Executive Summary

This report provides more than 40 best practices in eLearning based on recent Learning-on-Demand (LoD) program research and SRI Consulting Business Intelligence (SRIC-BI) consulting work. The practices come from research and consulting projects across multiple industries, including financial services, life sciences, automobiles, and oil and gas. The report is particularly useful for companies looking to improve their eLearning and learning implementations but is also useful for learning developers and vendors that need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their customers' learning operations.

Unlike other LoD reports, this study is not, in the main, a continuous narrative, but a “paper database” of the identified practices. We expect that companies using the practices as part of a performance-improvement exercise will want to add their own internal practices as well as new external practices that pertain to their own set of issues and opportunities. In addition, we will maintain and improve the best-practice set over time, enabling companies to take advantage of the innovations that are likely to occur.

Table 1 provides a summary view of the eLearning best practices in this report. Practices divide into the four key areas—strategy, organization and process, content, and infrastructure—that companies need to have right in order to create successful learning programs.

From this table one can immediately see that the complexity and success factors in a successful eLearning implementation are about far more than dealing with technology and finding the right content. Half of the practices relate to either learning strategy or organization and process issues. The list of best practices also reveals several common themes that appear across practices and across practice categories:

- **Growing role of informal learning.** Many organizations are undergoing efforts to create learning programs with a more balanced mix of formal and informal content.

- **Increasing centralization of learning and eLearning management.** Many leading practitioners are taking a more global view of their eLearning and learning investments.

- **Reduction in the cost of eLearning.** Companies are trying to rationalize eLearning investment beyond the early experimental days and find ongoing practices that provide value for money.

Current gaps in best practices include strategies for generating new revenue from learning, performance measurement, and Web services. We expect to see more best practices emerge in these areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Strategy</th>
<th>Organization and Process</th>
<th>Learning Content</th>
<th>Learning Infrastructure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use eLearning to address the learning challenges of a distributed workforce.</td>
<td>Create a centralized learning and development team. Source content both centrally and locally.</td>
<td>Develop a mix of off-the-shelf content and custom content to match the business situation. Create</td>
<td>Rationalize learning-infrastructure investments by taking a centralized approach. Create</td>
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• Use eLearning to improve synergies between internal and external participants in complex business processes and projects.

• Provide eLearning to the sales department for fast, measurable, business impact.

• Fulfill compliance-training requirements cheaply and efficiently using eLearning.

• Use eLearning to provide on-demand learning for call-center operatives.

• Use eLearning to improve time to return on investment during new corporate cost-cutting initiatives.

• Tie learning to performance.

• Assess learning outsourcing options.

• Create standards and benchmarks for eLearning content.

• Share internal and external best practices with all teams active in developing, commissioning, or implementing learning.

• Negotiate risk-sharing deals for off-the-shelf content libraries.

• Represent learning early during new strategic initiatives.

• Gain support from senior management.

• Find ways to win over middle and line managers.

• Foster a good partnership between the training department and information technology.

• Create meaningful learning objectives.

• Invest in change management and ongoing user support during a move from classroom learning to blended learning.

• Create incentives for informal learning and knowledge sharing.

• Supplement formal courses with informal learning activities.

• Combine basic with just-in-time learning.

• Take a learning-objects approach.

• Design all content with reusability in mind.

• Use easy-to-use development tools to create low-cost custom content in-house.

• Create a "knowledge assembly line" of high-impact presentations by subject-matter experts.

• Migrate from physical to virtual classrooms to extend reach and reduce cost.

• Create content-selection practices that meet requirements for deployment speed.

• Obtain mass-customized content from generic-content vendors.

• Integrate learning-management systems (LMS) with other enterprise systems.

• Consider LMS from enterprise-application vendors.

• Develop infrastructure to enable greater multiuse of digital content for formal and informal learning activities.

• Incorporate learning into employee portals.

• Be careful of political and technical issues when scaling up a local LMS for the enterprise.

• Consider custom LMS systems for low-cost tactical solutions.

• Treat LMS systems for business partners like consumer Web sites.

• Evaluate academic alternatives to commercial eLearning tools.

Source: SRI Consulting Business Intelligence

Of course, any list of best practices is academic unless organizations can actually implement them. SRIC-BI's consulting practice has developed a generic methodology for applying best practices that is adaptable to different circumstances. The methodology involves five key steps:
• Define mission and focus.
• Conduct diagnostic of current practices and needs.
• Develop or expand a compendium of relevant best practices.
• Rate practice performance against others.
• Create best-practices strategy and implementation plan.

To turn best practices into business results, enterprise adopters need to use a performance-improvement methodology such as the one above. Vendors need to work with their customers to help them identify, understand, and apply best practices to ensure that their eLearning initiatives are successful. Content and infrastructure vendors should develop "specialty" best practices and be ready to feed these practices into broader best-practice initiatives driven by a customer or a learning-service provider. Learning-service providers should consider offering a performance-improvement or continuous-improvement program that includes best practices.