# E-Learning Market Briefing (Feb 07)

The Learning Technologies event at London's Kensington Olympia at the end of January was one of the best yet. There were a lot more people, or at least it certainly felt that way, maybe they had really just reduced the exhibition and floorspace to make it feel crowded. A good party trick…

## Love in at the Olympia

From the exhibitors I spoke with, they were achieving 50+ potential contacts each day on the stands, which means it was a good show – although you can never tell if it's a good show until three months later when you can determine if you've actually won any new business. It also means there were a lot of people around just for the exhibition and skipped out on paying to hear the conference speakers.

And what were those speakers talking about? Informal e-learning, gaming, immersive learning…the themes that will still be around in a year's time, I suspect. We think we're in a period now where these terms need to get bedded down, and some evidence of implementation in organisations to counterbalance some of the hype.

### Loved up, or just confident?

It is hard to explain but there seemed to be a lot more confidence at the event. Laura Overton's survey results announced at the conference highlighted a growing maturity of e-learning and this came across from the conference. The quality of discussions and level of understanding was generally much higher than at previous events – more case studies than before, but more still needed. And in terms of new content…maybe I have just been in the market too long but it would be good to see some new faces next year. Though they should keep Donald Clark, who was consistently mentioned as the best speaker by the people we met. You can rely on DC to stir things up and arouse a few passions.

The Atlantic Link stand was buzzing with people wanting to see the award winning authoring tool and Adobe's was busy as they had the best freebies, including free webcams. We liked Atlantic Link's new mobile developments. Their new tool gives the ability to author courses for devices using the Windows Mobile operating system which opens vast possibilities for authoring content for mobile learning and information provision. One to watch Plenty of traffic for many of the tools companies including Mohive and Lectora, as more and more customers realise they can do it for themselves with a little TLC from support companies. NIIT are back in town too – it'll be interesting to see what their approach is to a UK market that is hard to recognize from their last visit.

### Celebration and sophistication

Maybe it's the chocolate fountain talking but the event was almost a celebration of e-learning with clients and suppliers all happy to share ideas and news. There were some good sessions though a lot of activity was happening outside of the main sessions.

It also seems like the marketing is also getting more sophisticated. There was a lot of press in the week before the conference, with almost too many press announcements to mention. Some like Brightwave also bought Google ads for the search term 'learning technologies' for the period around the conference which I thought was a clever idea. Some suppliers were not content with issuing press releases immediately prior to the conference but also issued releases immediately after the event. It feels a bit like that old training mantra "tell them what you are going to say, tell them and then tell them what you said". Can't accuse them of not trying…

**Nails on a blackboard**

Away from the love-in at Learning Technologies, an update on one of the, er, least loved companies in the industry at the moment. In the market this month Blackboard are trying to calm things after their claim to own the patent for Learning Management Systems. With UCLA and other universities switching to Moodle, Blackboard is keen to try and win back some friends. The company has issued what it is calling "**a legally binding promise**" not to sue universities or certain open source entities that use "homegrown" e-learning software. Hmm. When someone promises not to sue me, I know it means they've at least thought about it...

The U.S. Patent Office however says it will review the patent for e-learning software from Blackboard Inc., following a challenge from open source advocates. If you enjoy a nice slice of bitter lemon on Valentine's Day, you can always add your name at http://www.boycottblackboard.org/. Hope that helped get it off your chest. Until next month…