

standards



Fiona Leteney

The sky's the limit

Fasten your seat belts as a changing industry really takes off

It was Sunday and the evening before 4 July, but still Ed Cohen was willing to take time out of his long Independence weekend to talk to me about e-learning standards. He is the standards industry liaison at Aviation Industry Computer-Based Training Committee (AICC). His day job has just changed from being CTO of Plateau Systems to vice president of Learning Technologies at SuccessFactors.

My last few columns highlighted the changes to e-learning standards coming over the next few years in response to advances in technology and learner requirements. There are a number of areas to watch:

- Advanced distributed learning (ADL) and project Tincan – see *e.learning age* March.
- LETSI unveiled a new run-time web service (RTWS) API – see *e.learning age* May.
- AICC announced the development of a new standard with a release date of Q1 2012.

Many people think the AICC development is irrelevant because we don't use AICC, do we? But if you use SCORM then you do, because AICC developed the interoperability standards. Some people think AICC is dead but that's wrong too. The aviation industry is one of the most advanced users of e-learning in the world. So when I heard they were developing something new, I knew it would be interesting.

It is also significant that of the two people I have

spoken to from AICC, Bill MacDonald is in the aviation industry with Boeing, and Ed Cohen is from a learning technology vendor. Ed has been involved with AICC for 10 years and explained to me that it has gone down two parallel routes: one specifically for the aviation industry and the other for the rest of the commercial world. He admits: "Current standards act as a ceiling to innovation."

"Originally AICC's computer managed instruction (CMI) was designed for the aviation industry and written for specific types of training. Then it was feasible to create a pre-defined data model everyone agreed on. It was never really meant to be used by every industry. A monolithic approach will not work if we are designing a single standard for everyone."

This is true, no two industries care about the same data so it begs the question: Why are we trying to put everything in the same model?

Refreshingly, AICC and ADL (stewards of SCORM) believe it is time for something new. I can hear your cheers from here – and then the groans as the realisation hits that it could mean loads of work or obsolete legacy courses. But don't panic. I'm told the new standard, CMI-5, will provide backward compatibility to both legacy specifications.

The new CMI-5 specification will allow content developers more freedom to innovate while still being

interoperable. It will be more robust and simpler than SCORM or AICC/HACP. And there's more.

There will be the opportunity for data sharing between courses so that if data about a learner's performance or preferences are required in other courses the information can be passed through. Also for a single course, team working can be monitored and recorded; for example, where team members could be taking different roles in a training exercise.

The tracked data will not be specified so there will be no limits on what or how it can be reported. For example the LMS could report using Adobe pdf, pictures, charts, audio and even video. There will also be support for alternative content launch scenarios (eg mobile device learning). So LMS vendors will be able to differentiate their product in the "quality of implementation"; in terms of reporting features and integration with alternative launch/delivery scenarios.

And with content being able to provide data via extensions, it will be possible to launch content from any system and have data recorded for the learner in another. So learning management and standards are set to change. I'll be keeping an eye open and let you know progress.

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