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LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Transcript #1 *Selecting the Right e-Learning Development Tool for You and Your Company*

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Mary Kay Lofurno: Good afternoon, and welcome to the 1st edition of the SyberWorks e-Learning Podcast series. My name is Mary Kay Lofurno and I am the Director of Marketing here at SyberWorks, and I will be your host today. In this edition we are going to be talking with Dana Fine, Senior Instructional Designer here at SyberWorks, about how to choose the right content authoring tools to meet your e-learning needs.

Mary Kay: Hi Dana, thanks for joining us today. How are you?

Dana: Terrific, thanks for having me here today.

Mary Kay: You're welcome. Let's get started, **Dana**. Why did you write an article on selecting the right content management tool?

Dana: Well, it's really where most organizations or people start in regards to e-learning. They say to themselves "I have this course I want online, but how do I do it?"

Mary Kay: Hmm. How so **Dana**?

Dana: Selecting a course authoring tool can be a huge task. There are literally hundreds of content authoring tools available on the market.

Mary Kay: Wow. Dana, you're using the terms "course authoring tool" and "content authoring tool" simultaneously. Is there any difference?

Dana: Well, yes, course authoring tools can create online courses while content authoring tools create subject-specific online content. Let me explain. An example of a subject-specific online content tool is a tool that converts that converts a presentation, such as a PowerPoint file to a flash movie -- a SWF file. A SWF file is usable on an LMS -- a learning management system, but not on its own.

Mary Kay: Mmm. Hmm.

Dana: The LMS or some other sort of wrapper is required in order to enable viewing of the flash file by the student.

Mary Kay: Okay.

Dana: In the e-learning industry we use these two phrases interchangeably since we are assuming that the end result, the course, can be used by any LMS -- or any good LMS. [smile] The suite of tools used to create a course are the course authoring tools.

Mary Kay: OK, Dana, so what about learning management systems... and the SCORM standard... how does this all fit into e-learning content development. It can be really confusing if you are just thinking about "Oh I have this course and I want to put it online." You said wrapper, so...

Dana: Well, I'm glad you asked. Learning management systems are web-based software applications used to plan, implement and assess learning processes related to online and offline training administration and performance management. These LMSs provide a structured way in which to create and deliver content. They can monitor learner's participation or student participation and assess student performance.

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The LMSs can also provide students with interactive features such as discussion forms, other methods of communications, even communicating with their teacher. LMSs are therefore the platform by which the course is presented to the student. The course authoring tool takes the subject matter content, whatever it may be -- simulations, flash movies, tests -- and provides it in a form usable by the student and by the LMS.

Mary Kay: Mmm. Hmm.

Dana: SCORM or AICC standards provide a way for the course to be usable by any learning management system that supports the standard. The SCORM standard, for example, provides a specific SCORM application interface, called the SCORM API. If this API is implemented on an LMS, any SCORM compliant course should be usable on that LMS.

Mary Kay: Okay.

Dana: The AICC standard works in the same way. Standards are important so that content can be shared, used and re-used across systems. A good LMS that is SCORM/AICC compliant will work with any number of authoring tools that support the standard, such as the Syber LMS.

Mary Kay: Okay, that's great, **Dana**. That's excellent information -- very helpful. What are some of the factors to consider when evaluating course authoring tools?

Dana: Well, there are several. The first one is situational parameters. The content itself in conjunction with the subject matter expert has to be considered. Not all tools are appropriate for all training, particularly online training. Sometimes a learning activity that works in the classroom is doomed to failure online. The movie that seems so perfect that seems so perfect in delivering the course content in person may be way too long for delivery to, and to keep the attention of the online student. Online courses must be different than classroom training.

Short movies, short simulations, graphics that have meaning, are important for any course. You have to keep in mind that as long as your online training is founded on good instructional design principles, that you keep in mind the differences from classroom training to online learning -- the interactivity produced by the authoring tools will strengthen the student's experience.

Mary Kay: Okay.

Dana: The next factor is training objectives. A standard suite of questions will usually produce the answers needed to determine best tools for creating your course. You need to know what type of training you are providing. Is it blended? That is, is it partly classroom and party online? Is it updating a current skill set? Is it necessary for certification? Who is your audience?

There should be a list that use to make these determinations. How is the training being provided? Will the student be at home when taking the coursework? Are there time limits -- either a limit in the length of time the course is available or actually in the amount of time they can spend on the course? Will the student population computer literate, remote, or using a modem for delivery? Do you have to plan for older computers or will most students be using the latest technology?

The third factor is media needs. What types of media will you use? Are you providing information in a variety of formats -- that is Flash Movies, PDFs? Will there be audio? Will you be using video? Will you be using simulations? Does the course authoring tools of your choice support these file types? And, finally, are you following the SCORM/AICC standards?

Mary Kay: Hmm. Again, Dana, great information. Is there anything else they should take into consideration?

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Dana: Sure, I'll mention a few more things, but I want people to read my article.

Mary Kay: Oh! Absolutely, Dana. I understand. The article is located in the SyberWorks Media Center on the SyberWorks website at http://syberworks.com/website/articles/ContAuthTool.htm.

Dana: Very good.

Mary Kay: Now I've mentioned your article. What else should they consider, Dana?

Dana: Well other factors are... are you ready?

Mary Kay: Yeah, I'm ready.

Dana: ... resources and ongoing support. Do you have the in-house expertise to support the types of online training you want to develop? These resources should include graphic designers, subject matter experts, voice talent, video producers, models, production designers and so on depending on the course.

After the training is developed you need to know if the training needs to be refreshed periodically. The tests associated with the training will change on a regular basis.

Mary Kay: That's true.

Dana: You need to have customer support for those students with questions about the mechanics of using the course and subject matter support for those with questions about course content.

Mary Kay: Okay.

Dana: Another factor is interactivity. What level of interactivity is required for your course, or specifically, this training? Do you need simulations, and if you do, how detailed? Do you want periodic learning checks throughout your training? Do you need Flash movies for specific appropriate learning activities? How much will the training cost to produce the interactivity desired?

I'm going to go over that in my last factor. That's... finally the total cost of ownership.

Mary Kay: Oh yeah. Good old TCO.

Dana: The total cost of ownership is a financial metric designed to help assess direct and indirect costs related to, in the case, the cost of producing the course.

Mary Kay: Mmm. Hmm.

Dana: This would include the cost of the course authoring tools, training, upgrades and maintenance, and any other costs associated with the course development. As for the rest, I encourage you to go ahead and check out my articles.

Mary Kay: Super, Dana, really great stuff. So tell us, Dana, do you have a favorite content authoring tool?

Dana: Well, I use a variety of content authoring tools, including the Syber Author, Flash Captivate HTML, depending on the project at hand. Any knowledgeable instructional designer will use a whole chest of tools to build their e-learning content.

Mary Kay: Thanks, Dana, I really appreciate your time. And thanks for those of you listening out there. In our next edition we will be talking about tips for writing an effective online survey. Have a great week! Take care. Bye.

Dana: Bye.

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