

The industry lacks a single identity

The distance learning industry is lacking a single identity in terms of what it produces. Changes in the structures of learning and developments in technologies are occurring at such a rapid pace that producers and customers need to develop shared terminology. Many technologies were initially designed for the Board Room. These are now wanted for use in school classrooms or to meet the needs of individual learners in homes and in workplaces.

Traditionally segmented market of education and training

The industry has previously been differentiated and in many cases, is still differentiated, on the basis of its market base in the two sectors: education and training. The education sector is divided between the schools, K-12, and post secondary (Universities and Colleges). The training sector comprises training in government, industry and commerce. This conventional differentiation of the industry on the basis of its customer base is becoming increasingly restrictive as new technologies alter the rigidity of these boundaries, changing the ways and places in which learning occurs.

The emergence of new technologies challenges the viability of this traditional segmentation and has also resulted in the convergence of previously separate media which are now integrated by computer. Collaborations and strategic alliances will be required to enable the appropriate skills and expertise to be brought together on the development of new applications, products and services.

Perhaps the biggest challenge is that the customer base is broadening to include not just big business, large enterprises and educational institutions but also individuals and groups learning and working at home, in learning centres and at work in small to medium sized businesses. There is a shift occurring from a fragmented, local distribution of training and education to more co-ordinated systems of community, regional, national and international networks. These systems link learners to education and training opportunities using telecommunications and local and wide area networks (LANs and WANs).