

ENERGY ABOUND at the ASTD 2011 EXPO in Orlando

Vendors agree that conference attendees were alive with energy and brought genuine buying power to the ASTD 2011 EXPO floor.

By Ann Pace

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ASTD 2011 International Conference & Exposition attendees were buzzing with interest in a variety of longstanding industry hot topics including e-learning, simulations, leadership development, and talent management; as well as the increasingly adopted trends of social learning, mobile learning, and the cloud. The following EXPO vendors share their unique and lively experiences in balmy Orlando.

LeaderGuide Pro

Of Orlando's EXPO atmosphere, Nancy Michaels, executive vice president of Great Circle Learning observes, "It was unusually lively." Michaels notes that the diverse crowd seemed to include a greater number of representatives from international delegations than in years past. "Particularly from Chinese and South American attendees, there was a deeper interest in what is happening in the learning industry in the United States. I got the impression that the profession is evolving in new ways in these countries."

Great Circle Learning has seen its share of annual ASTD EXPO halls, with 2011 marking approximately 15 years that the company has showcased its LeaderGuide Pro products, a set of software add-ins to Microsoft Office that helps users restructure their training content into leader and participant guides. This year Michaels noticed a new consumer demand.

"People are recognizing the need for clear, written documentation to ensure instructionally sound delivery of their e-learning sessions," she says. "As people first moved into e-learning a few years ago, the general assumption was that the combination of video-based media and PowerPoint was enough, both in terms of cueing facilitators and producers, and in terms of guiding participants through lessons. Since then we've learned that the complexity of the e-learning delivery scenario requires clear, easy-to-follow documentation. Like sheet music, well-crafted leader guides help facilitators and producers to conduct the sessions, and attractive participant materials support learning."

One of Great Circle Learning's newest products, E-LeaderGuide Pro, helps to meet this demand. Starting from scratch or existing training materials, instructional designers use E-LeaderGuide Pro to quickly and easily craft Word documents for logical, specific direction during a virtual classroom presentation.

EXPO attendees continued to flock to the Great Circle booth to learn more about the growing LeaderGuide Pro product family. "In response to customer need, we now offer Solo products as well as our integrated Plus package, so that people can access exactly what they need when they need it," Michaels says. "Everyone is pushed by numbers-based performance expectations these days, so we've been working to make all of the LeaderGuide Pro tools available in response to training industry needs."

NexLearn

For first-time ASTD International Conference & Exposition vendor NexLearn, provider of custom-developed immersive learning simulations, the EXPO seemed a daunting place to stake its booth. “We thought the venue was too big, and that we’d be a fly on the wall,” says Curt Renard, executive director of national account sales for NexLearn. “In fact, the opposite happened; we had a lot of traffic. When the doors to the EXPO hall opened, the flood of people streaming our booth was like a tsunami.”

NexLearn used its Twitter account to advertise its presence on the ASTD 2011 EXPO floor. The company also informed the conference’s 7,000 followers of the daily EXPO raffle giveaway—a license for SimWriter Simplicity.

Intended for a smaller company, group, or individual trainer, SimWriter Simplicity is a scaled down version of NexLearn’s flagship product, SimWriter Professional. Simplicity makes it easy for anyone—instructional designers, trainers, or subject matter experts—to create engaging, decision-based immersive learning simulations using “pick-and-click functionality,” PowerPoint import, and audio capture capability.

According to Renard, NexLearn originally built SimWriter to increase its internal productivity as a custom developer. Then, after a customer asked to use the authoring tool, the company applied for patents on the product and began licensing it in 2006. The new Simplicity version came to market in 2011.

Renard observed that conference attendees were interested in simulation-based training. “They know they want it, but they’re not quite sure what it is, and they’re definitely in the dark about how to do it,” he says.

NexLearn not only develops custom simulation tools; it also offers customers an apprenticeship program by which they can learn to create and maintain their own products going forward. A SimWriter license—which three lucky raffle winners received at ASTD 2011—gives users the technology to build, maintain, enhance, or upgrade their training programs in the future. NexLearn also provides training on product use and ongoing support during any phase of the development cycle. “We work with customers as they get started with our products and then gradually back off as they become more proficient,” Renard says.

Trivantis

As a provider of publishing technologies for multimedia e-learning, Trivantis has made a name for itself with Lectora, its suite of e-learning authoring tools. The Lectora suite of products includes Lectora Inspire for rich-media e-learning; Lectora Online for web-based collaborative authoring; Lectora Publisher for rapid content creation; and Lectora Integrator, which converts PowerPoint documents to Lectora e-learning. At ASTD 2011, Trivantis debuted the newest member of its Lectora family, Snap! by Lectora.

Snap! by Lectora is a PowerPoint plug-in technology that quickly transforms basic PowerPoint slides into interactive Flash presentations complete with audio, video, and image features, as well as training quizzes and survey options. And Snap! by Lectora is much more affordable than its competitor products, Articulate Studio Standard and Adobe Presenter.

“Attendees were excited about the \$99 price point of Snap! by Lectora,” says Jessica Athey, manager of global marketing at Trivantis. “They were well-educated [about e-learning solutions] and wanted a tool that enables them to easily and quickly develop dynamic content with a clear return-on-investment.”

Many companies that had recently hired new employees were looking for a product that didn’t require a large learning curve. Snap! by Lectora is ideal for those entering the e-learning market and seeking a tool that is easy to use and affordable, or for those who need to train staff in a new product within a short period of time.

Athey describes EXPO attendees overall as energetic and excited to learn how to create new and engaging content. They were also interested in new industry trends, such as mobile learning and social learning. At last year’s conference, although many people were talking about social learning, few had yet to implement it, according to Athey. This year, however, attendees had a deeper interest in social collaboration and the cloud.

Trivantis is continually adapting its products and adding new features to meet the market’s shifting demands. Lectora authoring tools deploy content to iPhones and iPads. Snap! by Lectora’s SnapChannel.com provides a free destination for users to connect socially and share unlimited presentations, videos, and Flash content worldwide.



Inscape Publishing

“People were coming to the booth with a different look in their eyes this year,” says Jeffrey Sugerman, president and CEO of Inscape Publishing, a provider of assessment-based learning products. “For the past two years, people were merely trying to cope with the poor economy and decreased budgets; they couldn’t really buy. This year we had much higher-level conversations with participants. They were more energetic and engaged. It’s like they were coming alive again.”

Sugerman’s observations about the EXPO hall’s atmosphere come from nearly 10 years as a vendor at ASTD’s annual show, where he has helped to spread consumer awareness of Inscape’s signature DiSC Solutions. DiSC is a collection of personality profiles and related training materials that can serve as the core of or addition to any training program for management, workplace development, and sales populations. The newest DiSC product, Everything DiSC 363 for Leaders, offers the first 360-degree leadership tool for DiSC users.

Keeping with this recent focus on leadership development solutions, Sugerman—along with co-authors Mark Scullard and Emma Wilhelm—published a book in May with Berrett-Koehler, called *The 8 Dimensions of Leadership*. Employing the latest version of the DiSC system, the book helps readers to understand their own leadership styles and learn from others’ styles. “We’re noticing that the focus of leadership is swinging back toward understanding the people side of leadership development,” Sugerman notes.

In addition to new leadership development trends, Sugerman observed several consumer interest themes emerging from the EXPO floor. "The interest in mobile learning, the cloud, and moving beyond a traditional content management system is there, but it seems to be more of the 'trendy buzz' and future of learning, rather than the reality that people are implementing now," he adds.

The learning industry is continuing to debate the use of e-learning versus blended learning and traditional classroom learning solutions. Sugerman noticed that more companies were looking at simulations as a viable training medium, but believes it will take some time until virtual worlds get a broad audience, and even longer until m-learning sees widespread adoption.

DDI

Development Dimensions International (DDI) is no stranger to the ASTD International Conference & Exposition, where the veteran talent management solutions provider often lands a prominent spot on the EXPO floor. "I thought the attendees at this year's EXPO were much more action-oriented than they were during the past two years," says Aviel Selkovits, senior marketing consultant at DDI. "You could sense the shift in conference goers, from gathering information in recent years to investigating options, solutions, and products in Orlando. Even the attendee energy level felt higher than in previous years."

DDI offers a variety of talent management programs and technology options for the entire lifespan of an employee—including competency management and job analysis services, testing and behavioral interviewing tools for employee selection and assessment, leadership and workforce development experiences, and performance management and succession planning resources.

Selkovits identified virtual classroom and information learning—using web-based tools such as new media, social media, and web conferencing technology to deliver training in a formal or informal way—as generating the most buzz at ASTD 2011. "I saw a number of sessions on these topics, and also a number of booths advertising virtual solutions."

DDI highlighted several of its development options at its booth, including Interaction Management, the frontline leadership and workforce development system; Business Impact Leadership, its new mid-level leadership development program; and its latest product, Manager Ready, an online frontline leader assessment, which garnered the most interest from attendees, according to Selkovits.

Unlike multiple choice tests where participants choose what they would do or say, Manager Ready is a half-day assessment in which users solve problems by interacting with team members as they would in an assessment center. These real-world situations measure a participant's readiness across nine critical managerial competencies. "[Manager Ready] provides users with the same quality as a live assessment center, but online and at a fraction of the cost," explains Selkovits.

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ASTD 2011 Awards Presentation

ASTD honored three individuals in Orlando during a special ceremony held at SeaWorld's Ports of Call on Monday, May 20.



Jack Zenger, co-founder and CEO of Zenger Folkman, received ASTD's Lifetime Achievement in Workplace Learning & Performance Award. This award recognizes an individual for a body of work that has had substantial impact on the field of workplace learning and performance and for advancing the knowledge and practice of several areas of the field over an extended period of time. Zenger's expertise in leadership development, including his 2009 title *The Inspiring Leader: Unlocking the Secrets of How Extraordinary Leaders Motivate*, earned him this distinction.



Michael Allen, chairman and CEO of Allen Interactions, Inc., received the Distinguished Contribution to Workplace Learning & Performance Award. ASTD presents this award in recognition of an exceptional contribution of sustained impact on the field of workplace learning and performance. Allen is best known for his contributions to the field of e-learning, and for his commitment to developing tools that enable meaningful and motivational e-learning experiences.



ASTD awarded Captain Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger, III the Champion of Workplace Learning & Performance Award. This award recognizes an individual whose advocacy, commitment, or actions in support of workplace learning and performance has influenced audiences or organizations. Captain Sullenberger is best known for his heroic landing of US Airways flight 1549 in the Hudson River in January 2009.

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