

The Long View

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Masie is a futurist, analyst, researcher and humorist on the topics of technology, business, learning, and workplace productivity. Masie was the first analyst to use the term *e-learning* and has advocated for a sane deployment of learning and collaboration technology as a means of supporting the effectiveness and profitability of enterprises.

Q. You wear brightly colored jackets—how do you decide which one to wear?

I decided that if I was going to be on stage, I might as well be seen. I always pick a jacket that reflects my mood in the morning and how controversial I want to be that day. If I'm wearing red, watch out. If I'm wearing blue, I'm probably conveying a more soothing message.

I haven't yet worn jackets with big dots because I don't really want to look like a clown. Somebody told me I won't look good in stripes, but other than that, I'm open to a pretty large color palette.

I bought the jackets about 3 years ago after I lost more than 100 pounds. I bought them in Hong Kong, from a tailor named Rocky.

Q. What do you do to re-energize?

I am an active reader. Recently, I went with my wife to a beach in Antigua and I read six novels in five days. They ranged from really dumb to even dumber.

I own thoroughbred race horses. When I get up at 5 am to visit the horses and feed them a carrot, it is probably the most rejuvenating moment of the day for me.

Q. What was your first job, and what lesson did you take away from it?

My very first job was at a summer camp. I was in charge of keeping 3,000 campers supplied—I was their quartermaster. Summer camp was a powerful metaphor of how well you can learn in groups.

Q. Where do you see e-learning going?

I think the “e” has almost fully dropped off in a sense that when you are sent a document, you assume you are going to get a PDF.

I think the next piece that will give way is the concept that it ought to feel like school. Way too much e-learning has been “teach me a little bit, test me, yell at me if I got it wrong, and then remediate me.” The way people learn now is much faster, much more informal, and much more personalized.

If someone is reading an article online, is that e-learning? Who cares, if it's of value to them and it helps them gain knowledge.

We are going to see much more context and content rankings, so people can get what they want, in the context they want, when they want it, and be assured that other people have seen it and it's of some value. If I see a collection of 150 learning modules on a site, we are going to want to know what other people think of those modules. They are not all equal. Some of them are better. Some of them are more popular, and some of them are better for a certain type of person.

We are also going to move from reading to watching and listening. More and more of our content will include video and audio. It is interesting to watch the growth of YouTube, because while much of it is crap and weird, it represents something that people want—people actually want to see three minutes of something.

As human beings, reading is something that we adapted to, but watching, talking, and listening are what we naturally do. I think we are going to see more of that come into the framework.

Q. Why are your projections only two or three years out?

Because I hate being wrong. I think it is really difficult to predict more than two or three years because the rate of change is so dramatic.

Also, for better or for worse, people listen to folks like me who make predictions, and many times people will react too soon. Back in 1997 I predicted that video was going to be available over the Internet. I was right, but if you went out and bought bigger servers in 1997 to handle the videos, you were a real fool because the bandwidth wasn't there, there weren't sound cards, and people didn't have speakers at their desks.

I try to be a functional futurist. I look at what I call leading edge indicators. Microsoft just released their version of the iPod, the Zoon. The Zoon has a leading edge indicator because it has the ability to tell you when someone is near and will give you permission to see what song that person is playing, what pictures they are viewing, or what your favorite tunes are.

I think that is an interesting leading indicator to say that we are going to be able to walk into an environment and know something about the other people who are in that environment. How will that work out, I don't have a sense for that yet. As a futurist, I would say, 'I'll bet you in the next three years we are going to see more device-based social networking that allows people to find out characteristics about people who are close to them with permission.

I think that most people learn as much from other people as they do from published content. I think it's a combination of both—I wouldn't want to give up books and information online and I wouldn't want to give up people. It is easier to find content now than it is to find the right people. People are going to be able to rapidly know, with permission, about the people in their environment so they can find the right person for knowledge or for coaching.