Chapter VII

Electronic Publication

The most hopeful line for the development of our racial intelligence lies rather in the direction of creating a new world organ for the collection, indexing, summarizing and release of knowledge, than in any further tinkering with the highly conservative and resistant university system, local, national and traditional in texture, which already exists. (Wells, 1937)

Introduction

This chapter is primarily about one-way dissemination of content through the World Wide Web. Although such content may potentially be highly interactive, this chapter will be more concerned with instances of content where there is little interaction between learners and each other or their tutors. The objective will be to discover ways that both choice and constraint can coexist within a published environment, in an attempt to discover appropriate methods of allowing learners to choose whether and when to delegate control of their learning trajectories. As part of this process, the concept of reusable learning objects will be examined and recommendations made for an approach to their development and use.
This chapter, like those that follow, considers published content in isolation. However, the environment of the World Wide Web is never limited to a single form and other technologies that encourage communication are always available. Considering publication as a distinct form necessarily presents an unrealistic and artificial scenario, the purpose of which is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. This is not to suggest that it is an approach that would ever be recommended for use on its own, as most technologies will usually be embedded in a larger learning ecology.

### Publishing Content

There are many ways of publishing content electronically. Bearing in mind that e-learning was defined earlier as primarily Internet-based, this book will not deal with CD-ROMs, DVDs, and other non-networked media, despite their continuing (though waning) popularity as media for electronic games.

On the Web, the most obvious means of publication is through Web pages. These may be completely static files created with a text editor or specialist editor such as Dreamweaver™, NVU™, or FrontPage®, or provided through a content management system such as Plone™, Mambo™, or Drupal™. However, almost any electronic media may be made available through the Internet, including a wide variety of video, animation, virtual reality (VR), word-processed files, as well as proprietary formats such as PDF and Microsoft® Word. Technologies such as JavaScript, Flash®, and Java™ can provide highly interactive programs with rich functionality. Server-side technologies such as PHP, ASP.net, Java Server Pages, CGI, and Cold Fusion™ may be used to provide a still richer experience, allowing the server to present a unique view to each user of a site, often in conjunction with a database. At this point, there is a danger that the definition may become a little broad: a search engine or portal is such a system, but goes beyond the definition of content publication that will be discussed in this chapter. The focus of this chapter is on the authoring of content intended to bring about learning.

### Benefits to the Autonomous Learner

For autonomous learners, browsing Web sites (and, for that matter, reading books and journals) may provide greater freedom of choice than being involved in a face to face dialogue (Collis, 2005; Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Autonomous learners should, by definition, be more inclined to make choices about their own learning, including which learning resources would be most useful at any point, and when they are referenced. However, autonomy is, potentially, a highly variable factor,
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