

E-Learning Jargon

What you might think it is

 By Craig Weiss

As many of you are aware, the e-learning world is well known for its jargon. In turn, it is this jargon that can create confusion and misunderstanding not only for newbies into the space, but also for hardened veterans.

While it would be so much simpler if everyone used the same terminology – consumer world equal to e-learning world, that would be too easy and as anyone who has even put their toes into the online learning world say, easy is a word that is rarely afforded.

Gamification and Gaming

I am quite sure you have heard the term “gamification”. It is everywhere you look, at trade shows, in publications, and on various net sites. It is raved about, talked about, fought about, and even negated by some who think it is a passing fad (why is this not surprising?).

Even folks who are quite knowledgeable about the term, may be in for a shock – because that term you read about so often is referring to gamification on the workplace, F2F (face-to-face) training or in classroom – AND what the industry identifies as gamification:

The Training and EDTech World

Gamification among other things involves gaming elements. Remember those two words – gaming elements.

The E-Learning World

Gamification as of right now, does not truly include gaming elements - Oh sure some might say that to be the case, but in reality, well:

If a platform says they have gamification, it means that they have at least one of the following items:

- Rewards,
- Points/incentives,
- Leader board

Some have all three, and those are the systems you want; in general e-learning tool area, the term usually refers to the same options: rewards, points/incentives, leader board.

The spin is that you can accrue points by reading an article, taking a course, leaving comments, ranking content, completing an assessment and so on – varies among vendors.

Hence, some vendors might pitch “gaming elements”, but there is no way – the point above – is what the rest of the world sees as gaming elements.

Gaming Elements

In the e-learning world, gaming elements are directly tied to games. When I discuss trends in the space, I explicitly will state

“gamification” as one trend, and “games” as another. This is because I see them as two different and separate entities, and as of right now, that is how the industry sees it as well.

If someone says to me, you can create game courses, then it has some type of actual game elements. Now is it fun? Well, that is whole other story. The same applies to those who have created e-learning games.

No offense, but some look like C-64 games, text based from the late 80s-early 90s, OR CGA fair. On the other hand, they may use templates, I mean playing “glossary” or “jeopardy” is so awesome – I could play for at least 30 seconds.

Video

Here is the term that is kicking folks in the face. In order to understand the industry as a whole, one item you must realize – behind the times. That is to say, as a whole the e-learning industry, especially authoring tools and LMS/learning systems are often two steps back, when everyone else or at least the masses are one step forward.

If you are an early adopter as a consumer, you are about 10 steps forward.

This is why you see the gaming issue – Guess how many authoring tools can create 100% real game based courses? Several. Universal? Heck no.

With video it only gets worse. Not from the angle that no one includes video, they do – rather it is the term itself that means different things to the industry.

In the Consumer Market World

Video refers usually to someone shooting video via their smartphone, tablet, digital camera or digital video camera. You take said video and either view it on your device, maybe TV, share with it with others, post it on sites and so on.

Ahh... but in the e-learning world

Especially in the LMS/Learning Systems space, the term takes on a whole new meaning:

- It can be referred to a screen recording of something and then saved as a .MP4, .AVI and so on
 - It comes from YouTube or Vivemo or similar, and then embedded in a course or directly into your learning platform or maybe just right within the sites themselves; in the EDTECH space – YouTube rules
 - With Video Learning Platforms – video can be what the consumer market identifies as video (usually the case) and yes, equally screen recordings
 - For the masses of the e-learning audience, people do not shoot video at a production facility or have one in house; but some do
 - Some people might convert their PPT to a video (it can be done) OR they have that production facility and shoot their own high quality videos OR they purchase third party content video courses
- Another super example of the video dilemma goes back to the sharing of video with friends, posting it on sites and so on. In this approach, the person or persons shoots the video can upload right from the device (depending on the device).

BUT in the e-learning world, especially in RCATs (Rapid Content Authoring Tools) and the vast majority of LMS/learning systems,

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you cannot.

You read that right. Overwhelmingly in the space, you cannot upload video directly from your devices into the platform itself. I mean that would be easier right? And what did I tell you about easy in the online learning sector?

Let's Rumble Through Other Terms

EDTECH or EDTech - Educational Technology, usually refers to online learning/e-learning in education – at one point in time it referred to any educational technology, but for many vendors it goes into the e-learning world.

E-Learning – Despite some assumptions that it means electronic learning, it actually does not. It means online learning at least with the vast number of folks. Don't fall for the trap that someone has been doing e-learning since 93 or less, because what they are actually stipulating is that they provided CBT and whatever at that point.

The number of folks who were going e-learning back in 1993, was minimal – I mean Mosaic 2.1 with a 12K modem or 24K if you were lucky – would have created too many Rip Van Winkles waiting to view, let alone upload anything.

- **WBT** - Web based training. Courses created specifically for online learning.
- **CBT** – Computer based training. CD-ROM, and in some cases DVD built courses.
- **LMS** – Learning Management System, Learning System (which for some companies tries to spin it as something new and magical and not like the LMS).

• **Modules** – In the LMS space, refers to packages that can be purchased either separately (in some cases) or as add-ons. For some reason a lot of vendors, erroneously assume that modules are widely used – it isn't. The most well-known vendor to use modules is Cornerstone OnDemand. But SumTotal and alike do it as well.

And sadly, some lower price vendors are using it as well. Why? To push that they are inexpensive, usually at the cost of needing those other features – which are add-ons. I recall one vendor charging extra for a course catalog which was part of a module.

It reminded of cable or satellite packages, where you need one or two channels and they bundle it with a bunch of garbage you don't want, but have to take.

- **RCAT** – Rapid Content Authoring Tools. These course building tools are the reason the authoring tool space took off, since they enabled anyone to build a course, without any ID (Instructional Design) background. The biggest and best known of the initial RCATs is Articulate Studio, which uses PowerPoint as a cornerstone to their product.
- **ADDIE** - Analysis, Define, Develop, Implementation and Evaluation. Should be punted into outer space. In my opinion it has outweighed its usefulness. Great for the 70s, but in 2014 not so much.
- **ASTD now called ATD** - Once referred to as Association of Training and Development – a worldwide association for T&D folks, they changed their name to ATD – Association of Talent Development. Whoever was in the focus group for this decision, probably would have let Manson go free. And if they didn't have a focus group, I am dumbfounded on who thought this was a great idea.

The term does not apply to anyone who provides training in the B2B or B2C space, IMO (In my opinion), rather it focused on internal training or learning. I suspect I won't be speaking at ASTD after this comment, then again, previous statements about their incompetence when it comes to putting on a show, probably killed

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my chances long ago.

• **E-Learning Guild** - I am not sure if they are really an association, I never saw them as that, but they do many things right that the aforementioned does not. That isn't to say they have challenges too. Anyway, they are the folks behind Learning Solutions, mLearnCon, Ecosystem, DevLearn, Performance Support System (or something like that) and online events.

If you are going to select a membership between ATD and ELG, I'd go ELG, since they are 100% focused on e-learning professionals.

- **CMS** – Content Management System

Bottom Line

There you have it, some of the most common jargon out there. Yeah, I left out SCORM, SCORM 1.2, SCORM 2004 3rd edition, SCORM 2004 4th edition (rarely used), AICC, PENS – all of which are compliance standards, each with strengths and minuses.

As you are aware, I am not a fan of AICC – useful in early 2000s, but IMO not that useful today.

Then there is Tin Can aka xAPI. I like the Tin Can term better than xAPI, which is very technical and anyone in marketing knows, simple is better and xAPI just sounds too technical.

Oh, there is also API (Application Program Interface) and Mashups (two more APIs – great example – Google Maps whereas they show restaurants, businesses, etc.).

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