

Feature Article

E-media and Education

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Throughout the history of communications, pundits and alarmists alike have viewed each technological advance as the death knell for existing media formats. However, a quick look at the history of communications belies this viewpoint. The advent of radio and cinema were supposed to eradicate the printed word of books and newspapers. In turn, radio and cinema were supposed to be destroyed by television and VCR technologies. The truth is that there are more books, newspapers, radio stations, films and broadcast communication outlets than ever before.

"The report of my death was an exaggeration."
—Mark Twain, after reading his own obituary

Why is it then that we hear everyone talking about the Internet taking over the world of communications, making all traditional media obsolete? Will e-books replace books of paper and ink? Are we really moving into a world where public schools die out in favor of online tutoring? History has shown us that this is not the future.

The Internet isn't a replacement technology. It's the latest information delivery platform. Human beings are social animals, and we require human, face-to-face interaction. The Internet cannot take the place of live meetings, public education, or daily social and business activities.

However, like any new media format, the Internet can enhance and supplement traditional communications such

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as the single-site, live meetings that so many organizations use to disseminate important new information to their members.

LIVE MEETINGS

Live meetings do have some limitations. Not every member can attend, due to either the high cost of travel or to time restraints. When they do attend, the meeting is often marred by long lectures, poor visuals, slow delivery and hit or miss presenters. In addition, most potential audience members are under 40 and grew up watching television, which has greatly shortened their attention spans.

A typical attendance breakdown for an association meeting is as follows:

- 30,000 potential members
- 10,000 actual members (33%)
- 3,000 potential members that attend (10%)

30% or more of attendees are international; therefore, *only 2,000 attendees, or 7.5% of the domestic target audience, are attending the meeting.*

How can you reach the audience that isn't attending? The best way to reach this missing audience is through a

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REASONS TO REGISTER FOR THE
2001 ANNUAL CONFERENCE [4]**
**See the top 10 reasons your colleagues
gave for attending the Alliance's
26th Annual Conference.**

Educational Opportunities



Note: To encourage international participation in the 2001 annual conference and to equitably compensate non-U.S. registrants for the difference in the exchange rate, the Alliance is offering a 20 percent discount in the registration fee for non-U.S. registrants.

combination of traditional and cutting-edge communication formats, including print pieces, Internet programs, CD-ROMs, audiocassettes/videotapes and satellite broadcasts.

INTERNET

The most talked about technology today is Internet-based. What are the advantages offered by Internet programs? They provide content on demand 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and there is almost universal access. Another advantage is the ability to check usage and customize messages. The technology is new and exciting. However, the Internet also has limitations.

A total of 82% of people who use the Internet are on line for only a half hour or less. In other words, people are often too busy to spend a lot of time browsing the World Wide Web. Further, navigation can be difficult because of the overwhelming amount of information out there. Of course, not everyone is on line yet, and slow connections can also turn users off. Men, in particular, use the web the way they use a remote control, clicking from one site to another without taking in the information. It's the ultimate remote control or shopping mall, depending on your user preference. In addition, there are a number of petty annoyances on the web including hard-to-remember passwords, unbearable disclaimers and sites that require intrusive information.

FORMAT

Despite these limitations, the Internet can offer a variety of model programs for information delivery and distance education:

- **Print Publishing Model**—Currently, 90% of the Internet programs offered are based on the static print publisher model, but this is changing. The content consists of little more than text and a navigation bar. These platforms provide information, but do little to stimulate learning.
- **Slides with Audio**—Programs based on audio and slides take print based models one step further by providing the information through sound, as well as text and graphics. Studies have shown that information is better retained when it is delivered through more than one of the senses. If slides are animated, audience retention increases tremendously. One caveat to keep in mind is that the media is not the message. You must format the media for the audience. A careless

construction element, such as fussy or crooked slides, or bad color choices, can seriously diminish the educational value.

- **Video Streaming (Live or Post Conference)**—Video streaming is an excellent way to enhance the educational experience of an Internet program. Moving images add educational value to a program by keeping the learner's interest high and by re-emphasizing text and sound information. It also gives the user the feeling of actually attending the meeting or interacting directly with the subject of the video. For strictly live programs, it is important to remember that the user has to be at the right place at the right time and that bandwidth considerations can affect the quality of the live video. Also, video technology is not close to broadcast quality yet (despite what Internet professionals will tell you). Although universal access to high-speed bandwidth is 3 to 5 years away, video streaming is a good application for question-and-answer segments, or straight forward talking heads, but not for delivering scientific information that is slide dependent.
- **Case Studies and Interactive Programs**—The addition of case studies and interactive elements to the program enhances learning in two ways. First, case studies allow participants to apply their new knowledge to a real world situation. Secondly, interactive segments increase retention and make educational programs more fun. This encourages participants to really get involved with the content. The use of case studies, pretests, posttests, problem solving exercises and games are a great way to test how much of the content the participants really understand.

When designing an Internet program, it is important to tailor it for a specific target audience and to choose the program format that best delivers the information and key messages. In many cases, a simple format is best; while at other times, a combination of the above formats will really capture the audience's interest. Also, keep bandwidth issues in mind. The average PC user is running around 28K so don't try to do too much.

ADVERTISING

It is also important to remember that your audience has to find you. The Internet is not a "build your Internet course and they will come" application. Marketing has to be a

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key part of your creative and budgeting process. Hospitals and associations are notorious for thinking that a program audience is guaranteed.

During the past Super Bowl, we were treated to dozens of very weird ads promoting websites. These represent extreme examples of advertising the Internet. There are other forms of media to promote web-based courses. Marketing options include: brochures, mailings, banner ads on related websites, public relations, e-mails to members and advertisements on your own home page. Members often log on to an association's site once a week to find out if there is anything new or interesting on the site. If you don't update your web site, you will lose your members' interest, and possibly, their membership.

The Internet isn't the only way to get information to association members, and educators shouldn't overlook other media. In fact, educators should consider a chain-of-media that incorporates a variety of media formats and technologies.

CD-ROM

CD-ROMs are as interactive and user-friendly as Internet programs, and they are tangible items that users can install on their own desktop computers. In addition, CD-ROMs can include animations and video, which adds interest to any educational program. Once an Internet program has been designed, it is relatively painless to translate that program into a CD-ROM format, giving you two innovative means of reaching your audience.

Audiocassette and Videotapes

What about more traditional media? How can audiocassettes and videotapes enhance a live meeting by reaching the missing audience members? The audiocassette is universally available and easy to use. There is no other more convenient media format, but it is not always the most stimulating way to disseminate information. Think of audiocassettes as a chance to reach

your members in a closed environment (car). Don't just create tapes that are recorded presentations, but try alternative mediums. Think of cassettes more like talk radio; make them interesting using interviews, news stories and descriptive narration.

Videotapes are just as available and easy to use, but are more interesting due to their visual aspect. There is limited access for videotapes in the professional setting.

SATELLITE BROADCASTS


A live, satellite broadcast can turn your meeting or educational program into a multisite, or even multinational, event. The live nature of the broadcast ensures that everyone at every remote site is receiving the same information simultaneously, thereby assuring consistency of message. These broadcasts can also be interactive, allowing participants to interact electronically with the faculty at the origination site and to receive immediate feedback. A satellite broadcast can be expensive, but they usually prove to be very cost effective when a cost-per-person-reached analysis has been performed. After all, a satellite broadcast makes more sense than trying to deliver your message by sending faculty to 10 to 300 sites across the country for four months at a time.

COMPENDIUM

There is a marginal cost in making multiple products with similar messages. For instance, a satellite broadcast can lead to a webcast that can be reformatted to a CD-ROM and/or audiocassette for physicians, while a videotape is made for students or international audiences. Another chain of media might start with an audiocassette that is transformed into a web course that is used either as a stand alone or in conjunction with journal commentary and phone conference calls.

People learn in different ways. It's important to keep in mind the age, demographics, education and skill set of your audience when embarking on your electronic education strategy.

So take advantage of a variety of communication formats to create a cohesive and comprehensive educational program. The Internet is the latest, but not the only, tool in the educator's armamentarium.

Rockpointe Broadcasting and MeetingCast.com, based in Washington, DC, specializes in serving CME providers with electronic CME programs. Mr. Sullivan, the author of this article, may be reached at (202) 589-0333 or tsullivan@rockpointe.com. 

Alliance Annual Conference

Reasons to Register for the 2001 Annual Conference


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Professional Development Director
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The Advance Program (formerly the Preliminary Program) for the 26th Annual Conference of the Alliance (Wednesday-Saturday, January 24-27, 2001, San Francisco Marriott, San Francisco, California) is being sent to you this month (by first class mail) *and* placed on the Alliance's Web Site (www.acme-assn.org). Included in the Advance Program is a comprehensive list of over 140 educational activities *and* networking opportunities, which will occur during the conference.

And, you said it better than we could! According to registrants who evaluated last year's meeting, here are ten

reasons "you really should go to the Alliance's 2001 annual conference."

- 1) Networking opportunities
- 2) Comprehensive and cutting-edge information
- 3) Amount of information received in a short time
- 4) Chance to exchange ideas and experiences
- 5) Good introduction and overview for newcomers to CME
- 6) Practical advice to address day-to-day problems
- 7) Motivational and inspirational messages
- 8) Updates on current CME issues
- 9) Wide range of topics and expert presenters
- 10) Reinforcement of current CME practices

So, take your CME colleagues' advice. Register immediately for the 26th Annual Conference (the biggest and best meeting of CME Professionals), *and* experience some of San Francisco's renowned landmarks, arts, culture, and restaurants. 

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The *Almanac* is published monthly by the Alliance for CME, Southcrest Bldg, Suite 105, 1025 Montgomery Hwy., Birmingham, AL 35216; Tel.: 205/824-1355; Fax: 205/824-1357; e-mail: acme@acme-assn.org; ISSN#1076-3899.

The views expressed in the *Almanac* are those of the authors and are not intended to represent the views of the Alliance or its membership.

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