

(PRLEAP.COM) Embedded interactivity in soft skills [e-learning](#) doesn't work. That's the controversial view expressed by Rapid Learning Institute (RLI) CEO Stephen Meyer in a packed presentation at Elliott Masie's Learning 2013 conference in Orlando on November 4. The title of the talk was: "Brief is Beautiful: The Unstoppable trend toward short-form E-learning."

"It's seems an article of faith among many instructional designers that embedding interactivity in e-learning is a must," said Meyer. "But our team has yet to see a single instance in a sales, leadership or other soft-skills module where interactivity didn't disrupt the flow and cause learners to disengage."

RLI offer libraries of six- to 10-minute short form modules in Sales, Leadership/ Management, Employment Law Compliance and Safety.

Meyer said that long modules and embedded interactivity were critical factors in poor e-learning utilization rates during what he called The Age of Instructional design, which went from 1980 when personal computers were commercialized until about 2010. "During this period e-learning developers misunderstood two things: First, they didn't understand their audience. Users had entered the digital age and their brains were being re-wired by the Internet, particularly search engines, which could give people solutions in the nano-second of need. Users were being conditioned not just to tolerate, but to actually want their content to be delivered in non-linear, disjointed bursts."

The mindset of e-learning developers was at least a decade to two behind their audience, Meyer claimed. "Instructional designers were creating 60-, 90, even 120-minute modules based on their old model, which assumed content had to be linear, logical and complete, exactly what people don't want when they sit down to learn on a computer."

The second thing e-learning developers misunderstood was their new medium. "When I watch Age-of-Instructional-Design e-learning modules, it's clear to me that the developers didn't really grasp that, first and foremost, they were creating content in the medium of video, which operates under a completely different set of rules from books, manuals, ILT and other traditional vehicles for learning content."

Meyer said we're now in the early stages of The Age of Information Design, which prioritizes engagement. He defined Information Design as "the art of presenting any kind of content in a

way that engages people," and emphasized that Information Design doesn't replace Instructional Design. "The science of instructional design is essential. Information Design should be viewed as an adjunct, a partner. It's the missing element that brings balance to the equation. In the past it was too much about the content. Information Design brings the user experience and the uniqueness of the medium, video, to the forefront. It assumes that the first priority of an e-learning developer is to grab people by the throat and not let go. If you can't do that, nobody will watch the brilliant content you're creating."

Meyer introduced a new idea – "thin slicing" – to help e-learning developers achieve better engagement. He defined "thin slicing" as an approach to creating short-form modules that starts with a very narrow "thin slice" of learning and develops it into a five- to 10-minute module. "Thin slicing is really the opposite of chunking or learning compression," he said. "Both of those approaches are about taking a large amount of learning content and reducing it to something smaller. Thin slicing starts small. It's about identifying a single, memorable learning concept – ideally one that triggers a powerful 'aha' in the learner. You design the module around that 'aha.' Your goal is to bring about a specific behavior change that will lead to a measurable improvement in a very narrow area of performance."

Meyer added that mobile learning will inevitably lead to an increase in more engaging [short-form e-learning](#)

. "M-learning is by definition e-learning," Meyer said. "E-learning developers need to visualize a learner on a mobile device at the airport with 10 minutes to kill before boarding the plane. And they need to ask, 'What do I need to do to capture and sustain that person's attention? What Information Design strategies can I deploy to create a video that's so compelling she won't get distracted and bail?' "

About Rapid Learning Institute

Rapid Learning Institute (RLI) provides [online training and talent development tools](#) for businesses, government agencies, nonprofits and educational institutions in the areas of sales, human resources, management, leadership and safety. RLI's approach is founded on the idea that talent development can only be effective if managers make it a priority and follow up to ensure that learning sticks. The company's signature five to 10 minute modules, called Quick Takes, help managers build their core competency as talent developers by giving them the tools they need to replicate in others the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors that drive performance.

Based in Greater Philadelphia, RLI is an operating division of Business 21 Publishing