

Growth of e-learning during Covid is just the beginning

 By [Paul Hanly](#)

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The e-learning industry has shown immense growth since the arrival of Covid-19.



Many businesses were not prepared for what it would mean in terms of operations, and initially they experienced a kind of “crisis jump” into new technology.

However, as time has gone on they have come to realise that there are major benefits to online learning, notably cost-savings and the capacity to measure efficiency. As a result, we are seeing far more companies and organisations seeking more permanent, structured solutions and investing heavily in learning platforms and quality content.

While hopefully further inroads can be made against the pandemic in 2022, the shift to online learning models has meant we are likely to see a lot more blended learning and online corporate training going forward.

There have been some interesting trends to emerge in 2021. Microlearning, for example, has been getting quite a bit of attention. Essentially it means that an extensive skill can be developed with “bite-size” pieces of information provided to the learner gradually. It is particularly popular among younger generations.

Data costs

For those of us in South Africa and on the African continent, it has been pleasing to note that the cost of technology is coming down. Because of the lower costs, e-learning is becoming available to a much wider audience, which obviously augers well for skills development and making more people employable.

The downside is that data costs are still high in South Africa, which presents a challenge for the industry in that the learning audience is highly diverse across all LSMs.

Data costs have the potential to exclude lower LSM brackets from accessing knowledge because of affordability and infrastructural limitation. This is something that needs to be addressed.

Evolution of tech

There is no doubt that learning technology is evolving at a rapid pace, with cloud-based solutions being far more advanced and secure than on premise legacy systems.

This new technology is allowing us to improve learner experience and make learning more interesting by incorporating technology like virtual and augmented reality into the learning journey.

The Netherlands-based Cirrus assessment platform, which is increasingly being implemented by South African institutions includes artificial intelligence (AI) for automatic marking and on-screen annotation.

Importantly for a country like South Africa, where electricity outages are frequent, Cirrus includes a unique offline model that ensures tests and exams will not be compromised if internet connectivity is disrupted.

Our aim is always to stay ahead of global trends, as much of our business is done in the international market where we compete with the best by offering quality service and products at competitive prices.

Power of data

It is no secret that data is the new gold.

Learning is not only about passing or failing but should always be about learners being able to apply the relevant knowledge in the workplace. We use AI to analyse learning styles and content knowledge to automatically adjust content to suit an individual's knowledge gaps.

We also analyse the content itself and look for trends, strengths and weaknesses in the content.

Big data has allowed us to develop a training intelligence system which is customised to suit each client's own needs, giving a real time data dashboard to manage learning & development (L&D) departments and assist with decision-making processes.

Looking ahead to 2022, we envisage that we will see far great emphasis placed on the "how" of learning. In other words, we now need to teach people how to learn, not just what to learn.

For example, these days, if we need to know how to do something, we look for a YouTube video or Google it. There does not seem to be the need to retain knowledge for long. If you forget, you just Google it again. So there needs to be a shift in this regard.

Adaptive learning

The coming year is also expected to see more focus on adaptive learning, where learners are able to concentrate on

knowledge gaps, at their own pace. It allows facilitators to move away from the tired “one-size-fits-all” approach to hone in on learners’ individual needs, resulting in greater learning and retention, less time in training, and ultimately, happier students or employees.

In 2020, Africa’s e-learning sector was worth an estimated \$2bn (R32bn), and that figure is expected to rise substantially.

Smartphone penetration in South Africa is already above 90%, and while the percentage is about half that in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, the arrival of more affordable smartphone devices on the market will lead to an uptick in numbers.

We are already seeing a noticeable migration to online schools in places like Rwanda, where homegrown e-learning technologies are being developed, so the sector on the continent has much to look forward to.

ABOUT PAUL HANLY

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