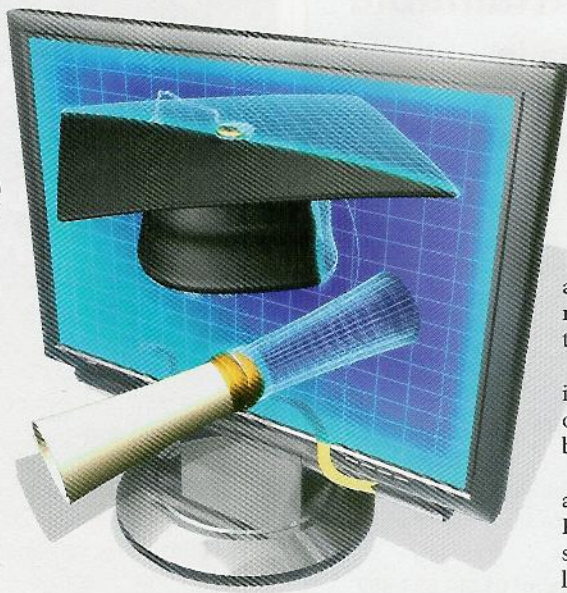


Ask the audience



adopters of higher grade WiFi or connectivity offerings will pressurise venues to come up to a new standard."

While such developments will be important, it seems likely that, in terms of training room technology, 2007 will be the year of audience response.

Paul Berry, director of UK business at training room technology provider Promethean, says: "Audience response systems are rapidly growing in popularity among training professionals. By using individual handheld keypads, group members can provide immediate feedback to the trainer. Whether at the beginning of a session to determine what delegates already know, or at the end to assess if key learning objectives have been achieved, audience response systems add value to training sessions by providing a dynamic and innovative touch to group interaction."

Many believe that during 2007 technology will continue to make the training room less and less relevant. They argue that e-learning is not only cheaper, it is also more effective.

For instance, Brendan Coakley, product manager at internet-conferencing specialist Premiere Global Services, says: "All web-conferencing features are available at only about 25 pence per minute per participant. This is a lot cheaper than paying for everyone to get to a central venue."

Others point out that online learning offers delegates greater control over when they study and how quickly they progress. Trainers can conduct online surveys to check progress, and they can make use of a broader range of materials than is the case with traditional classroom-based training.

But not everyone is convinced that the training room is outdated. Phil Dodds, group sales director, GBS Corporate Training, says: "Classroom-based learning remains the preference for most organisations, and a major switch to newer methods will certainly not happen overnight."

Some see technology as the nemesis of the training room. Yet it could also be its salvation, as new-fangled gadgets give traditional learning more va-va-voom.



Paul Berry, Promethean

transfer it to DVDs and websites so that delegates and others can use them after the event.

Portable camcorders that record straight to DVD will continue to replace the old large VCR models, and separate TVs and video players will disappear in favour of LCD projectors straight on to the wall. This may also be the year when the remaining overhead projectors are finally dumped.



Phil Dodds, GBS Corporate Training

Mark Dixon, boss of venue provider Regus, believes that WiFi will be the big venue story of 2007. He says: "We're planning to launch business-class WiFi, which will have the functionality that training and corporate clients demand. It will be secure, high speed and portable. Particularly in the training market, early

Interpersonal skills

Isobel Rimmer, director of Masterclass, a provider of management, leadership, sales, marketing and interpersonal skills training to companies such as PricewaterhouseCoopers, Novartis and Symantec, says audience response systems are about to take off.

"Many of our programmes focus on behavioural skills. There's a real need for technology that allows the audience to respond to what they're seeing. We're not sure yet what form this will take, but we're sure that audience response will become increasingly important in the training room."

As technology becomes ever-more central to the delivery of training programmes, it is important to remember that, no matter how powerful a piece of kit, it is only a tool. As Rebecca Hutchinson-Barr, venues and resources manager at Capita Learning & Development, puts it: "Most trainers are eager to use anything that will increase the effectiveness of their training but not everyone is keen to adopt every new technology. We must always remember that, while new technologies can ensure a smooth delivery on the day and increase quality, they cannot act as a substitute for a high quality trainer."

Interactive whiteboards

Also, technology is making its presence felt in the training room, and it looks as though in 2007 we will see more of it.

Interactive whiteboards took off in 2006 and we can expect to find them in more and more training rooms throughout 2007. Increasingly, trainers will look to capture information on them and then

INTERACTIVE DELEGATE RESPONSE

■ TurningPoint – which is distributed by Steljes in the UK – was recently voted by the training industry as its Training Provider of the Year. It is a voting-based assessment tool that allows trainers to measure exactly what delegates understand and then use that information to adjust the dynamics of the lessons to improve learning outcomes.

It can be used for small meetings, as well as for events with thousands of attendees. It allows trainers to alter the sequence of slides in their presentations according to participant responses, and to track how individual participants are understanding the session. It integrates fully with PowerPoint.

Matt Nithwani, product manager at Steljes, says: "Most corporates tend to rent rather than buy it, and this costs around £10 per handset per day. There are a few training consultants who have bought it and, although I can't give an exact price because it is sold through resellers, our recommended price is £65 per handset and a one-off fee of £500 for the core software."

Belfast company Quizdom offers similar interactive voting systems, which enable trainers to capture detailed audience responses and feedback that can be imported into PowerPoint. It charges £1,998 for a set of 28 of its Q4 RF handsets and a copy of the accompanying Interact software.

by Alex Blyth