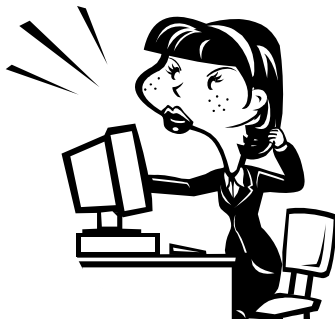


eLearning – is it for me ?

Prof. Kanishth has only one very demanding pupil, the television camera. It sits perched between two rows in his classroom. Around 20 people sit here, most of them middle-aged professionals, after a hard day's work. They have paid Rs.25,000 to benefit from the professor's two decades of experience . They flinch and whisper and glance around the room.

But the camera just sits there, its single blank eye fixed on Kanishth. And so the usual habits of the college lecturer are denied. There will be no strolling back and forth across the

academic stage, coating the blackboard with graphs and equations. Instead, he's rooted to the left side of the room, within range of a wall-mounted floodlight and the long black lens.



Prof. Kanishth gets two hours every Saturday evening with his students and isn't inclined to waste it. He has just begun the evening's discussion on Strategic Management, when the door to his rihfts opens. ``Stop!" says a Ruchya, the'sound lady'.

It's a problem with the sound - some mysterious, unbridged gap between the wireless mike on Prof. Kanishth's lapel and the audio input of the videotape recorder.

Minutes later, Ruchya says all is well. The professor looks past the lights, into the dark, blank eye of the camera. "Good evening," he says, as if everyone had just arrived. ``This is the ninth lecture in the course on Strategic Management."

Days later, in New Delhi, in his office, Ravi Kapoor puts aside his work, starts his Web browser, and goes to school. Ravi knows nothing of the loose wire or of the five-minute class delay. He'll never meet his fellow students. The Professor, for Ravi, is just a low-fidelity voice. When he has a doubt, he gets a reply from Ms. Srikrishna Y, who is the online mentor.



Ravi can stand and stretch whenever he wishes to, stroll over to the window and gaze out at the landscape across his office. In fact, Ravi is not attending classes for the next three weeks as he will be away on a business trip. Kanishth's words, gestures, notes - they've all been freeze-dried, for students like Ravi, who are in remote corners.

Welcome to the distance learning of today – call it what you may -- online learning, e-learning, computer-based training, et al. What it simply means is that, college education delivered over the Internet to wherever/whenever a student wants it.

Who are the most probable students of elearning :

- A student who wants to know more about Physics. No more visits to libraries and the tuition master
- A professional who wants to grow, and has no time to take the short term management program
- An IT pro who commutes 8 kms to upgrade herself to this new course on project management that would surely make her a Project Leader
- A consumer electronics sales company which has new products coming in every fortnight and therefore impossible to get all the 900 geographically-dispersed sales people to the classroom
- An airlines company which is hiring flight stewards by the dozen and would like to quickly educate and train them on things like safety standards, security drills etc.
- A company which needs to reorient its entire workforce which is diverse and geographically scattered, through imparting of certain soft skills
- A BPO company which would like its new recruits to have some improved typing skills

I can go on and on since the list and who can benefit from eLearning is long and continuing to grow. However, one thing is certain. There would soon be a time when eLearning would be for everyone and will be an accepted compliment to classroom education or instructor led training.

The author is xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.