$	$	$	1 year free
Event Fee Discounts	✗	20%	20%	20%
Online Event Site License Discounts	✗	✗	20%	20%

*See www.eLearningGuild.com for details

✓ = Included in Membership   ✗ = Not available $ = Separate fee required

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The eLearning Guild organizes a variety of important industry events...

THE eLEARNING GUILD 2008
THE ANNUAL GATHERING
April 15 - 17, 2008
ORLANDO, FL

LEARNING MANAGEMENT COLLOQUIUM
April 16 & 17, 2008
ORLANDO, FL

THE eLEARNING GUILD'S ONLINE FORUMS
CHECK ONLINE
for topics and dates!

DevLearn 2007
THE eLEARNING DEVELOPERS' CONFERENCE & EXPO
November 5 - 8, 2007
SAN JOSE, CA