The Rise of Online Education

Traditional education is finding a home in the history books. Online learning is a cheaper, more immediate delivery mechanism for instruction and helps keep individuals competitive in an ever-changing global business environment.

By Robin Bradley Hansel

DEFINITION: Virtual learning platforms offer self-paced curriculum in the form of professionally produced videos that meet learning needs from general education to industry-specific skills.

BACKGROUND: University of Phoenix's Web-based program for adult students was created in 1989 and was one of the first to specialize in online learning. Since then, the online education capacity has changed dramatically. Even four-year universities are in the game, posting massive open online courses (MOOCs) for students. Another pioneer was Lynda Weinman, who began posting Web design video content online back in 1995 and later co-founded lynda.com.

COSTS: Lynda.com's basic membership fee is $25 per month, which allows access to the entire library of more than 16,000 hours of online content. Skillshare offers subscriptions for $9.95 a month to include access to some member classes and a 20 percent savings on their courses, which typically cost $20 to $30. Udacity pricing varies per course with most students paying $150-$200/month to work at their own pace.

PERKS: An Android app for lynda.com is now available, offering a more seamless viewing experience for members and non-members. Follow Skillshare on social media for special deals and class coupons. For the first time ever, Udacity is offering a fully accredited online master's in computer science from Georgia Institute of Technology in cooperation with AT&T.

OTHER: Lynda.com provides course completion forms sharable on LinkedIn to anyone who watches a course in its entirety. Although Skillshare teachers are screened, some courses have significantly better instructors and video quality than others. Certification options on Skillshare and Udacity vary among individual courses and may include additional fees.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

SKILLSHARE Founded on the principle that "everyone can teach," Skillshare.com is a global learning community for classes in just about everything: business, crafts, design, fashion, film and video, food and beverage, lifestyle, music, photography, technology, writing and publishing. "This will be the year that online learning breaks into the mainstream," said Michael Karnjanaprakorn, CEO and co-founder of Skillshare. "If the Web is a virtual town being built, the school is being built for the masses right now. It's an incredible opportunity to rethink the future of education."

UDACITY Udacity.com students engage in highly challenging STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) curriculums, take quizzes, turn in class projects and earn verified industry credentials. Courses are taught by instructors and industry experts. "The jobs skills gap is getting wider and growing every day around the globe," said CEO Sebastian Thrun.

lynda.com Lynda.com offers a library of video lessons on the latest software, technology, creative and business skills taught by industry leaders. Users have access to full courses, which range from one to several hours. "I think in the next several years, we'll see online learning become more accepted as a fundamental way to learn in the classroom, boardroom and living room. The 'show me, don't tell me' model of teaching will be more commonplace. I think online learning will begin to close the job-skills gap and better prepare the workforce for fast-changing technology," said Lynda Weinman, executive chair of lynda.com. ■