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Review

Rapid E-Learning Reviewed

ufi   learndirect

Mobile Learning Reviewed

About this guide:

It's for: People in the learning and training community who are keen to learn more about the emerging trend of rapid e-learning and how it can benefit their organisation.

It's by: Ufi/learndirect and Kineo. Kineo is the leading rapid e-learning specialist in the UK and has applied rapid e-learning in a wide range of organisations. Ufi/learndirect has embraced rapid content development approaches as part of its strategy to address business requirements.

It explains:

- What rapid e-learning is – and is not

- What benefits it can deliver to the organisation

- Practical steps for rapid development

- How some organisations are successfully using rapid e-learning

- Where rapid e-learning is headed

Click here to see some examples

Rapid e-learning: Timing is everything

Where are you with e-learning? Have you looked at it before and rejected it? Or are you looking over your current e-learning offering, your budgets and business requirements, and wondering if there's a different and more cost effective way it can be done?

If so, you're not alone. For many organisations, e-learning has hit a roadblock. Like traditional learning, off the shelf titles can be too generic and miss the mark. Bespoke e-learning can cost too much and take too long. By the time it's built, the goalposts have moved. Often, these factors are a reason to look elsewhere to address training issues.

Rapid e-learning is a reason to look again. Many organisations are now finding that rapid e-learning approaches are enabling them to respond to more business requirements, drive costs down, deliver faster and open up access to training.

Ufi/learndirect's view

"The 1990s saw the dot.com boom. However the much hyped 'e-learning boom' has arguably never happened. This is in part due to companies over investing in technology and lacking in focus on content, leading to poor quality products which did not meet user expectations. Much has changed since then with more relevant and engaging products becoming available.

With this next generation of e-learning, these barriers are being broken down further, not by a big bang but by stealth, as various new Web 2.0 technologies facilitate innovation. For us, rapid content development is playing a key role in this."

Kirstie Donnelly, Director of Products and Marketing, Ufi/learndirect

Kineo's view

"Rapid e-learning is about taking back control of e-learning. We see it as a response to many of the fronts on which e-learning has disappointed: it costs too much, takes too long to develop, and stands still once it's been developed.

These have been barriers to e-learning for several years. Rapid approaches mean that e-learning is now a real possibility for smaller organisations who could never afford 'traditional' bespoke, and larger organisations with small specialist audiences for whom the ROI for e-learning wouldn't stand up. Rapid e-learning enables those organisations to say 'yes' to e-learning."

Stephen Walsh, Kineo

Six months ago, the term 'rapid e-learning' was uncommon outside the e-learning trade journals in the UK. Time moves fast. In recent months, it's become common parlance in UK articles and tradeshows. On the other side of the Atlantic, Bersin and Associates predicted that 50% of all e-learning will be defined as rapid e-learning by 2008 – and we're expecting similar shifts in the UK if recent upsurges are sustained over time. Seasoned clients and the relatively new to e-learning are asking for rapid e-learning by name. More than one client we know is establishing a rapid e-learning supplier framework. The tipping point is upon us.

High time, in our opinion, to look closely at what rapid e-learning can do for your organisation, where it's working for others, and how to take it forward. But let's start by exploring what it is – and importantly, what it isn't.

Rapid e-learning: What it means, what it doesn't

If Wikipedia has taught us anything, it's that definitions don't stand still. Many commentators have taken a view on a definition for rapid e-learning. Let's not add another one, but rather suggest a series of hallmarks of a rapid e-learning project:

- E-learning developed quickly – 3 weeks or less being the target

- Considerably lower in cost than traditional 'bespoke' e-learning methods

- Short, focused e-learning modules – usually 20-30 minutes at most

- Some use of an authoring tool in the process

- Can involve a subject matter expert (SME) directly authoring into a tool, or working into predefined templates

- Can be 'disposable' – often used for subjects with a short shelf life

So far, so uncontroversial. But maybe it's more useful to dwell on three points that rapid e-learning is not. There are three common myths about rapid e-learning that are worth being aware of as you wade into this new territory:

Rapid e-learning myth:

It's an excuse to skip design
Rapid e-learning reality: Design is key to its success. Several commentators have written that rapid e-learning means you can skip the design step. As we can probably all agree from bitter experience, any training intervention that skips the design step is doomed.

Rapid e-learning requires thoughtful design, with the learner in mind, with objectives clearly defined, with engagement at the fore, and with impact on learner performance and potential as its guiding purpose.

Rapid e-learning myth:

It's just dressed up PowerPoint
Rapid e-learning reality: If done properly, it's bespoke e-learning. One of the advantages that many authoring tools provide is a familiar environment in which to structure your rapid e-learning – namely PowerPoint. But if rapid e-learning only delivered linear PowerPoint, it wouldn't be worth doing.

The reality is that rapid e-learning, when designed properly, can have much the same engagement and navigation flexibility as you'd expect to find in a bespoke e-learning course, and can be a highly effect part of the blend for soft skill training requirements in addition to more knowledge-driven ones.

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Rapid e-learning myth:

It just means 'get an authoring tool'
Rapid e-learning reality: It means a new look at the whole process If you plan to develop rapid e-learning in your organisation from start to end, you will need an authoring tool. Choosing the right one is a key consideration and beyond the scope of this guide.

What's important to clarify though, is that while using an authoring tool is a key part of the rapid development process, there's much more to consider.

If you look at the typical e-learning project, the 'authoring tool' step is just one component of overall development, preceded by all the project definition, scoping, learning design and content creation tasks, and followed by all the piloting, launch, hosting, marketing, support and evaluation ones.

What's the point in only looking at the authoring process if 80% of the development costs are in the design, scoping, scripting or delivery areas? Taking a rapid approach means examining the full development process, and removing the speedbumps and the costly components that can be accelerated, combined, or removed completely to deliver effective outputs more quickly.

Ufi/learndirect's view

"Rapid e-learning is not an excuse to lower standards in scripting or design and shouldn't be a reason not to develop an engaging learning experience. While there are huge benefits in using an authoring tool that allows a non-technical SME or trainer to develop materials there must still be the involvement of somebody with the expertise to scope, and design the learning content."

Kirstie Donnelly, Director of Products and Marketing, Ufi/learndirect

Kineo's view

"We have seen many organisations acquire an authoring tool and then go through the 'now what' phase. It becomes quickly apparent that while authoring tools provide great value, they don't instantly accelerate development or improve its quality.

That's why much of the work we do with organisations to introduce and embed rapid approaches has actually got very little to do with the mechanics of how to use an authoring tool, and a whole lot to do with how you accelerate the scoping, scripting, design and launch aspects of development – that's where the real opportunities to reduce time and cost exist."

Stephen Walsh, Kineo

So let's add three components to that emerging definition of rapid e-learning then. Rapid e-learning is:

- Designed to be engaging and effective
- Far beyond linear PowerPoint presentations
- A way of accelerating the full e-learning development process

So much for what it is - what benefits does rapid e-learning provide, and what are some of the practical steps involved in bringing rapid approaches to your organisation? The next two sections explore these questions.

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Rapid e-learning: The potential benefits

Rapid e-learning that lives up to its potential can contribute to key drivers:

- Cost reduction
- Speed of response
- Increased control
- Wider access to e-learning
- No compromise on quality

Let's examine each briefly.

Cost reduction

With hourly development rates for bespoke e-learning still in excess of £15-20k per hour, it's a relatively limited set of organisational needs that can hope to consider it. Rapid e-learning is considerably less expensive than traditional bespoke e-learning, even factoring in the cost of an authoring tool, you should expect it to cost less than 50% of typical development fees. A whole new set of organisations and divisions can now consider e-learning.

Speed of response

Recent research in the US by Bersin & Associates indicates that 72% of training requirements are time critical and need to be addressed in 60-90 days. At Kineo we're often working to deadlines of 3 weeks or less, often in response to product launches, new system rollouts, and policy updates. Traditional e-learning models struggle to deliver in this timeframe. A rapid approach therefore becomes critical if your training team is to respond to the demands of the business.

Ufi/learndirect's view

"One of the criticisms sometimes levelled at us is speed of delivery – how can we get courses to market quicker, we need the content now. On our first pilot with rapid development, we started in September and delivered by end of November. That, on a first project, which included both development of a module and of a reusable process, I think is phenomenal – and it gives us real potential to deliver much quickly to employers and end users.

We've adopted the term 'Rapid Content Development', because it clearly defines exactly what it is and what it does. I believe if we correctly embed Rapid Content Development into our process and development cycle we will create new and fresh content able to hit our markets/audiences much more quickly than previously, but importantly be able to contextualise the content to fit audience.

Kirstie Donnelly, Director of Products and Marketing, Ufi/learndirect

Kineo's view

"Most of our rapid e-learning partners, including Ufi/learndirect, are far from new to e-learning. We're working with established players, leaders in the industry – and it's not surprising. They've spend a lot on e-learning in traditional models and are keen -- and under pressure -- to find a way to deliver more for less. Cost and time are the dominant drivers, but quality is not negotiable: rapid must maintain standards and expectations set by them and their learners."

Stephen Walsh, Kineo

Increased control

Generic titles provide you with little to no control over the content. You get what you pay for, and customisation comes with a price tag. Bespoke e-learning, by its nature, provides you with initial control, but then updates and maintenance quickly increase the cost and can tie you into expensive maintenance contracts. Rapid e-learning reduces the total cost of ownership by enabling you to directly update, change and maintain e-learning on your own terms – and when there's continued requirement to update skills and knowledge, control is critical.

In practice

Rapid approaches give Reuters more control
"Reuters' managers need to build capability quickly and our employees need to continually update their knowledge and skills. Rapid e-learning development is vital to help us achieve this and our work with Kineo is an important element in this work."

"Reuters is committed to providing its employees with effective, business-driven learning solutions. Rapid e-learning is a key component of our strategy and we are working with companies like Kineo to make sure we achieve our objectives".

Charles Jennings, Global Head of Learning, Reuters

Wider access

With lower costs and increased control comes the opportunity to widen access to e-learning. Organisations who could not have previously considered e-learning can now gain from its benefits. Smaller target audiences within large organisations that were overlooked in the past can now cost-justify e-learning development.

Ufi/learndirect's view

"Within the wider government's skills and employment agenda Lord Leitch in his report 'Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills' has placed a greater responsibility on employers to deliver skills training to their workforce.

One of Lord Leitch's recommendations was a new 'pledge' for employers to voluntarily train more employees in the workplace up to level 2, and through Ufi/learndirect we are looking at ways to help UK employers achieve this. The Leitch recommendations will be reviewed in 2010. This could lead to some training becoming mandatory. We believe rapid e-learning offers UK employers an incredibly cost-effective tool to do this, either by externally sourcing content or by building their own in-house capability."

Kirstie Donnelly, Director of Products and Marketing, Ufi/learndirect

Kineo's view

"We've found that access to e-learning has been opened up by rapid approaches, really on two fronts.

First, smaller organisations, who would never have been in a position to afford traditional bespoke e-learning development, can now consider a customised approach to e-learning for the first time. Second, even in medium to large organisations who are already using e-learning, there are always overlooked groups, for example very small specialist audiences who on their own ould not be able to cost-justify e-learning. Now with rapid tools and approaches, they too can consider e-learning. So for us, it's very much about inclusiveness."

Stephen Walsh, Kineo

No compromise in quality

All of the above benefits would be nullified if rapid e-learning was markedly inferior to the alternatives. As we've stressed earlier, it is not a reason to lower standards. Well designed rapid e-learning can be deployed in environments where it sits alongside generic titles and traditional bespoke e-learning and not suffer by comparison. On a recent rollout for a very high-profile development at a large multinational, rapid elearning produced results that were viewed to be 'as good as bespoke at a fraction of the cost.'

In practice

Rapid e-learning helps Virgin Media to say 'yes' more often
"The use of rapid development tools mean that I can say 'Yes' to customers I may have had to say 'No' to in the past due to the time, money and effort required to develop material in the traditional way. We can now cater for many smaller audiences, tighter deadlines or slimmer budgets (sometimes no budget!) without losing the impact and quality that a more traditional development model can offer. Although it's not the answer to everything, we are using these tools extensively at Virgin Media. It's the only way to deliver against our rapidly changing business."

Simon Connolly, Learning Solutions Business Partner, Virgin Media

So clearly there's a compelling set of benefits to be achieved, and organisations that are enjoying those benefits through a rapid approach. What are they doing differently? That's the subject of our next section.

Sample steps in rapid e-learning development

As we mentioned earlier, taking a rapid approach to e-learning means a lot more than putting an authoring tool in place. It means looking at every step in the development process to identify where you can:

- Think 80/20: Focus on where the most value can be added

- Use templates intelligently: build-in best practice through a templated approach

- Think re-use and sustainability from the outset, so that updates are straightforward

- Use collaborative tools to provide better communication and control

If you look at the typical steps in the development process, it becomes clear how much scope there is for exploring ways to accelerate, before and after the 'authoring' step. Kineo has developed a Rapid E-learning Methodology which takes each step in the development process and identifies how to introduce rapid approaches in each step. It can be summarised by this diagram:

1. Rapid definition

Align
Define
Set-up and manage
Scope
Forward plan →

2. Rapid development

Assemble content
Build
Review
QA
User test →

3. Rapid launch

Launch
Support
Measure
Refine
Sustain

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Kineo recently collaborated on a pilot rapid e-learning project for Ufi/learndirect, on a short module covering the key points in the new Work and Families Act. The goal of that pilot was twofold: to create an e-learning output, but also to hone a sustainable rapid development process for future projects. During that project, we found that much of the time and cost savings were achieved in two upfront phases:

1. Scoping content
2. Working with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

For the purposes of this guide, we're therefore going to focus on the rapid approach that proved effective in those phases. Obviously these are steps within an overall rapid approach. More information about the overall approach, and the guidelines that underpin it, are available at http://www.kineo.co.uk/rapid-elearning/rapid-e-learning.html or by contacting info@kineo.com

1. Rapid approach to scoping content

Scoping in rapid e-learning differs from traditional bespoke e-learning in several key ways:

Scoping process in traditional e-learning	Scoping process in rapid e-learning
Iterative process involving: • Project initiation documents • Scope documents • Stakeholder reviews • Rounds of amendments Typically not less than 2 weeks (elapsed time)	Accelerated process involving: • One single template • One single review event • One point of signoff Typically not more than 2-3 days (elapsed time)
Instructional design commences after scope is approved	Top-line instructional design and content development bundled into scoping task using a pre-determined template
Usually working with a variety of content sources and SMEs	Usually not more than one or two sources– typically a PowerPoint, workbook and/or policy document – and maybe a SME but for a limited period of time only
Inaccuracy can carry hard cost of external development effort if underscoped –precision is key driver	Inaccuracy is confined to a limited content set and set of design options, and can be corrected during assembly – speed to best estimate is the key driver

To bring rapid approaches to your scoping process, consider the following key steps:

1 → Get baseline estimate

2 → Chunk information

3 → Identify content & interactions

4 → List source materials

5 → Assess the risks
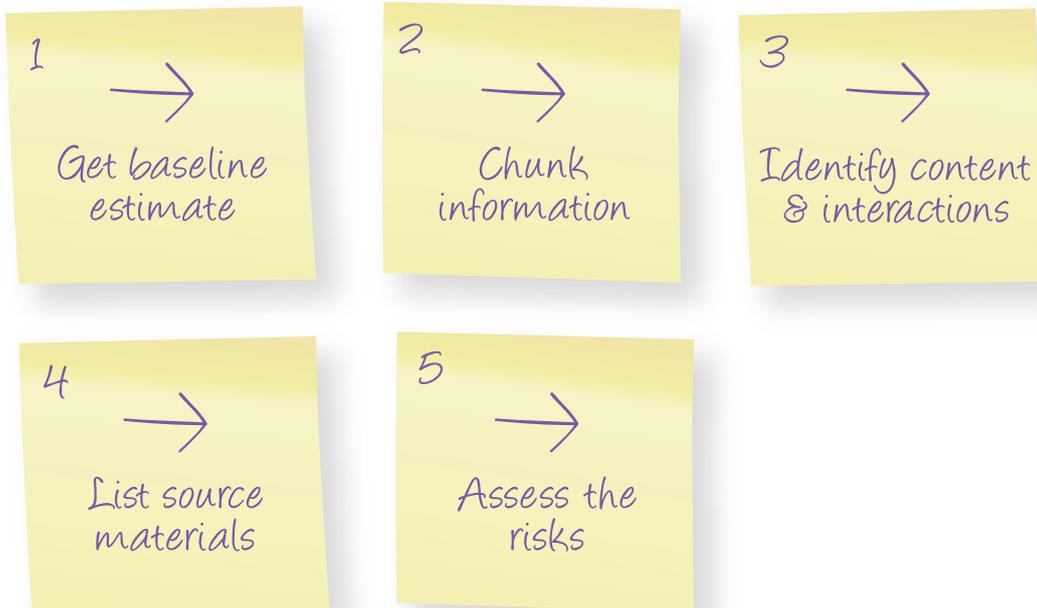
1. Get to a baseline estimate quickly

In rapid e-learning it's critical to visualise the end product from the start. So before any detailed work on the scope, take five minutes to get a rough approximation of the scale of the project. You can use the current delivery method/materials to provide a very rough indication of the scope.

Delivery method/materials	Rapid e-learning converter
Classroom/workshop	Assume that the e-learning will be approximately 40 minutes for each hour of existing classroom time. This is because e-learning removes some of the time inefficiency of classroom (breaks, introductions, going at a moderate pace to accommodate everyone). Assume 1 screen per minute
PowerPoint	Assume that the e-learning will be 1.5 times as many screens as are represented in PowerPoint materials provided, to accommodate additional commentary, questions, introduction and summaries (obviously, if these are in the PowerPoint materials already don't double count)
Documentation	Assume three screens per page will be required to summarise information and to include a reasonable level of questions

2. Break it into information chunks

The 'headline' scope of the project is in one sense defined by the key learning objectives and/or the brief you've been given – for example, "Explain our seven step sales process", "Communicate new product features and benefits", "Raise awareness of our health and safety policies, "explain the new legislation".

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To translate those objectives into a quantifiable project, you need to break down the scope into a series of information chunks. The metric by which you do this can vary, including:

- Steps in a process (if it's process based)
- Number of features/benefits of a particular product
- Subsections of an Act/document

If e-learning is based on existing materials, this may provide a logical scheme for information chunking, for example:

- Each session in the workshop
- Each section in the existing PowerPoint slides
- Each heading in the policy document

The headings will vary depending on the nature of the project, as discussed above. The key tasks at this point is to decide on a manageable, easily identified set and stick to it as you complete the following set. It might help to visualise these as items on the main menu of a finished course (as they may well become).

At the end of this step, you should have a list of information chunks. If working with a SME, you should confirm the structure at this point, to confirm you've broken the content into logical components, and there are no key points missing from your analysis. This could be a very quick call/meeting to confirm your structure is sound – and a much quicker interaction than on a full-blown bespoke e-learning project.

In practice

Use a scoping table
If you're going to achieve this task in a limited period of time, you need to keep it simple. Use one document to capture it all. We recommend you set up a scoping table with the following column headings:

Information chunk	Learning objectives	Key content points to cover	Interaction approach	Number of screens	Learner time	Source materials	Scope Implication?

When Ufi/learndirect and Kineo recently collaborated on the Work and Families Act rapid e-learning pilot, this is the approach we took, which allowed us to quickly identify scope requirements and work effectively with a Subject Matter Expert in minimal time.

3. Identify content and interactions

Now that you've identified the chunks of information and the learning objectives, your next task is to establish what the likely key content points to cover and the proposed interaction approach will be for each chunk. Think of this as the sequence, or 'complete thought' for each information chunk.

While this is not storyboarding, the compressed process of rapid development means that a certain amount of content development should be done at this point in the process. You should at least have the key points, even down to bullet points for storyboard development if you have sufficient content to work from at this point.

Once you've identified a likely interaction approach, quantify it using both screen and learner time metrics. This is where you can deviate from the one screen per minute guideline because you realise your interaction approach will take longer/shorter for a specific reason – e.g. it includes a complex point, a series of questions (longer), or is a series of photos in a montage or links to intranet pages (shorter).

4. Inventory existing source materials

It's a good idea to list against each information chunk where the source material will come from. In some cases this may be obvious – for example, if there is a single policy document. However for most training needs there is a variety of potential sources – procedural information, existing training materials, intranet resources. By identifying where the content you need to apply each interactive approach comes from, you achieve three goals:

1. You create a clear resource brief for yourself or whoever is going to develop the content, saving time when rapid development starts

2. You identify where no source material currently exists and either determine where you will rapidly source it (e.g. SMEs) or drop from the scope

3. Along with the above point, you develop an agenda for additional content gathering by the Subject Matter Expert

Doing this eliminates the risk of surprises when it comes to development and you realise there aren't any case studies to support the interaction approach. Of course you can change the approach, or you can find a SME in a hurry to provide those case studies, but it is more effective to uncover these issues in advance so there are no delays during the rapid development phase.

5. Do a rapid risk assessment

Having identified approaches and source materials, it's good practice to make notes on where there is going to be additional effort and complexity that influences the scope of the project.

Think of this as rapid risk assessment – identifying the pressure points that could cause issues in rapid development and determining how to address them now.
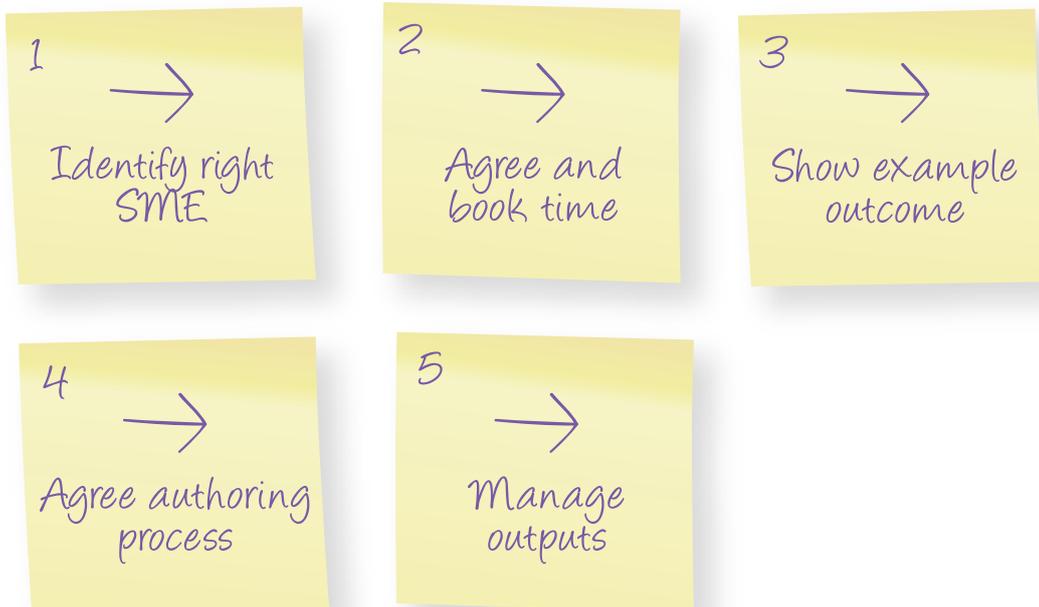
For example, if it transpires that sourcing or developing the graphic required is going to take more time and effort than the project constraints will allow, this may be the time to consider an alternative approach (in this case it's trivial issue, but a more complex case study or simulation may rule itself out based on the time and effort implications.)

In these cases, it's possible to carry the issue forward into rapid development –however it may slow down that phase and you should factor that into your forward planning.

2. Rapid approach to working with subject matter experts

Unless you are the expert in the topic in which you're building the rapid e-learning, you are likely going to need a Subject Matter Expert (SME) to make it work. Again, rapid approaches can enable you to work more effectively and efficiently with subject matter experts.

Here are five steps you can take to do just that:

1 → Identify right SME	**2** → Agree and book time	**3** → Show example outcome
4 → Agree authoring process	**5** → Manage outputs	

1. Find the right SME for the job

Not all rapid e-learning projects have the same subject matter expert requirement. The key project factors that will steer you towards the most appropriate SME are:

- Time: If you've only got three weeks, only some SMEs will be in a position to help. You are unlikely to secure the most senior qualified person unless they're very committed to the project (and they may not be at the right level to provide useful help).

- Subject matter: A more linear procedural or systems content may need less face-to-face SME time than soft skills or more complex content, which may need more interpretation.

- Project profile: A rapid e-learning project for a specific group or role will have a specific SME requirement that's different from, for example, a company-wide induction project that will require a range of SMEs to represent different groups and functions.

2. Set time expectations

A common complaint from SMEs about participation in e-learning projects is that it takes far longer than they were told it would. To avoid this, be clear about time required upfront. And if your SME can't commit? You can either:

- Adjust your schedule to accommodate (if they must be the SME) , or

- Adjust the working model to accommodate (if the deadline can't change), or

- Find alternative SME resources.

3. Show them the outcome before you start

Bear in mind that your SME may have no idea what you mean by e-learning – or have a different idea of e-learning to yours. If you're not on the same page in terms of type of learner experience and learning model, you will encounter problems and disagreements in the detailed content development and review. To help them visualise the outcome, and the iterations along the way:

- Show them the most similar piece of e-learning at your disposal

- Show them an example of a script/unedited PowerPoint for review

- Show them a typical output from the tool you're using.

In practice

Take five – five questions you can always ask
If your SME is time pressured, focus on a core set of questions to help provide what you need to develop engaging rapid e-learning:
1. What are the top five things people must know (about this subject, product/system/regulation/ issue)?

2. What are the key steps/processes people must follow to do this right?

3. What are the top five most common mistakes people make? What are the consequences?

4. What are your five case studies, examples or anecdotes that would help people put this topic in context?

5. Where should people go for more help, advice and information on this topic?

Getting the answers to these questions will help you be efficient with your SMEs time and provide great raw material that should form the basis for any engaging piece of e-learning (obviously only ask them if the answers are not obvious in the content you already have).

On Ufi/learndirect and Kineo's recent rapid e-learning pilot, the answer to question 3 when asked of the SME revealed that there are a number of misperceptions and false assumptions about the legislation. On pursuing this further, this generated raw material for what become the 'perception and reality' section of the scoping table and ultimately a key part of the final module.

4. Agree a process for content development

There are many models to get from the contents of the SME's head to a finished rapid e-learning course. From lowest level of SME involvement to highest, the most common are:

- SME provides raw materials and ideas, then reviews build

- SME briefs, reviews scoping outputs and storyboards, build

- SME co-writes, reviews scripts, build

- SME authors (in PowerPoint or authoring tool.)

In between there are many gradations. It's important that you agree with the SME the model that will work best for you and them, and adhere to that model. Best practice is to develop a short document or flow-chart agreeing who will do what so there's absolute clarity.

5. Manage their outputs effectively

SMEs need project management, probably more than any other member of the e-learning production team as they're typically not dedicated to the project and are, by their nature, usually extremely busy. Some basic tips for project management of a SME:

- Develop a personalised project plan with just their responsibilities and deadlines

- Ask them if they're clear on their tasks and if they need support

- Build contingency into any deadlines to allow for slippage

- Focus them on the content, not the whole project (unless they're explicitly playing a more involved role)

- Focus them specifically on the content that only they can provide, for example, interpretation, examples, anecdotes, not on materials you can source without their input

- Work to a scheduled review event, e.g. meeting or conference call

- Don't allow their involvement to tail off – their detailed review is most critical at storyboard

In between there are many gradations. It's important that you agree with the SME the model that will work best for you and them, and adhere to that model. Best practice is to develop a short document or flow-chart agreeing who will do what so there's absolute clarity.

In practice

SME should always work to a template
It's common for SMEs to provide more than you need, or in a format that is unworkable when it comes to developing e-learning. Manage that risk by providing them with a template to work in – the scoping template is an extremely useful document for SMEs to work to, as it provides a structure and a clear requirement.

One effective way we have found to make the best use of limited SME time is to provide a pre-defined template that has baseline content already in place. For example, if you're working with a SME to develop e-learning on performance coaching for your organisation, it can be much more effective to provide them with an outline of a pre-constructed template for coaching that's e-learning ready, and ask them to focus on what needs to be specifically different for your organisation.

For many topics, such as absence management, health and safety, sales skills, and so on, there's a reassuring commonality across organisations in what's required to cover in these topics – the "80 per cent" that's the same. By providing that, you enable your SME to focus on the remaining 20 per cent, for example case studies, quotes, references to your specific policies and issues, that will make it customised.

One way of providing that is through what we call a 'Rapid E-learning Flatpack', which is in effect a construction kit for rapid e-learning. These are available in a wide range of topics at www.rapidelearningstore.com

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Skills for rapid e-learning development

So what skillsets should be present in a rapid e-learning team in your organisation? There's no simple answer to that, of course, it will vary according to the individuals in your team, the types of rapid e-learning you're aiming to develop, and to what extent you want to take the full production effort in house.

A simple starter checklist of the skills that an individual or a team would typically require to design and develop rapid e-learning is as follows:

Skill area	Comment
Design skills	Performance requirement analysis Content scoping and analysis skills SME engagement and knowledge elicitation Content structuring and conversion Interactive content development (including writing questions) Specify/source relevant images
Technical/authoring skills:	Competence in the use of PowerPoint (as it is a source application for many authoring tools) Competence in the basic functions of the chosen authoring tool
More advanced skills	Blend design skills Launch/evaluation/measurement Competence in more advanced features of an authoring tools Audio editing skills Graphics manipulation and editing skills

We also assume a basic level of project management, communication and writing skills as part of what you'd expect in your rapid e-learning team.

In this section, we have focused on just two development aspects common to practically every e-learning project, and looked at them through a rapid development lens. It goes without saying that there are similar benefits to be achieved at almost every step in the development process, to reduce time to develop, lower cost and increase efficiency. So how are other organisations applying these steps and others to bring rapid approaches to their operations? We examine that in the next section.

Rapid e-learning in action: Three case studies

So which organisations are putting rapid development into practice, and what benefits are they achieving? Earlier we included examples of how Reuters and Virgin Media were benefiting from rapid approaches. Here we look at three examples of rapid elearning development in action.

Ufi/learndirect: Rapid internal development and mobile e-learning

Ufi/learndirect has already championed and piloted rapid e-learning development approaches through the Work and Families Act pilot referred to in the above section. Ufi/learndirect is extending its commitment to rapid approaches through two active projects:

- Internal Development: Ufi/learndirect has internal training and development objectives as an employer of course, and is currently looking at how a rapid e-learning approach could be used to address those. This has the advantages of containing cost, accelerating time to development, and of course ensuring that Ufi/learndirect has full control of internally developed courses for future updates.

- Mobile and Rapid E-learning research: Expanding rapid e-learning's reach into the mobile arena, Ufi is again collaborating with Kineo to conduct research into the potential of applying rapid development models to deliver effective e-learning to a range of mobile devices including video-enabled iPods, PDAs and third generation mobile phones. This project involves developing new models for rapid development in a mobile environment and will be a leading piece of action research at the intersection of two emerging fields in learning and technology.

Ufi/learndirect's view

"We are always striving to innovate and extend the range of technologies and approaches available to develop effective e-learning. The area of rapid e-learning was on our agenda, and working with a specialist like Kineo in the area helped us to explore how we can make use of this approach to increase speed to market and develop a reusable process.

We're now exploring other areas for rapid content development and will continue to evolve our strategy in this area."

Kirstie Donnelly, Director of Products and Marketing, Ufi/learndirect

Kineo's view

"Working with Ufi/learndirect on this pilot provided us with an opportunity to further apply our rapid e-learning development processes. The practical experience of developing the module and ensuring the process was adaptable to Ufi/learndirect helped to refine and influence the approach. Now we're jointly looking at extending rapid e-learning's reach into new territories, such as mobile e-learning, and it's great to see Ufi/learndirect calling for this innovation."

Stephen Walsh, Kineo

Marks & Spencer: Global reach through rapid development

For Marks & Spencer, speed to delivery and the ability to reach global suppliers with training are key drivers. M&S has collaborated with Kineo on a major rapid e-learning project to develop 11 modules on kidswear Health & Safety for a global audience to extend access beyond what workshops can provide, and to enable vital assessment and tracking data to be gathered.

The rapid process involved the creation of branded templates for scripting and development and authoring tools, combining several development steps to meet business deadlines, with cost-effective, high quality engaging e-learning as the outcome. The modules are hosted via an M&S branded portal using Moodle's open source LMS. This provides the necessary tracking and management data, and enables global access to the e-learning modules. A parallel project to develop a suite of line manager e-learning modules for M&S is applying the same approach to a manager audience in the area of soft skills including coaching, recruitment and reward.

"For M&S, speed to delivery is a critical issue, with less than 8 weeks to deliver 11 modules. The rapid approach we've taken with Kineo on this project shows how you can deliver cost-effective high-quality e-learning speed, and reach a global audience to address key compliance requirements."

Susi Proudman, Marks & Spencer

Cable & Wireless: Using templates to accelerate development

Cable & Wireless was one of the early pioneers in using rapid authoring tools for e-learning. Cable & Wireless is partnering with Kineo on two major e-learning initiatives; developing a suite of product knowledge modules, and a series of modules for the management academy. Both share key challenges: quality of learning experience is paramount, effective use of limited SME time was crucial, and response time to business needs had to be quick.

Applying its rapid development approach, Kineo has designed a series of branded templates for Cable & Wireless. These provide Cable & Wireless's SMEs with a familiar environment in which to work, but critically with a structured learning design and creative look and feel built-in, allowing SMEs to focus on content delivery. This has enabled acceleration over normal development times - templated designs approved and built using Breeze and Articulate authoring tools on a weekly basis. The benefits to the business are quality e-learning solutions, developed in rapid time, using an extremely cost-effective model which leverages SME and designer expertise appropriately in the collaboration.

"At Cable & Wireless, 'people, not technology' is our mantra, as it's our great people who deliver great service and who our customers identify with. As a result, we're investing in our colleagues and rapid e-learning is central to our e-learning model. It enables us to deliver quality e-learning at scale to business critical deadlines in a way that traditional models might be challenged to match. We're using it in a wide range of areas, including soft skills. With Kineo's approach, we've been able to respond quickly and efficiently to business and customer requirements. Rapid e-learning is not an excuse to compromise on learning design - and with this approach, we haven't."

Mike Booth, Learning Technologies Manager, Cable & Wireless

If you've got other case studies and examples of how you're using rapid e-learning methods, we'd like to hear about them – contact us at sbingham@ufi.com or stephen.walsh@kineo.com

The future of rapid e-learning

Growing use and awareness of the term 'rapid e-learning' in the UK, coupled with an upturn in organisations using rapid tools, suggests that it will not take long for the kinds of shifts and trends towards Rapid e-learning that we've seen in the US taking hold here.

Rapid e-learning is of course an evolving field, and is ideally placed to take advantage of many of the emerging web 2.0 trends that have changed the internet and the way we use it. Here we share our views on some future trends for rapid e-learning.

Moving away from courses: In length

Rapid e-learning modules tend to be quite short in length – 20 minutes or less is the norm, and in our experience, most learners welcome that. We expect that they will become even shorter, and more 'disposable' in nature, with three to five minute experiences focused on a specific task becoming more commonplace. Many authoring tools are well set up to provide very short focused interactions and we anticipate that rapid designers will use them.

Evolution of tools

As the practice of authoring becomes more prevalent, we can expect the rapid e-learning authoring tools to advance too. We can expect to see tools that make it easy to assemble game-like learning experiences, more immersive scenario-driven e-learning, and of course improvements in workflow and collaboration.

A further evolution to be expected is open source rapid e-learning tools, where there's no licence fee for the tool, and collaborators share improvements, in the way that Moodle works as an open source LMS. At present there are a few open source e-learning tools, but they're very much in the embryonic phase. As rapid e-learning becomes more established, we can expect to see more of these.

Everyone as rapid e-learning author

As tools become more available, what's to stop anyone and everyone in the organisation having access to a rapid e-learning platform and outputting e-learning as and when they need to? Is there anything wrong with that – do we need controls in place? It's a topic of some debate at the moment, with some commentators calling out for access to tools to be limited to those with defined skills and training roles in the organisations, and others arguing for a more web 2.0 'everyone as publisher' model. The right answer probably lies somewhere in the middle, with wider access than the training department, but still a role for QA and of course using templates to build in quality from the outset.

Open source rapid e-learning?

One of the key web 2.0 trends is that of sharing and harnessing collective intelligence. If two or more organisations share a common learning need, why not use a rapid e-learning tool and template to collaborate and share the burden, and benefit from the results? Competition usually gets in the way, but in the public sector, and for certain content areas in the private sector, this should not be an issue. We know of at least one highly commercial organisation that is seeking to collaborate with others in their industry on shared e-learning. With rapid approaches, the tools and templates make this more possible and likely.

Ufi/learndirect's view

"As this part of the e-learning market continues to grow, we expect to see more organisations of all sizes and levels looking for routes to easily customise e-learning for their own purposes. We'll shortly be announcing details of a new collaboration with Kineo on a service to further enable easy and rapid customisation of e-learning on a large scale to the UK market."

Kirstie Donnelly, Director of Products and Marketing, Ufi/learndirect

Kineo's view

"We're committed to rapid e-learning and look forward to continuing our work with Ufi/learndirect to bring our Flatpack E-learning approach and methods to an even broader sector of the market. We believe this provides a great opportunity to reduce cost of development and increase control over the look and feel, and ongoing relevance of e-learning for a whole range of organisations."

Stephen Walsh, Kineo

Take it further

What do you want to do?

Read other guides in this series

See some examples of rapid e-learning

Help is at:

More UFI guides
More Kineo guides

A demonstration of a Kineo Rapid E-learning Flatpack in Absence Management

Kineo's Rapid E-learning Flatpacks, guides and templates E-learning authoring tools

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