



Content Services

Are you worried that bespoke e-learning is unaffordable?
It needn't be: Quick guide



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Recent research conducted by IMC (UK) Learning Ltd confirms that in this internet age, e-learning has become a highly rated method of providing staff with training as, going beyond cost and time savings whilst protecting productivity, it is widely recognised as fundamental to an organisation's ability to create sustainable competitive advantage.

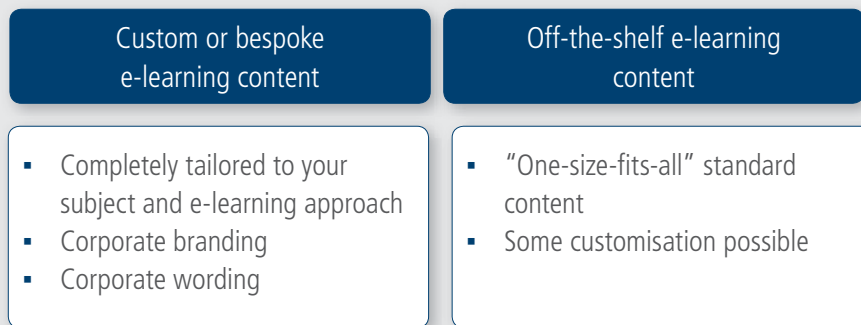
However, the right off-the-shelf content is sometimes hard to find. If you are sure that e-learning works but you can't find the off-the-shelf e-learning content you need, you are not alone. You may also be worried that bespoke e-learning content, whilst ideal, is unaffordable.

Thankfully, bespoke e-learning doesn't have to mean expensive e-learning. Bespoke content can be as simple or as complex as you like. But finding the right supplier who can advise you on the type of e-learning content you need and all the aspects you need to consider could be the difference between success and failure.

This Quick Guide offers a brief overview of the things to consider and the questions to ask if your organisation is thinking of producing bespoke e-learning to support staff training.

1. What is bespoke e-learning?

In the industry jargon, individual pieces of e-learning are known as “content” and there are two main types: (1) Custom or bespoke e-learning content and (2) Generic or off-the-shelf e-learning content



Types of e-learning content

Generic or “off the shelf” e-learning content is based on standard material covering general topics applicable in any organisation. There are many different suppliers who specialise in “off-the-shelf” content and offer extensive catalogues of “one-size-fits-all” learning material. Professional content providers offer huge libraries with generic content titles covering subjects such as:

- Language training
- Information technology training
- Project management training
- Leadership training

Some content providers may offer to customise their “off-the-shelf” content for you with adaptations ranging from adding your corporate branding to their standard content to adding or enhancing existing content. However, generic content still remains essentially a one-size-fits-all product.

Various licencing models exist, but the most common model is the payment of a “pay-per-learner” fee to access the material over a fixed period of time (anywhere from 3 – 12 months). If more time is needed, another licence needs to be bought. Terms and conditions will apply.



Bespoke e-learning, on the other hand, is content specifically designed for your organisation, based on your own material and branded with your own image. Some of the most common subjects that organisations commission bespoke e-learning for include:

- Induction training
- Sales & Product training
- Compliance training

Once produced, the intellectual property rights (IPR) should belong to you. There are probably hundreds of ways of categorising bespoke e-learning content, but you can't go far wrong with these simple ones based on the extent of media types used:

Level 1: Rapid authored content

Typically based on linear progress through a slide presentation containing images, text, navigation buttons and one voiceover

The screenshot displays a LECTURNITY web-player interface. On the left, there is a navigation sidebar with a table of contents for a presentation titled 'Africa 1 - LECTURNITY Flash Player'. The table of contents lists sections: 2. Table of contents (0:20), 3. Climate (0:27), 4. Countries (0:47), 5. Flags (0:52), 6. Animals (0:57), and 7. Questions (1:08). The 'Animals' section is currently selected. The main content area shows a slide titled 'Animals' with the following text and images:

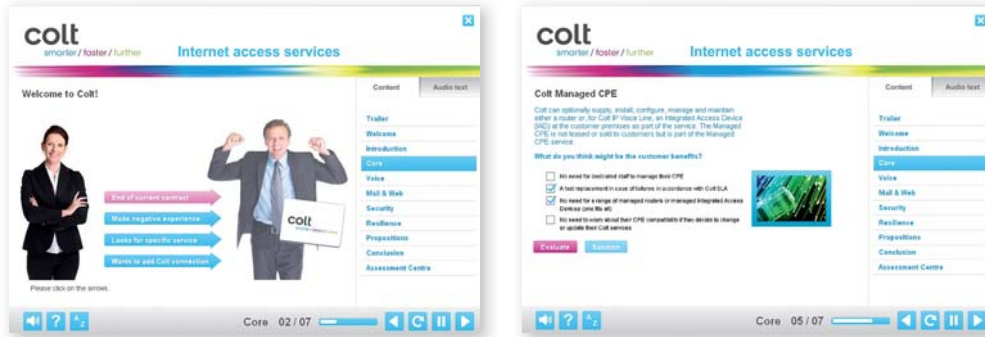
- Elephants** are large land mammals in two genera of the family Elepharidae: *Elephas* and *Loxodonta*.
- Three species of elephant are living today: the African bush elephant, the African forest elephant and the Asian elephant (also known as the Indian elephant).
- The **giraffe** (*Giraffa camelopardalis*) is an African even-toed ungulate mammal, the tallest of all land-living animal species, and the largest ruminant. The giraffe's scientific name, which is similar to its antiquated English name of camelopard, refers to its irregular patches of color on a light background, which bear a foian resemblance to a leopard's spots.
- The **hippopotamus** (*Hippopotamus amphibius*), or hippo, from the ancient Greek for "river horse" (*ἵπποπόταμος*), is a large, mostly herbivorous mammal in sub-Saharan Africa, and one of only two extant species in the family Hippopotamidae (the other is the Pygmy Hippopotamus).

The slide also features three images: an African bush elephant, two giraffes, and a hippopotamus. A video inset in the bottom left corner shows a male presenter. The interface includes a search bar, navigation buttons, and a 'LECTURNITY web-player' logo in the bottom right corner.

Level 1 e-learning content

Level 2 Animated, multi-path content

More interactive, flash-animated transitions, more than one voiceover and multi-path learning



Level 2 eLearning content produced by IMC for **Colt Technology Services**

Colt Technology Services is Europe's leading provider of information delivery infrastructures. For more information, please visit www.colt.net

Level 3 Rich media, serious games based content

Rich, engaging media (film, animated cartoons etc), games, programming, student-dictated learning logic, custom animation, non-linear and multipath learning



Level 3 e-learning content

The content level chosen has an impact on the production times and costs. The subject and the urgency will determine which level of production is the most appropriate, but it is essential to check which level of e-learning content you will actually get when trying to find the supplier who best understands your needs and offers you the best value for money.

2. What are the Pros and Cons of Bespoke e-learning?

The main advantages of bespoke content are that it is much more tailored to your subject, your culture and your audience and can be produced on any subject for which your organisation has a training need.

There should be no ongoing licence fees for bespoke content whereas "off-the shelf" content can have a higher lifetime cost because of ongoing licence fees. The cost of bespoke e-learning content is all in the production. If it is accessible via an intranet or LMS, there is no marginal cost for delivery: rolling out a piece of bespoke e-learning to 50, 500 or 5,000 people costs the same.

Since bespoke content is created for your organisation, you own the content and hold the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). This might offer your organisation the opportunity to sell your content to other people to achieve a monetary return on investment (ROI).

A distinct advantage of bespoke learning is the freedom to design the most appropriate assessment and evaluation methodology. You do not have to rely solely on traditional text-based questions at the end of a learning sequence but can apply differing forms of assessment where appropriate. These could include drag & drop, rank-in-order, hotspots and crosswords.

It is important to consider a number of other factors as well. Bespoke content requires a much longer lead time and involves an up-front investment. In the longer term of course, you are responsible for keeping the content up-to date which might involve post-production work for you or for your content supplier.

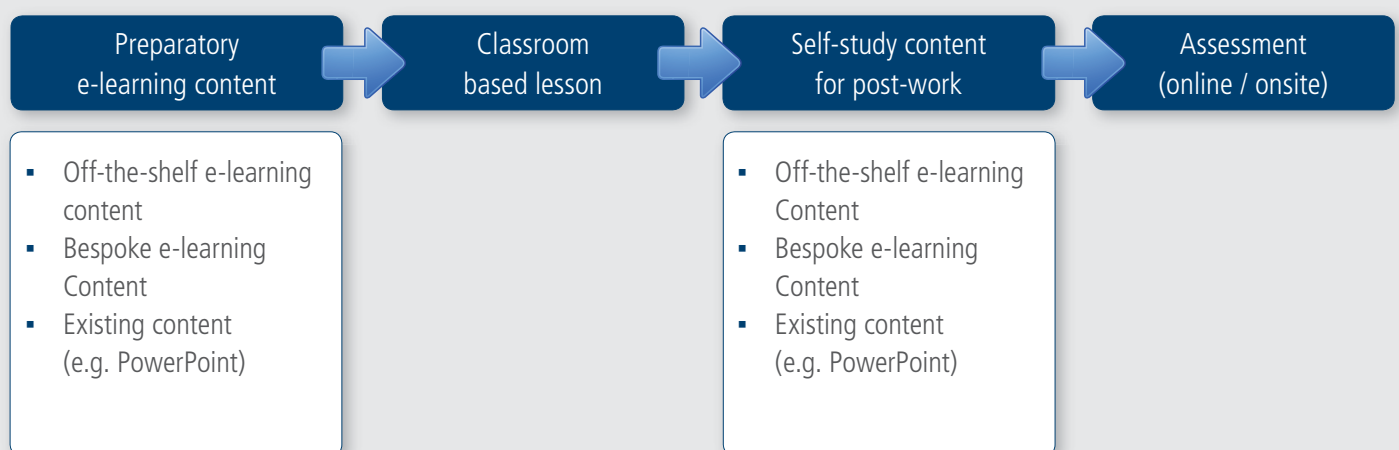
Bespoke e-learning PROs	Bespoke e-learning CONs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Tailored to your content, culture and audience▪ No ongoing licence costs▪ Intellectual property Rights (IPR) owned by your organisation▪ Bespoke assessment design possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Needs to be produced (no short-term availability)▪ Involves up-front investment▪ Risk: have you got the right supplier?▪ On-going updates may be necessary

Pros and cons of bespoke e-learning at a glance



3. How does using bespoke e-learning work in practice?

A term you will often hear is “blended learning”. This is an approach to designing learning programmes that blends e-learning content (bespoke, off-the-shelf) with classroom-based learning and/or other learning/collaboration techniques such as discussion forums, audio- and videoconferencing. There is no standard “blend” as every subject is unique and the choice of delivery (online or face-to-face) depends on the material being taught. For learning with highly practical elements, or soft skills training, an appropriate blend might be to start with online e-learning in preparation for practical workshops or classroom sessions, followed up by more online self study and then an online assessment conducted over several weeks. Subjects with less hands-on and practical elements (software training or accountancy for example) may well have more e-learning in the blend.



Example of a possible blended learning scenario using bespoke e-learning

4. Which criteria should I use to select my supplier?

On paper, all this sounds fine. But, if you are looking at commissioning bespoke content for the first time, what are the most important criteria for finding the right supplier? By probing potential suppliers on the following topics you can be sure that you are in safe hands:

- **Subject Matter Expertise**

The success of your learning content depends on the level of subject matter expertise offered during the design process. Make sure that your own subject matter experts (SMEs) are on the project team, especially if your content is about your organisation's products, services and processes. In an ideal world, your supplier's experts complement your in-house experts and by working together, you end up with content that is both factually accurate and designed to 'sink in'. When speaking to your supplier, ask if they have a network of Subject Matter Experts, some of whom can be integrated into the project team if required.

- **Instructional Design and evaluation expertise**

Many suppliers may focus all their efforts on creating visually appealing animations and sequences. There is no doubt that an intuitive and self explanatory user interface will support your staff in navigating your e-learning content more efficiently but this alone does not ensure learning success. Have a look at their creative and instructional design approach and ask if they focus on didactics and can provide you with coaching about the application of didactic design patterns. Where possible, your supplier should follow a pattern-based approach during the design stage. Didactic patterns are established design models which are applied to didactic decision-making situations. They relate to the chosen content format, structure, multimedia design, interaction design and motivational design. In addition, ask your supplier if they are experts in e-assessment and evaluation (formative and summative evaluations). Your chosen supplier should be able to advise you on the different options from which to choose when deciding on the type of feedback a learner experiences when completing an assessment object. Different types can be used in different situations according to the learning outcome required.

- **Blended learning design expertise**

The creation of an appropriate blend, including your bespoke e-learning, is critical to the success of your training. In order for you to fully benefit from the opportunities offered by blended learning, and to implement it in targeted ways to realise its full potential, your supplier should be able to provide you with advice when developing a holistic learning design. This includes services such as identifying content which is particularly appropriate for eLearning, finding the right mix of online communication/collaboration tools and coaching trainers on professional e-Tutoring.

- **Project Management Expertise**

From a project management viewpoint, creating content is all about providing an agreed deliverable on time and in budget. It is important that your supplier uses a proven methodology which breaks the design process into various phases (e.g. "creative approach", "storyboarding", "production phase") with defined deliverables. This enables you to monitor progress during the course of the project and avoid an unpleasant surprise in terms of quality and costs at the end of the project. Make sure that your supplier covers the whole end-to-end content production process and can ideally assign a certified project manager (PRINCE2 or PMI for example) who will be your central point of contact.

- **Technical Expertise**

Depending on subject matter, target group(s) and available budget your organisation's e-learning needs could vary from using existing PowerPoint slides in one project to producing highly sophisticated and media enriched content in another. Your supplier should be able to assure you that they are technically equipped to produce the whole range of content from level 1 to level 3. The professional use of Flash, Flex (AS 3), XML, HTML, JavaScript, C# and other programming languages should be part of your supplier's technical expertise. A list of all the supported authoring technologies should be available. Furthermore, the supplier should not insist on using a particular technology but start by analysing what you want to achieve and then selecting the appropriate tools to provide the best solution. In addition, make sure that your supplier has experience in producing accessible e-Learning content in line with DDA requirements (assistive technology and WCAG 2.0 Guidelines).

- **E-learning Distribution**

Content is typically delivered over the internet or intranet but can also be delivered via DVDs. However, at times where mobile devices such as smart phones, MP3 and MP4 players and the PSP (Play Station Portable) are becoming more and more popular in a business environment, check with your supplier if they have experience in creating content that supports these appealing output options. In addition to this, ask your supplier if the content can be integrated easily and seamlessly with almost all LMSs and infrastructures (SCORM or AICC compliant content). If you do not have an infrastructure in place, ask your supplier if they can provide you with an interim solution at low cost and with short term contractual arrangements (e.g. a shared platform or cloud based LMS).

Supplier Selection Criteria

- Technical expertise
- Design methodology
- Subject matter expertise
- Instructional design and evaluation expertise
- Content distribution solution

5. Top level process for successful bespoke e-learning production

The section illustrates a top-level process for successful bespoke content production in your organisation.



Process for successful e-learning production

Step 1:

Analyse your training needs carefully and decide if producing bespoke content adds value compared to “off-the-shelf” content. Identify the right learning approach (blend) for your training needs. If you do not have the expertise in-house, think of getting a supplier involved who can offer you the required e-learning consultancy services. This supplier can be, but does not necessarily need to be, the organisation that will produce your bespoke e-learning content.

Step 2

Identify which level of bespoke content (1, 2 or 3) your topic actually requires to be successfully taught. Please bear in mind that visually appealing e-learning content alone does not guarantee the best learning results.

Step 3

Choose a supplier carefully, using the criteria above, who can act as your partner for bespoke content production. Provide your supplier with a clear project scope and technical specifications in order to receive an accurate quote.

Step 4

Make sure that your project is staffed with both in-house and supplier provided people with subject matter and instructional design expertise so that you can monitor intermediate deliverables (i.e. the storyboard)

About IMC

Since its foundation IMC has become firmly established as a leading full service provider of advanced learning solutions in the private and public sector. Research analysts such as Gartner have credited IMC with an excellent solution portfolio and a leading role in the supply of innovative learning technologies. With enthusiasm and passion for learning, we support the life-long education of students and employees in and between organisations. IMC's products and services, which encompass the Learning Management System CLIX, the Authoring Tools LECTURNITY and POWERTRAINER, the Content and Community Platform SLIDESTAR as well as the Electronic Performance Support System LIVECONTEXT, are an equal match for the diverse and individual needs of learning organisations. In addition, IMC offers bespoke e-learning content development and a wide range of consultancy services in the field of learning and training management.



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