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# Last Year's Predictions For 2008, Reviewed

By Stephen Downes
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It's the end of 2008, and while most people are predicting what will happen in 2009, I look back at those who predicted 2008.

It is safe to say that most pundits did not predict the largest story of the year, the collapse of the economic system. And while most people saw change in government, fewer predicted the role the internet would play in the result. As for e-learning, 2008 was a year in which very little actually occurred(even in gaming, the headline reads Old Standby Back On Top). As Dave Cormier summarized, it was the year in which blogging declined, Wikipedia became old, people still didn't get it, and tentative experiments - MUVEs and MOOCs - showed only hints of what is to come.

**Lisa Neal Gualtieri**, Ph.D., Editor-in-Chief, eLearn Magazine, and Blog on education.

*Predicted:* Better prioritization will lead to more purposeful activities, such as social networking to make meaningful connections as opposed to demonstrating popularity. Less-democratic processes will lead to a clearer distinction between expert-generated knowledge and the overwhelming quantity of information available everyplace, making it easier to discern information quality. Ultimately, time is one of our most valuable resources, and I am hopeful that in 2008 it will be easier to learn, as well as to create and locate high-quality learning content.

Grade: B
Social networking came into its own in 2008, raising millions of dollars for social and political causes. And we saw attempts, at least, to popularize 'less democratic' processes in the writings of Andrew Keen, the growth of Citizendium and, of course, the Britannica Blog. But none of these made it easier to discern information quality, and it didn't become appreciably easier to learn or locate high quality content.

**Richard E. Mayer**, University of California, Santa Barbara, US. Web page.

*Predicted*: When considering innovations in e-learning for 2008, it is tempting to focus on advances in technology-such as the use of games, virtual reality, and pedagogical agents. However, the most important innovations in e-learning will involve advances in our understanding of how to design e-learning environments that help people learn-such as how to design serious games, VR environments, and online agents that promote appropriate cognitive processing during learning. Basic research on learning and instruction will provide new guidance for instructional design, including which instructional features promote which kinds of learning for which learners.

Grade: D
Basic research did occur in 2008, as it does every year, but it is far less clear that we saw any particular advance in our understanding of how to design e-learning environments (unless you consider practical work such as [CCK08](#) or [Jokadia](#) or [Wikiducator](#)). Looking up "Basic research on learning and instruction will provide new guidance for instructional design" on Google tells us the current state of affairs: an [old ITForum paper](#) on information age learning, Gagne's [nine steps](#), and a 2005 paper on [ISD](#). So general a prediction demands specific results, and this just did not happen in 2008.


**Stephen Downes**, Researcher, National Research Council Canad. [Website](#).

*Predicted:* The "middle path"-proprietary lock-in services, like Vista, iTunes, Facebook, and Second Life, will be abandoned for more open commercial alternatives rather than free and open source software and content. "Personal networks" will be created by individuals to manage and share their contacts and information sources; people will "peer" into each others' networks or subscribe to filtered versions of each others' network feeds. Digital devices will be synched using online services that will offer a publishing option for "live updating." Finally, open academic publishing will have its strongest year. Many government agencies will require that funded materials be made openly accessible. Useful libraries and indices of open academic content will appear, pushing commercial providers to offer some free content just to stay in the game.

Grade: C
While people avoided [Vista](#) like the plague, nobody was abandoning [iTunes](#), [Facebook](#) or [Second Life](#) (though, in fairness, the criticisms did begin to mount). [Personal networks](#) were created but, for the most part, were not used to create filtered feeds. Devices were [synched](#), but mostly were used to make phone calls, listen to music and download apps from an app store. The number of [Open Access mandates](#) increased, commercial publishers leaned toward free, but useful indices did not emerge (though [ticTOCs](#), released December 20, is a start).


**Saul Carliner**, Associate Professor, Graduate Program in Educational Technology, Concordia University, Canad. [Website](#).

*Predicted:* I see these trends emerging: (1) continued integration of e-learning into the broader, everyday context of learning; (2) increasing interest in informal learning (and, as seen through

ebbs of interest in performance support and workflow training, only limited incremental practical developments); and (3) a somewhat increased interest in digital video for learning as a side benefit of both the early 2009 transition from analog TV to HDTV in the U.S. and the hi-def DVD format-war seemingly being won by Sony's Blu-Ray technology.

Grade: C+
This prediction is essentially a projection of three existing trends, none of which demonstrated any particula strength, coupled with a known future event (the conversion to HD) and the projection of a very likely one (the win by Blu-Ray). The best part of the prediction is the observation that the increased interest in performance support and workflow learning would result in only limited practical developments.

**Jay Cross**, CEO, Internet Time Group, USA

*Predicted:* The suffix "2.0" will be appended to almost everything. Get ready for LMS 2.0, Performance 2.0, and even Google Search 2.0. But be careful when you get to Web 3.0, Third Life, and the other 3.0s. E-learning, knowledge management, corporate communications, and talent management will continue to converge. Some companies will mash them together and put it all under a CPO (Chief People Officer.) Finally, hierarchies will crumble as executives see the speed at which Web-savvy new hires penetrate silos, talk directly with customers, and get things done.

Grade: D

Yes, we got LMS 2.0, Performance 2.o and Search 2.0 - all in 2007 or earlier. No credit for predicting past events. Yes, we saw a convergence of e-learning, knowledge management, corporate communications, and talent management - in, for example, competences and skills databases. Yes, we saw the Chief People Officer. At Walmart. In 2004. A fad that didn't become a trend. But most of all, hierarchies didn't crumble in 2008 - though just about everything else did.

**Michael Feldstein**, author, e-Literate weblog, USA

*Predicted:* This year we will see universities begin to provide institutional support for Facebook and other Web 2.0 tools, not as replacements for the LMS but as adjuncts to them. Also, 2008 will be a blockbuster year for the participation of young people in the United States elections, thanks in part to the use of Web 2.0 sites to educate them on the issues and to mobilize them. Blackboard will show measureable market-share loss for the first time. All LMS vendors will benefit, but Moodle and Sakai will benefit disproportionately.

Grade: A
Detailed and specific predictions, all of which came true. The Open University, for example, was one of many institutions to develop a Facebook application. All LMS vendors adapted web 2.0 tools. Young people were a dominant inluence on the U.S. election, sweeping established

candidates and pitting a choice between 'change' and 'maverick'. Blackboard did lose market share, with Moodle benefiting. Sakai, meanwhile, maintains only a sliver of the market.

**Carol Barnum**, Director of the Usability Center and Professor of Information Design, Southern Polytechnic State University, USA

*Predicted:* The WOW factor is upon us. A recent two-part story on NPR reported that one in five students is now taking courses via distance learning. With so many students learning online, more attention needs to be paid to the question of usability, particularly to understanding the user's experience. A few years ago, there was little mention of usability in the same conversation as e-learning. Now it comes up, even if the meaning is in the eye of the beholder. But, here's an interesting point, which could signal convergence: U.S. News and World Report 2008 Best Careers issue puts "usability/user experience specialist" on its list of top careers with bright futures. With the growing interest in e-learning and the growing prospects for usability specialists, there is indeed optimism that the two spheres will not only overlap but merge.

Grade: D
We saw a video on YouTube and a paper at E-Learn but no significant uptick in the importance of usability in online learning and certainly no signof the two spheres merging. And the U.S. news and World Report Chart? Usability specialist is still on it, but with only a 'B' for job prospects and on the bubble.

**Mark Notess**, Indiana University, Very There Consulting, and member of eLearn Magazine's Editorial Advisory Board, USA

*Predicted:* 2008 will be a banner year for distance learning enrollments. Economic and geo-political instabilities will lead more people to seek new employment credentials. The steep growth of baby boomer "first retirements" will also fuel the trend, as people in their 60s look for second careers or life enrichment. The distance learning build-out of the past several years will come into its own, but some of the persistent learner-experience issues will contribute to continuing high attrition. These issues will generate new research and experimentation, resulting (eventually) in major improvements to both program management and technology platforms.

Grade: B-
Bonus marks for predicting economic instabilities (geo-political instabilities are a given). As for distance enrollments, everything I could find (such as this article and reports such as this and this) showed that while enrollments were up, they were not dramatically up. The rest of the prediction was too vague to evaluate. What does it mean to say that a build-out will ' will come into its own"? And while there may have been "persistent learner-experience issues" but we don't know what they were, and there was no indication that attrition was more or less an issue this year over previous years.

**Karl Kapp**, Assistant Director, Institute for Interactive Technologies and Professor of Instructional Technology, Bloomsburg University, USA

*Predicted:* Content within corporations and universities is going to become more and more disaggregated and learner created. Truly valuable content will be found as short videos on YouTube, entries on blogs, or a favorite page on a wiki, none will be housed in a Learning Management System. In fact, I predict a corporate version of YouTube will emerge just as the academic version, TeacherTube previously emerged. Formalized "instructional design" will begin to look more like "instructional assembly," in that what is traditionally thought of as a course will really be the efforts of an instructional designer to assemble disaggregated pieces of related content into a coherent flow for novice learners or learners who are not comfortable with assembling the content themselves for whatever reason.

Grade: B-
Content did become more disaggregated and learner created, continuing a trend that has been evident for several years. Penalty for non-falsifiability: if valuable content were housed on a learning management system, this would not be evident to the wider internet. No corporate version of YouTube emerged. 'Inbstructional assembly' did not emerge as a wide practice. maybe in a few years.

**Angeliki Poulymenakou**, Assistant Professor in Information Systems; and Spiros Borotis, Researcher, both at Athens University of Economics and Business, Greece

*Predicted:* The proliferation of e-learning 2.0 will create new challenges for the quality of e-learning content, i.e. the need to create meaningful support structures to assist learners navigating through and evaluating the plethora of new user-created forms of learning resources. Moreover, emerging online social communities, e.g. Facebook and Myspace, will provide new and alternative ways of rapid e-learning through various applications and groups. Regarding the use of e-learning in Europe, an emerging field concerns the support for contemporary employment arrangements like flexicurity, as well as for ensuring the provision of equal opportunities.

Grade: C
Quality continued to be a challenge for e-learning content in new media, but no new challenges emerged. While support systems for learners would be useful, the need for them did not grow appreciably in 2008, and no new systems were created (it's interesting that in 2008 user-created resources were largely ignored by most commentators). New facebook applications and groups supporting learning were created, but not at any increased pace from preceeding years. Following from a 2006 report, Europe did establish a commission on Flexicurity, but otherwise discussion of the concept seems to have slowed in 2008.

**Jane Hart**, Head, Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies, UK

*Predicted:* Open source and other free tools will continue to dominate the e-learning market, but these will be used to create simple informational types of e-learning rather than complex instructional solutions. Here are some tools which I think will do well, or even better, in 2008: Google Docs (now that it has embeddable presentation functionality), Slideshare (with narrated presentations) will go from strength to strength, as will VoiceThread. YouTube and other video sites, including those that specialize in instructional videos like TeacherTube, as well as aggregators like SuTree, will dominate. Tools like Gcast and Gabcast will make podcasting even easier.

Grade: B-
While open source and free tools were important, it is hard to say that they "dominated" the e-learning market - not while commercial systems such as Blackboard and Desire2Learn are still viable, not while content creation tools like Camtasia and conferencing tools like Elluminate still dominate their sectors. Google Docs didn't enjoy a good year, though it remained popular. Slideshare remained strong, but has slipped a bit. VoiceThread flailed, languishing at 23 on Hart's list. TeacherTube, as noted, has been dropping. SuTree, Gcast and Gabcast/ Nowhere to be found.

**Prof. James Hendler**, Tetherless World Constellation Chair, Computer Science Dept., Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, USA

*Predicted:* The Semantic Web is beginning to spread. It's already being used underneath a few popular Web sites, and there are a large number of start-ups springing up in the area. My prediction for the coming year is that users will start noticing more Web sites that seem to offer more views of more data and that they will be able to make more of their preferences known to applications. Within a couple of years, this will become expected of educational systems, especially library systems, and educational Web site providers will need to start learning more about this technology.

Grade: D
Not to put too fine a point on it, but predictions that the semantic web will spread have been around for years. And for years, that spread simply hasn't been happening. Same in 2008, which was the year of Ajax and the mashup, and not the year of the Semantic Web at all.

**Curt Bonk**, Professor, Indiana University, USA

*Predicted:* There is a distinct shift recently from the clamor over a particular technology or Web 2.0 tool to how they can be combined for multi-pedagogical and multi-technological experiences. There are Facebook groups for Second Life educators; Facebook groups established to generate research on YouTube; people blogging on their Second Life adventures and putting up related pictures in Flickr; classes creating wikibooks with students from around the world, which have

these learners blog on their progress and create podcasts of their final products. Yet another multi-pedagogical/multi-technological example is when college students collect sounds from different cities or locations and index them using Google maps. A new term for these "mash-ups" will emerge in 2008 in various training and education sectors to help focus on the wealth of learning-related aspects or possibilities that can now be realized.

Grade: C
Some marks for predicting the clamour over combining things (no points for the undefined 'multi-pedagogical and multi-technological experiences'). The long second and third sentences are not predictions, but rather, descriptions of the state of affairs (at the end of 2007). No new term for 'mash-up' came into being in 2008.

**Jonathon Levy**, Senior Learning Strategist, Monitor Group, USA

It appears the moment we've been anticipating may be arriving. Much of our work in 2008 will address RFPs for new models of performance-based learning both from companies and universities! We are responding to requests for capture of tacit knowledge, and integration of resident expertise that people carry in their heads into a semantic knowledge ecosystem. There also seems to be recognition that there is no longer time for learning activities to be separate from the "doing." We see a growing market for innovative "smart tools" that transcend "e-learning" and imbed new knowledge acquisition into the context of doing actual work.

Grade: D

If there was a new market in performance-based learning, it wasn't really evident. Certainly, it had been talked about for some time, and companies like Accenture had launched human performance groups. But beyond the usual level of hype for things like Second Life (which even dropped off a bit in 2008) there was no particular emphasis on simulation or immersion in learning. The same with workplace learning and EPS systems. And 'smart systems'. No new developments over and above the general background noise that has existed for years. And nothing new on jonathonlevy.com after 2006.

**Seb Schmoller**, Chief Executive of the UK's Association for Learning Technology (ALT), England

*Predicted:* My predictions for 2008: Effective use of RSS by learners, teachers, and learning providers will become more normal. Meanwhile the off-line capabilities of browser-based applications like Google Reader will grow, making a big difference for users with only intermittent Internet access. The hype surrounding social networking will abate, with a greater understanding developing about when social networking supports learning and when it is a distraction. And many more people will break free from Windows or OSX-based systems, and

begin to rely instead on cheaper, lighter, disk-free devices, with their "stuff" stored somewhere on the Internet rather than locally.

Grade: B+
Pretty good predictions. More learners, teachers and providers used RSS; the jury is out on whether it was used more effectively, and the numbers were not staggering. Off-line browsing capacites did improve, but the impact was limited. The hype around social networking didn't abate appreciably, but it leveled off, with criticisms about the appropriateness of using Facebook in learning becoming more common (also, the popularity of the term 'creepy treehouse'). Windows and OSX proved more resiliant than predicted, actually gaining ground by occupying the OLPC platform. But cheaper, lighter, disk-free devices were huge in 2008.

**Richard Larson**, Director, MIT Learning Interactive Networks Consortium (LINC) and Mitsui Professor, Engineering Systems, MIT, USA

*Predicted:* The year 2008 will be the year in which open source educational materials will be co-invented by educators from around the world and will be as easily uploaded onto a searchable website as are the videos on YouTube. Quality control can be maintained either by official moderators, or-preferably-by market forces guided by user comments prominently displayed. The content can be incorporated into class-based or distance-based courses. Each educational entry can be small (an educational "snippet"), medium (30 minutes of a class), or large (one week's worth of work).

Grade: F
The YouTube of open leaning materials? Didn't happen? Quality control mechanisms? Nope - all that was tried with MERLOT years ago, and the whole quality-review thing just isn't catching on. Incorporating open learning content into courses? Sure - nothing new there (and not any easier, either). The concept of 'snippets' was "invented" long before 2008 - they were called learning objects or information objects. For a *prediction*, this really is a surprising submission.

**Margaret Driscoll**, Managing Consultant, IBM, USA

*Predicted:* The e-learning buzz for 2008 is virtual reality (VR) for training (the 3-D variety). Industry pundits are selling decision makers on VR's immersive, distributed, virtual, and collaborative attributes. This stuff is so cool that mainstream TV shows like "CSI: NY" have an option called "Second Live Virtual Experience," Sears has a prototype store, and MTV is already in season three of "Virtual Laguna Beach." Recall the e-learning tsunami of hype and you will quickly see the parallels. Look for a rush to create a VR training program, a lack of adequate funding and time to execute, and no grounding in educational practice or theory. VR is Valhalla for die-hard constructivists.

Grade: A-

Hard to say that this prediction, though narrow, wasn't spot on. As 2008 progressed, it was clear Second Life had peaked in 2007. By the end of it, organizations like Reuters had bailed and Second Life was fading from the mainstream. Google pulled the plug on Lively. "The companies that rushed to set up bases within the cult virtual world of Second Life appear to have wasted their time as many have shut down and others are "ghost towns", an Australian researcher has found."

**Mark Oehlert**, Innovation Investigator and Gaming Specialist, Defense Acquisition University, USA

*Predicted:* I predict that I will: (1) continue to look for social networking functionality to become integrated into e-learning platforms; (2) ask why/how standards like SCORM stay important/relevant as de facto Web standards like AJAX, REST, and SOAP seem to address the same issues in a more complete way (and if I am wrong here, please someone tell me); (3) continue to watch as gaming design and instructional design talk past each other and fail to find a satisfactory hybrid solution; (4) continue to argue that mobile learning (as opposed to "immobile learning?") will not cross into the mainstream as long as we continue to fail to adapt our design to the fact that most mobile devices are first audio devices and, distantly second, visual devices. Continuing to define "mobile learning" mainly by it association with one class of technology (cell phones) will have a similar effect.

Grade: D
Telling us what you are going to talk about for the next year is a bit of a cheap dodge. Also, predicting that things will not happen is also a bit of a dodge. A prediction that is a question is definitely a dodge. Yes, web 2.0 technologies were integrated into e-learning platforms, but this was announced prior to 2008.

**Patti Shank**, President, Learning Peaks LLC, USA

*Predicted:* Learning content, activity, and assessment authoring tools continue to improve. There are great tools with a short learning curve (for example, Adobe Captivate and Articulate Presenter) and tools with a longer learning curve that are really excellent (for example, Lectora, and Flashform). Savvy instructional designers are starting to realize that they cannot be involved in the development of all instructional content in their organizations. Designers are beginning to help others author content and that should leave the more complex projects, where quality of instruction and assurance of skills is needed, in the hands of capable instructional designers. One oh-so-hopeful prediction: Instructional design programs will begin teaching instructional designers to write. Why this critical skill isn't considered a must-have has me scratching my head.

Grade: B-
There's no real indication that instructional design programs began teaching instructional designers to write. Saying that the tools will improve is kind of like throwing rocks at trees in a

forest. And designers have been helping others author content for many years now (these days you find mostly instructional design *tools* intended to assist authors). It's not all a wash though. It helps when somebody explicitly identifies cases where your prediction is being realized.

**Clark Quinn**, Quinnovation, USA
Grade: B-

*Predicted:* The cynical: There will continue to be "eLearning Solutions Providers" with no one on the executive/management team who really understands learning; a total LMS/CMS/Portal/eCommunity all-singing, all-dancing solution will be announced, but it still won't be the answer. The optimistic: mLearning will cross the chasm this year, and more organizations will take a wise perspective toward using technology to populate the "performance ecosystem." Both: Exciting new Web 2.0 applications will keep appearing, but we won't be better at avoiding hype and looking for real learning affordances.

I searched high and low for a 2008 announcement of "a total LMS/CMS/Portal/eCommunity all-singing, all-dancing solution" but didn't find one (I even left out the singing and the dancing). Did mLearning cross the chasm? That's a bit of a judgment call. It was certainly more popular, but not arguably mainstream, with most activity in the form of pilot projects and test runs. Exciting web 2.0 applications kept appearing, but arguably the economic crash has made us a *lot* better at avoiding hype - at least for the next few weeks.

**Ben Watson**, Director, Microsoft Learning, Canada

*Predicted:* Somehow in 2007 the power of the human touch passed the learning industry by when FaceBook, MySpace, and YouTube roared to life and gained prominence while search engines continued to grow their dominance by becoming the learning tool of choice for individuals. In 2008, expect the learning industry to continue to struggle to remain relevant as these technologies, and others, continue to bypass corporate-structured learning while individuals continue to vote with their virtual feet while creating relevant content on their own. Ironically, competing demands for attention will drive people to single-source as much of their learning as possible.

Grade: B+
The learning industry struggled to stay relevant. Many training departments failed their organizations. And with the crash in the fall, learning was first on the chopping block and schools, colleges and universities faced funding cuts. And we began to see a shift in emphasis from instiututions creating learning to students creating their own learning. We haven't seen the move toward single-source learning, though iTunes is definitely offering itself as a candidate.

**David Porush**, Co-founder and Chairman, SpongeFish, USA

New gadgets and communications tech tease us with visions that "it's all gonna change." Radio, television, the first PCs"-all inspired millennial prophesies of revolutions in learning. The simple fact is that most people still learn formally in classrooms very similar to the Sumerians' of 3200 B.C. What has changed most stunningly is the breadth and instantaneity of our informal learning. My prediction? Formal learning will still take place in classrooms or virtual simulacra of classrooms. But this year social networks for sharing what you know informally and personally will be the big news.

Grade: C
The key aspect of Sumerian classrooms, at least according to Porush (who appears to be the primary source for such references) is that "The discipline of the schoolchildren being tutored in script 'canalizes' their thought processes, reinforcing certain pathways." Formal learning can still be contrasted with informal learning, a concept that gained ground steadily in 2008. Were social networks for learning big news in 2008? Not particularly more than most anything else. A more concrete prediction would have been helpful here.
**Philip Lambert**, Vice-President, Red Hot Learning, Canada

*Predicted:* 2008 will be the year that serious games get serious attention from corporate training departments. More studies will show the positive learning effects of games, and, as practitioners quote positive ROI from serious games that far exceed the ROI provided by other forms of e-learning, many corporations will jump on this exciting new bandwagon. By the end of the year, it will be apparent that, just as in the early days of e-learning, people who do not know what they are doing will create games that do not teach effectively, do not engage learners, and are not used. This will lead some to question, once again, the validity of using games to teach.

Grade: A

Games received a lot of attention in 2008 and, in particular, as predicted, studies showed the positive effects of learning from games. Proving ROI was more of a challenge, generating some debate, but specific claims were made. In addition, other people built ineffective games. What's missing thus far to any great degree is the questioning. Just a matter of time, though.


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Overall, the predictions were a pretty mixed bag, with lack of specificity, predictions of past events, and obviousness being the main culprits. 2008 was an especially difficult year to predict, and those who simply predicted 'more of the same' (more social networks, more virtual reality, more Youtube, more mobile learning) tended to fare poorly. It's likely that in 2009 the people who based their predictions around the current economic crisis will meet a similar fate. Predictions *of* an impact amount to predicting past events, but identifying the specific impact will be more difficult. And what will technology do in the mean time? If you focused on the economic downtiurn, you probably missed that.