Blogging with Bliss

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Monday, January 18, 2010

Why Use an e-Learning Consultant?

No matter how you spell it, e-Learning or eLearning, one day you and your organization will need assistance with your Web-based, performance-improvement initiative. That is, you need to publish learning activities online. Whether you are new to e-Learning or you need to add talent to an existing, in-house team, you can add value to your project by working with an e-Learning consultant. In addition, a consultant brings several savings to your organization.

First, as you may know, hiring a new employee doesn't always happen overnight. It takes time to:

- Decide and describe the skills and qualifications the e-Learning professional must have.
- Get an employment requisition approved internally.
- Recruit and hire a full-time equivalent (FTE) addition to your staff.

By the time you bring a new employee on board, you may have lost two to three months of dedicated work on your e-Learning project. You can save time by using an e-Learning consultant.

Second, your organization can realize hard-dollar "savings" through what it won't pay out in direct salary and fringe benefits. You don't need to worry about paying for the e-Learning consultant's benefits.

How Can Escoe Bliss Help You?

With over 15 years of leadership in consulting and workforce learning and performance, the professionals at Escoe Bliss have a large database of local talent at their fingertips. They can quickly assess your needs for an e-Learning consultant, and work within your organization's budget. They can find the talent who will help you bring your e-Learning project to successful completion.

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** Jenise Cook will be a featured blogger for the Escoe Bliss team throughout 2010. Jenise is a documentation design, e-learning development, and media production professional. You can look for her e-Learning related blogs on the 3rd Monday of every month. **

Posted by Escoe Bliss at 12:36 PM

http://escoebliss.blogspot.com/2010/01/why-use-e-learning-consultantby-jenise.html

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Monday, February 22, 2010

What to Look for in an e-Learning Consultant

Now that you have decided to contract with an e-learning consultant, what do you look for in the individual? What skills and experience do you highlight on the resumes you will receive?

The answers to the questions above vary depending on the type of project you have and your company's culture. In this blog post, I'm going to highlight a few skills that I feel are essential for the success of your e-learning project. Please keep in mind that these are my opinions only, gained from "boots on the ground" experience. It's important for you to know your organization's needs intimately and to select a consultant who will be a good fit for you and your team.

Project Management Skills

In an ideal world project plans are always on time (or early) and always under budget. In reality, milestones slip and change orders may become frequent discussion items. To keep your e-learning project on task and in scope, look for a consultant who has three to five years proven experience either in project management or as a business analyst. In addition, ask if they have had some formal training or certification in either of these disciplines.

If the consultant has completed some training in project management or business analysis, and has worked in these disciplines, you will find a consultant who not only understands your global project plan but who can also help you manage it in terms of the specific e-learning deliverables.

For example, let's say you are rolling out a new, Web-based administrative system to replace tasks currently completed in a paper-based environment. You see the need for an e-learning course to demonstrate this new system and explain its benefits to your staff. You have an extensive, six-month project plan where the e-learning development is one of many tasks you manage.

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The e-learning consultant with experience in project management or business analysis can take a look at your overall plan and its milestones, and make realistic learning design and development recommendations. Most e-learning consultants follow ADDIE (Analyze Design Develop Implement Evaluate) for the management of learning projects. However, you need a consultant who truly understands the big picture so that you have a project team member who champions appropriate e-learning deliverables in a way that works best for both your project plan and your learners.

Instructional Design Skills

Yes, I know, this topic seems too obvious to mention. However, in addition to the project management skills, I feel you need to look for an e-learning consultant who not only has proven instructional design skills but also has a heart-felt passion for the adult learner. You are focused on your organization and its business results, and rightly so. That's your job and you do it well. In the middle of hectic projects, the needs of the adult learners could get lost amid the razor-sharp focus on business results.

To have a successful, effective e-learning program that produces the workplace performance results you seek, you need a consultant who will remind everyone about the learner and what the learner needs from the course. You need an advocate for the learners who litigates for them in the court of your organization's many opinions.

Communication and Relationship Skills

Although I list business communication and relationship skills last, they are the most important skills of all. You need an e-learning consultant who has excellent people skills. When your subject matter experts (SMEs) and your project stakeholders meet with the consultant you've chosen, you want someone who will effectively communicate the reasons why he or she recommends certain learning deliverables as an advocate for your learners. And yet, you also need someone who can do this with grace and respect, and who will work with your colleagues. You want to look forward to seeing the consultant instead of dreading his or her arrival at meetings. Look for someone who can collaborate with your colleagues and compromise when it's important for your business.

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How Escoe-Bliss Can Help You

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Jenise Cook, M.A., will be a featured guest blogger for the Escoe Bliss team throughout 2010. Her posts will appear monthly on Blogging with Bliss. Her professionalism and passion for her work in documentation design, e-learning development, and media production radiate from her writing and we consider ourselves extremely fortunate to count her among our guest bloggers. The first blog in her series on e-learning was Why Use an e-Learning Consultant.

Posted by Escoe Bliss at 9:34 AM

http://escoebliss.blogspot.com/2010/02/what-to-look-for-in-e-learning.html

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ESCOE BLISS
PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

Monday, March 15, 2010

Preparing for the e-Learning Consultant's Arrival

It's Monday morning, and you're staring at the stack of candidate resumes you received from Escoe Bliss. You had no doubt they would find you e-learning consultants with the skills needed for your first e-learning project. Before you pick up the resume at the top of the stack, you're wondering: What will the consultant need to get the job done?

Every project is different, and it's important to have coffee, chocolate, and restroom facilities available. And, of course, you'll need to have the tools for developing and delivering the online courses, subjects I'll cover in future blog posts.

However, there are some things I've learned from experience that you can put in place for the consultant before she or he arrives at your site. In this blog post, I'm going to cover these topics:

- Learning Organization Leaders
- Subject Matter Experts
- Executive ("C") Level Sponsors

Learning Organization Leaders

Partner closely with your organization's training department. These departments can fall under an alphabet soup of different names, but they carry the torch for all learning and workplace performance activities in your organization. Make sure you have a tenured staff person from your learning organization to serve as the "go-to" expert, or liaison, for the consultant. He or she will need an ally who can smooth out the bumps that come up during the project.

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Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

An e-learning consultant relies on SMEs like we rely on oxygen. From my experience, SMEs openly share their knowledge on the course topic. They're usually glad to be in the company of someone who cares about their expertise and wants to pick their brains for the details needed for specific learning objectives.

The reality is, especially over this last year-and-a-half, SMEs are now performing the work of two-to-three colleagues (who were laid off) and have multiple projects on their work plates. They're "slammed", short on time to get their job done, and still have a nice annual performance review with a variety of other objectives that they are focused on meeting. Therefore, it's important for you and the SME's manager to give the SME permission to spend time with the e-learning consultant. Add some type of reward and recognition, and your project will soar to success.

Executive ("C") Level Sponsor

A couple of times, I worked on some e-learning projects where the primary project sponsor was at the V.P. level. The V.P. attended most of our project team meetings, and was a signature to sign off on the course at every review cycle. We had clear communications with the V.P. When we were about to deploy the course, the team presented it online to the one who signed everyone's check, an E.V.P. over the V.P.'s area. The result was a somewhat major revision of the course that delayed deployment for about two weeks.

So, unless you are 100% certain of your C-level executive sponsor's role, bring her or him to the project table very early on to understand and manage expectations. On another project, we brought the E.V.P. in at our brainstorming stage (the high-level detail design document phase) and we received excellent feedback that framed the direction of our development, and also a hearty "well done" after deployment.

Finally, feel free to prepare in other ways. Find out if the consultant prefers coffee, tea, or water; likes or doesn't like dark chocolate; and make sure his or her computer systems are all set up and ready to go the morning of that first day. Finally, a warm and welcoming attitude will win you a dedicated colleague.

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Posted by Escoe Bliss at 10:15 AM

http://escoebliss.blogspot.com/2010/03/preparing-for-e-learning-consultants.html

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Monday, April 26, 2010

How to Choose e-Learning Tools

In the March e-learning blog post, "Preparing for the e-Learning Consultant's Arrival", we took at look at how you can prepare your organization for the e-learning consultant's arrival. A part of that process involves choosing the e-learning software tools to use for your project, a decision we're going to look at this month.

The Consultant's e-Learning Tool Box

The first thing to realize is that you want to choose the software tools that will be the best fit for your organization and your learners, and then worry about which consultant you'll contract with for your project later.

e-Learning consultants generally fall into two camps:

- Specialists in a specific software tool.
- Generalists dedicated to proficiency in several tools.

Now, you're free to focus on software choices for your organization's purposes. Once you've purchased the tools you need, you'll be able to partner with Escoe-Bliss to find a consultant proficient in the software.

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The Most Common e-Learning Software Tools

We have no bias towards a specific software tool, and you can find many tools by searching for them on the Internet. We suggest the keywords "elearning software" or "e-learning software". The alphabetical list below is by no means comprehensive, however, it reflects the most common tools used by corporations, academia, and government agencies:

- Adobe e-Learning Suite (Adobe)
- Articulate (Articulate)
- Camtasia (TechSmith)
- Captivate (Adobe)
- Flash (Adobe)
- Lectora (Trivantis)
- Raptivity (Harbinger Knowledge Products)
- ToolBook Instructor (SumTotal Systems)

The majority of these companies provide significant purchase discounts for non-profit and academic entities.

Choosing the Tool that's Right for You

Most people tend to look at their organization's budget first. I'd like to encourage you to think about money last. Instead, begin by analyzing your organization's and your learners' needs. When you place business and learning needs first, you'll purchase the best tool with confidence, and avoid being stuck with a quick, cheap purchase that you could regret later.

One partner you'll want to include at the very beginning of your analysis is your Information Technology (IT) department. Your IT folks know the ins-and-outs of your organization's networks and other systems. Show them the above list, and any other tools you've found on your own. You'll need your IT people to tell you what constraints you may need to consider not only for when the consultant is using the software on your systems at your location, but also when you deploy, or launch, the finished course to all of your learners.

And, think about your learners. You want to choose a tool that creates courses with flexible and easy-to-use navigation. You also want to make sure an interrupted learner can bookmark the course and return to the place where they left off at a later time, if needed. Most of the tools listed do provide that helpful feature.

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Converting PowerPoint Presentations to e-Learning

Several of the tools listed above allow you to work with your existing PowerPoint slide decks, a bonus for learning organizations that have years of valuable content residing in PPT files.

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Posted by Escoe Bliss at 8:58 AM

http://escoebliss.blogspot.com/2010/04/how-to-choose-e-learning-tools.html