xplanaworkbook™

XplanaWorkbook 1.0 Whitepaper

E-Workbooks:
Fostering Education in a Digital World

By Shana Leonard

Xplana Learning

June 2004

xplana™ LEARNING

Table of Contents

Introduction

The way we learn is changing. The development of the personal computer dramatically changed the way society obtains and distributes information. The internet placed infinite resources and a wealth of knowledge at our fingertips, and new technologies appear daily that modify the way we access information. New emphasis is placed on personalized learning and adaptability of information to the needs of the individual.

The future of education is unpredictable; but as learning becomes more technology-centered, successful educational tools are a necessity. E-books and e-workbooks present information in an enhanced format that engages and educates students. As interactive supplements to traditional text material, e-workbooks are educational alternatives to traditional printed material. This comprehensive e-learning platform fosters learning in these new educational environments.

What is an E-Workbook?

An e-workbook is a digital version of a traditional workbook, complete with all required media and student activities. E-workbooks are most commonly associated with foreign language courses; however, the functionality available in the XplanaWorkbook platform will extend potential use to other disciplines such as English composition, mathematics and the sciences. E-workbooks are often used in conjunction with traditional textbooks, and consist of various types of assessment activities that focus on key concepts and learning objectives in the course. Activities such as multiple choice, matching, flashcards and short answer provide a framework in which students can understand and apply new ideas.

Why E-Workbooks?

The days of print workbooks are numbered. Antiquated characteristics, such as the necessity of attempting to cram complicated answers into miniscule spaces and an extremely fragile binding, establish the print workbook as a learning tool of the past. E-workbooks offer an exact replica of material presented in traditional workbooks; however, activities are interactive and include associated media such as audio and video segments. The e-workbook provides a round-the-clock homework study program that benefits both students and instructors.

Studies prove that students possess different learning styles. In the same vein as e-books, e-workbooks contain various types of activities that appeal to a number of learning styles. E-workbooks promote the development and perfection of skills or concepts through practical application in interactivities. The repetition of activities and ideas embeds the information into students' memory. Feedback to each activity supplies students with correct answers and explanations as to why an answer was correct. This function provides students with context and clarification regarding from where a response derives. The e-workbook is a new kind of workbook for a new kind of learning.

The increasing sales of e-books (electronic textbooks) spurs the need for a digital aid to the e-book that enriches the learning experience. E-workbooks have been utilized for some time in the business, finance, and self-help markets. These products break difficult theories in areas ranging from money management to resumé writing into chunks and reinforce them through a variety of activities. Companies such as Xplana Learning observed the effectiveness of e-workbooks and the demand for a computerized supplement to e-books, resulting in a sophisticated spin on the classic print workbook.

Market Forces

Society's thirst for innovative technology and cost-effective solutions to expensive textbooks are the driving forces behind the sweeping movement to convert traditional textbooks to enhanced e-books. According to Syllabus Magazine, panelists in a 2003 summit even listed textbooks among traditions they believed to be approaching the end of their shelf life. As the rapid growth of the e-book market paves the way for continued digital learning methods, e-workbooks are the logical next step in the learning revolution.

The development of e-workbooks provides a cost-effective solution for publishers and students alike. Textbook prices are on the rise in response to a complicated market in which publishers raise prices to compensate for high production costs and decreasing sales due to the used-book market. In turn, students seek course materials in the used-book market to avoid purchasing the astronomically-priced new textbooks. Seventy-seven and sixth-tenths of a cent of each dollar made from new textbook sales is spent on producing the book and bringing it to market, according to the National Association of College Stores (NACS). However, the transition to e-books and e-workbooks reduces many production costs by eliminating middle-men responsible for printing, binding and distribution.

High textbook costs place a significant price on learning for students. According to the NACS, textbook prices rose from $693-$765 in 2001-2002 to $727- $807 for the 2002-2003 school year. Burdened by tuition and cost of living, students should not have to pay an additional several hundred dollars for textbooks. E-workbooks are significantly cheaper than their print counterparts, and are more convenient for the chaotic student lifestyle. In addition to convenience and affordability, e-workbooks present an unparalleled educational experience to the most technologically receptive sector of society.

In response to this flourishing e-learning market, distance learning and online courses are becoming increasingly prevalent. Distance education requires effective material that is compatible with online courses. E-books and corresponding e-workbooks integrate seamlessly into online courses and afford students a comprehensive education beyond the confines of the classroom setting.

Standards

As the demand for electronic learning tools becomes more evident, standards for e-workbooks begin to materialize. Basic e-workbooks tend to display in a true-to-textbook format that incorporates a variety of interactivities, immediate feedback to responses, and the option to post announcements. Many e-workbooks also flaunt a valuable tracking system that maintains which assignments are due, incomplete, or graded.

Why XplanaWorkbook?

XplanaWorkbook presents a sophisticated product that fuses traditional workbook activities with interactive elements, resulting in a learning tool for a high-tech world. While most e-workbooks are comprised of basic activities in true-to-workbook form, XplanaWorkbook boasts the inclusion of these traditional activities housed in a sophisticated design and formatted with special features. Xplana Learning's XplanaWorkbook functions as an exemplary workbook, but contains the management tools required to effectively teach an entire online course.

As a robust homework management solution, XplanaWorkbook is a time-saving device and organizational necessity for both instructor and student. The versatility of the product allows for customization of material for each instructor; however, the option exists for instructors to manually alter activities. XplanaWorkbook material is SCORM compliant and easily exported to a Learning Object Repository. XplanaWorkbook's malleability establishes it as a pioneer in the e-learning field. Other impressive features include:

- **Easy Navigation** Two different navigation tools allow for quick page location and leave little room for confusion.

- **Easy-to-follow Table of Contents** This simple table-of-contents ensures that the student can locate an activity in mere seconds. Additional information including the corresponding textbook page, due date, grading system, and points earned appears in this sidebar when a student selects an activity.

- **Administrative Options** Administrative tools supply instructors with the means to edit content, create new activities, and manage courses with ease. Instructors can also easily alter due dates or grading options to accommodate their changing needs.

- **Content Management** A customizable design permits instructors to modify existing assignments and create activities. Producing new activities is as simple as following the templates for the ten types of activities, authoring new activities, or importing text files using a built-in text-conversion tool.

- **Syllabus** The syllabus option lets instructors upload or create a syllabus to guarantee clarity regarding class standards, grading and expectations.

- **Grade-book** A flash-based grade-book equips instructors with the option to view the entire grade-book as a spreadsheet, import or export grades to or from other learning management systems and create assessment activities. Instructors can also determine grading systems and the weight of each assignment.

- **Roster** The Roster tool aids instructors in managing student and class lists. Instructors can also export the roster for use in other learning management systems (LMS).

- **Announcements** The Announcements option lets an instructor post pertinent announcements or notifications to the class, thus averting the hassle of mass emails and the miscommunications or technical difficulties that inevitably accompany them.

- **Calendar** The calendar is an effective time-management tool that highlights due dates and tracks personal progress; red squares flag a missing assignment while green checkmarks indicate completed assignments.

- **Resources** Instructors can include supplemental materials to enhance student learning. URLs or uploaded documents can serve as resources for a particular section or as general references.

- **Journal** The journal section allows for composition activities in addition to standard comprehension activities. The journal tool features a floating character palette for accurate accents and all the standard features found in word-processing applications. Grading of journal entries is conducted manually, by word count or by number of total entries.

- **XplanaVoice** This integrated voice-based discussion board offers the unique ability to include oral exercises in the workbook. Instructors can create oral exercises, listen to student answers, and comment in voice or writing. These oral assessments can also be graded.

- **E-book integration** The design of the workbook ensures seamless integration with XplanaBook, Xplana Learning's computerized media book. The two products are perfect complements as the workbook lets students apply information gleaned from the reading, while the e-book serves as a reference guide for the activities presented in the workbook.

Concluding Thoughts

The evolution of technology empowers people with convenient, enhanced learning tools. However, with technological advancements comes the challenge and responsibility of improving computerized learning to benefit the maximum number of people. Xplana Learning tackles this challenge daily, forging new territory in the education-technology field. By blending innovation, interactivity and ingenuity, Xplana Learning modernizes traditional learning techniques for today's digital world.

Bibliography

Haynes, E. "An Evaluation of Online Workbooks and Lab Manuals."
Presentation at the SOCALLT Conference, University of Texas at Arlington, March 2003.

National Association of College Stores. "Higher Education Retail Market Facts and Figures 2003-2004."
Retrieved 14 June 2004.
<https://www.nacs.org/nacs_store/default.asp?productid=2672>

"Syllabus 2003 Review: Designing New Learning Environments."
Syllabus Magazine. 1 October 2003. Retrieved 15 June 2004.
<http://www.syllabus.com/article.asp?id=8252>