How Long Does e-Learning Development Take?
by Karl M. Kapp, EdD and Maria Plano

Since the days of "green screen" computer training, the age-old question of "How long does it take to develop on-line learning?" has plagued vendors and clients alike. The reason is that there are many variables impacting the development time. Here are some guidelines to help separate e-learning development efforts into high, moderate, and low categories. The first task is to determine the amount of instructional design (ID) effort.

Low/No ID Effort

- Instructional objectives have been written
- A course outline has been created—chunking and sequencing of content is complete
- Text is written as it should appear on the screen
- Instructional interactions and tests have been designed and written

Moderate ID Effort

- A course exists
- Course goals and objectives have been identified
- Instructional strategies for instructor-led training have been developed, but need to be modified for application in an e-learning environment
- Documentation describing what an instructor would say when covering each topic can be provided
- Documentation is largely up-to-date, but needs to be tweaked

High ID Effort

- No course or content exists in any form
- Course goals and objectives, as well as evaluation and instructional strategies must be developed
- Course content must be captured via interviews with subject-matter experts

The next task is to determine the amount of multimedia/web development (M/WD) effort required.

Low M/WD Effort

- Finished course will include pages of text and a navigation framework with little interactivity (fewer than 8 interactions per hour/40 pages of courseware)
- Interactions that are included are simple, such as rollovers, multiple choice questions, and pop-up boxes, and are based on a set of templates that will not be modified
- Feedback for questions is simple, including the answer and a text explanation
- Navigation through the courseware is linear
- No media, such as animation, audio, or video is included
- Stock graphics can be used and custom graphics are not needed

Moderate M/WD Effort

- Finished course will include pages of text and a navigation framework with a moderate level of interactivity (interactions every 3-4 pages)
- Interactions that will be included per hour/40 pages of courseware are:
  - 10 basic interactions such as rollovers, pop ups, and multiple choice questions that are developed from templates that will not be modified

- 2-3 complex, custom interactions such as matching, drag/drop, simulations, and games
- Navigation may be linear or exploratory
  - Audio and animation are used at key points throughout the course, including narrated screens and a static character for introductions and summaries
  - A few custom graphics are required

High M/WD Effort

- Finished course will include pages of text and a navigation framework with a high level of interactivity (interactions every 1-2 pages)
- Interactions that will be included per hour/40 pages of courseware are:
  - 15 basic interactions such as rollovers, pop ups, and multiple choice questions that can be developed from templates, but may be modified as necessary
  - 3-4 complex, custom interactions such as simulations and games

- Navigation may be linear or exploratory, including branching
- Audio, video, and animation will be used frequently throughout the course—potentially with narrated screens and video or a 3D character for introductions, summaries, and explanations of complex concepts
- Custom graphics will be developed

Once you have determined the instructional design and multimedia effort, you can begin to determine the development times by plotting the position for the development effort on the matrix below.

		Web/Media Development Level		
		Low	**Medium**	**High**
ISD Development Level	**High**	100-200	200-400	400-600
	Medium	60-100	100-200	200-400
	Low	20-60	60-100	100-200

Of course, actual development times will vary depending on team experience and nature of the material, but this matrix provides a starting point for developing your own in-house development matrix.

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