

## Megatrends in e-learning provision

### CrossKnowledge

#### Context

With 250.000 e-learning students in 2007, CrossKnowledge is one of Europe's leading providers of e-learning.

CrossKnowledge was founded in 2000 and has had an 80% annual growth rate since. 40% of its budget is assigned to Research and Development.

CrossKnowledge has its headquarters in Paris, France and branches in London, United Kingdom, Madrid and Barcelona, Spain, Montreal and Toronto, Canada, Gent, Belgium, Shanghai, China and Tokyo, Japan.

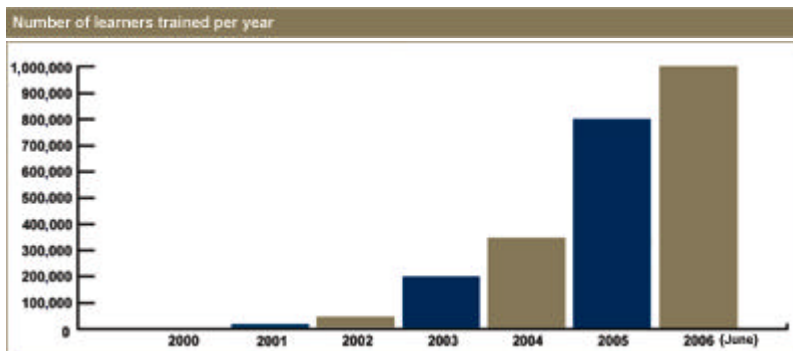


Fig. 1. Number of users benefiting from CrossKnowledge solutions (more than 1 million at June 2006).

CrossKnowledge presents its aims thus:

Skills have become a key asset for companies. In a globalised economy in which, more than ever, the ability of an entire organisation to carry out the strategy makes the difference, Crossknowledge offers increased performance and development of company leadership through new learning technologies.

Firstly, by thinking globally and by multiplying the number of development programmes at all levels of the organisation. Business universities addressing a handful of managers with expensive programmes no longer have a monopoly on leadership. With new learning technologies, these leadership programmes can now be deployed throughout the organisation.

Secondly, by targeting efficiency and measurement. How many alignment and awareness programmes have been deployed at great cost – and immediately forgotten? With new learning technologies, large-scale training may be

individualised, measurable and long-lasting, demonstrating a real return on the investment.

Crossknowledge tries to apply these principles in a pragmatic way with its clients, more than one hundred multinationals who now place their trust in the company. It does this by thinking in terms of the specific issues of each of these companies, providing them with a dedicated solution which can be offered at all levels, and by capitalising each time on best practice to continue providing the best possible value for its clients.

By giving its consultancy experience in creating HR-training operations and by guaranteeing project support through a number of services, Crossknowledge now opens up prospects for skills development actions that thus far have been inaccessible in terms of teaching effectiveness and economic efficiency.

Crossknowledge allows best advantage to be taken of new learning technologies to put them at the service of company performance.

This is the CrossKnowledge website:



Fig. 2. <http://www.crossknowledge.com>

Founded in 2000, Crossknowledge is the European leader in distance learning for management education. A French company with a strong international presence, Crossknowledge designs, develops and markets the fullest catalogue on the market, with almost 300 multilingual training modules, tackling all management topics. The high added value content, compliant with the AICC and SCORM international e-learning standards, is created by

leading authors, academics and Management professionals in Europe, and integrates equally well into blended (multi-mode) training as well as 100% distance learning.

A recent (late 2006) development shows CrossKnowledge forming alliances with other leading e-learning providers:

Crossknowledge, the European leader in distance learning for management education, has announced that it has strengthened its presence in graduate-level management education by signing new partnerships with four leading international business schools: Manchester Business School (UK), Open University (UK), the European School of Management and Technology (Germany) and Brandeis University (USA).

Today, business schools are faced with a new set of challenges: globalisation, the growing importance of research and increasingly demanding students and corporate partners. In particular, working executives, whether junior or senior, want a high-quality learning experience that will help them meet their career goals, but that is also flexible and adapted to their personal situation and projects. Faced with this changing environment, business schools need to find new ways of teaching local and international students. Consequently, they have been turning their attention to e-learning.

Crossknowledge is a member of the EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development), the global authority for management education. The EFMD has developed and provides EQUIS accreditation for business schools, CLIP accreditation for corporate universities and CEL accreditation for e-learning. Crossknowledge was the first EFMD member from the world of ITC and e-learning.

Crossknowledge offers a uniquely innovative learning experience: an international network of renowned authors, content approved by business schools, the latest "rich media" e-learning technologies, and personalised learning modules. Thanks to this expertise, Crossknowledge has become a leading partner of major business schools, first in France with HEC, ESSEC, ESCP-EAP, Euromed Marseille and the Grenoble Ecole de Management, and now internationally with four new strategic alliances.

### **Historical context**

Since the year 2000 CrossKnowledge has passed through three stages of development:

- Learning portals from 2000 until 2002
- Blended learning from 2002 until 2005
- Distance instructor-led training from 2005 until 2007.

Its latest development is to set up alliances with Manchester Business School (UK), Open University (UK), the European School of Management and Technology (Germany) and Brandeis University (USA).

Competence in e-learning has developed with each innovation being market tested *in vitro* and *in vivo* before its global roll-out. CrossKnowledge hires external consultants and invests a lot in existing staff.

The development has been abrupt. E-learning is growing at an annual rate of 60% over the last 5 years. From its foundation in 2000 CrossKnowledge has grown to 250.000 e-learning students per year by 2006.

Evaluation and research are continuous. Every year CrossKnowledge conducts surveys with its clients on two levels:

- Corporate satisfaction and needs
- Learner satisfaction and needs

Its clients are involved in Research and Development through deployment steering committees and e-learning research and development. This is a key to success.

### **Technical issues**

CrossKnowledge brings together a strong blend of competences in order to address the whole e-learning information and technology value chain and to integrate the different information technology components:

- *E-learning modules*: CrossKnowledge intensively uses Flash animations and videos for the new generation of e-learning modules. CrossKnowledge does not develop all e-learning modules in-house but has the required competences to integrate these new technologies with the e-learning platform.
- *User interface*: the new generation of Player is displaying the e-learning modules using the latest Ajax and Flash technologies.
- *Web-based and database-driven applications*: in order to design scalable e-learning applications, CrossKnowledge has competences in designing Web-based applications that efficiently access databases.
- *Networks and performance*: it has internal consultants that help its customers adapt their network parameters in order to optimise the delivery of CrossKnowledge's Rich Media content.

The e-learning solutions are Web-based and only use open standards (HTML, Javascript, Ajax architecture) or widely used multimedia plug-ins (Macromedia Flash Player) for animations, video and audio files.

These Web-based applications can be viewed using Explorer but also Firefox, the Open Source browser that runs on Microsoft, Apple and Linux machines.

CrossKnowledge has built strong integration links between the front office and back office systems, in order to speed-up the delivery of new modules and of new training courses. The project managers can very easily roll-out new

courses with few parameters, using the powerful back-office CrossKnowledge Deployer.

The main technical strength of the e-learning administrative system lies in the speed of delivery of the projects:

- The CrossKnowledge Deployer system allows the project managers to deliver new courses quickly and efficiently
- New learners can be enrolled very quickly either through massive enrolment lists uploaded with back office or with automated connections through powerful Web Services
- Learners can link directly from their Corporate Intranet environment to the CrossKnowledge LMS without again entering their login and password, thanks to the SSO interface (Single Sign On)
- The powerful LRM system (Learner Relationship Manager).

CrossKnowledge does not offer certification services and processes today.

## **Courses**

CrossKnowledge self-training sessions are 30-minute long asynchronous training sessions covering key concepts, practices or managerial behaviours. CrossKnowledge currently offers close to 300 sessions in seven different languages (French, English, Spanish, German, Polish, Chinese and Japanese) organised in almost 50 distance training programmes in three main fields:

- *Management fundamentals*: marketing, finance, management control, strategy and human resources; (40% of training programmes);
- *Management techniques*: employee and team management, project management, customer management and negotiation/sales; (40% of training programmes);
- *Personal management skills*: personal effectiveness, personal development and communication (20% of training programmes).

Intended to pass on fundamentals, they are based on internationally recognised concepts and techniques (e.g. mutual gains bargaining), allowing their use in any company and any culture.

CrossKnowledge Solutions are based on an exclusive teaching format tested by thousands of learners in more than 40 countries, with an average level of satisfaction and perceived usefulness greater than 80% and a learning effectiveness that has been proven by pre/post training measurements:

- use of one or more voices that guide the participant;
- massive use of video to demonstrate good and bad practices;
- inductive teaching that promotes discovery as opposed to "top-down" methods; alternating between case studies, contributions and practical exercises, like in a training room;
- thorough feedback that does not judge or penalise the participant;

- frequent interactivity to pace training and keep users active;
- systematic practical exercises to check that know-how is really being acquired and not just presented.

Organised in a modular fashion, CrossKnowledge Sessions™ enable:

- individualised training on demand;
- training of geographically remote groups;
- provision of a training programme that is common to an entire group;
- training of large groups in shorter timeframes by using a pre-existing catalogue;
- optimisation of classroom training: better preparation and less time spent in the classroom because concepts and techniques were taught beforehand.

To provide a comfortable learning environment and to motivate and support learners, distance training programmes are all coached by CrossKnowledge tutors whose degree of involvement is determined beforehand with the customer.

#### *Individualised tutoring*

CrossKnowledge distance training programmes can be followed through individualised tutored itineraries. In this case, CrossKnowledge implements an original educational approach based on a personal action project.

A CrossKnowledge tutor with professional experience and a college degree helps the participant outline his or her project and monitors its implementation through regular feedback. Training resources such as CrossKnowledge Self-Training Sessions are therefore used actively through immediate application, the best way to ensure effective learning and assimilation. The tutor acts as a coach who supports the participant's growth in skills.

#### *Collective tutoring*

CrossKnowledge distance training can be followed via collective itineraries that harness the power of collaborative work. In these collective itineraries, followed entirely through distance training, CrossKnowledge tutors give the participants problems to be solved and lead work groups through phone conferences, forums and chats. Work on performance and the beginning of behaviour change is facilitated by group discussion, just as in a classroom.

Problem-solving concepts and techniques are conveyed through CrossKnowledge Self-training Sessions. CrossKnowledge tutors propose the work to be accomplished, lead the groups and stimulate discussion. This educational engineering represents the state of the art in distance training.

#### *Training support*

Participants experiencing difficulties understanding the material can e-mail their questions to the CrossKnowledge training team, who answer in English or French within 24 to 48 hours, depending on the difficulty of the question. Training support is provided with the help of the experts who contributed to the content of the CrossKnowledge training programmes.

Thanks to CrossKnowledge self-assessments, each programme is individualised. Used in distance training, CrossKnowledge assessment solutions enable you:

- *prior to training*, to give motivating feedback to each participant on the main areas requiring improvement and if necessary, to prescribe individualised programmes based on the level and needs of each learner;
- *after training*, to measure what has been acquired in terms of both knowledge (measured immediately after the training session) and effective practices (measured several months after the programme);

The main original feature of these questionnaires is that they measure not only knowledge but effective practice as well, through questions that are focused on observable behaviour. The CrossKnowledge Self-Assessments solution therefore allows you to measure the learner's development of operational skills and not just his/her acquisition of theoretical knowledge (which is not always put into practice).

The role or importance of synchronous and asynchronous communication between students and teachers and among students themselves is:

- synchronous communication represents, on one hand, training in a classroom and, on the other hand, groupings in a conference call or in a virtual class, generally at the beginning and at the end of the programme. This adds up to approximately 60 % of the total course.
- asynchronous communication serves 2 roles:
  - (i) to make everybody at the same level in an individualized way before training in the classroom
  - (ii) to transfer techniques / process / concepts before the training in the classroom so as to be able to concentrate the groups on the application.

With 100 % distance learning courses, synchronous communication consists of phone points with the tutor, or of virtual classes, and represents 10 % of the total course. CrossKnowledge actually launches programmes in which the asynchronous part (e.g : forum between students) will represent 30 to 40 % of the programme.

CrossKnowledge consultants make recommendations on the type of training system to be implemented and the balance between synchronous and asynchronous communication, on-site and remote, and individual or collective training.

## **Management, strategy and attitudes**

Like any other change, the introduction of new distance training methods first requires thinking about the best way to manage this change. CrossKnowledge helps its customers define a change management plan that includes very precise actions as well as:

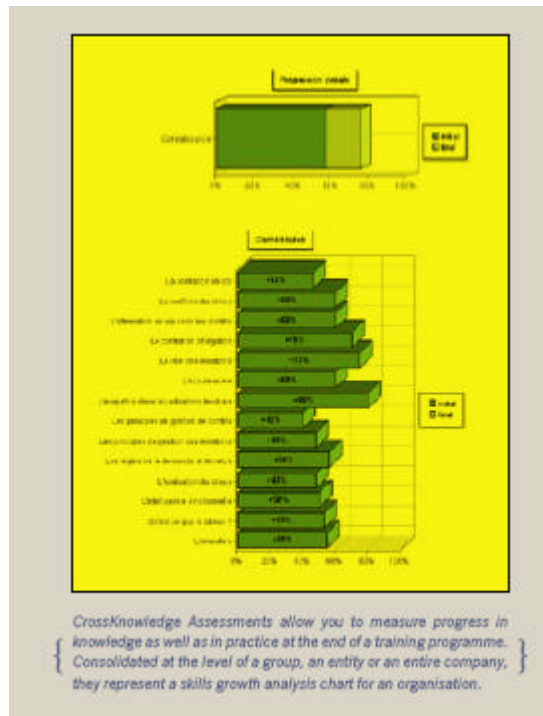
- a marketing and communication plan for executives and sponsors
- an outline of the participants and identification of the sponsors to be called on;
- for the HR network, awareness initiatives (demonstration portals, presentations, case studies, newsletters, etc.) and training / certification in the new learning methods;
- for end users, push marketing and loyalty development initiatives (company executive videos, multimedia presentations for the launch, connection kits, goodies, promotional e-mails, etc.);
- study and feedback systems for completed projects (on-line surveys, focus groups, etc.).

Top management is necessary and key. Good products and services are also indispensable and key to deliver what has been promised.

Every e-learning project has to be transverse and involve staff from different teams: R&D, technology, content, tutoring, consulting, and marketing.

CrossKnowledge has a clearly identified a strategy for online education. 50% of distant training and 50% of face-to-face on average, for both hard and soft skills. It is already being achieved successfully.

Quality in e-learning is measured after each course through “hot assessment”. Then four months after, a “cold assessment” is made to check retention and changes in practice.



CrossKnowledge includes also the following items in the reports:

- extent to which target populations are covered
- extent to which the needs of operational customers are met;
- rate of effective access to training;
- total hourly cost of training (training, logistical and human costs);
- implementation time;
- scalability on a world level.

The effectiveness of the administrative routines in online education are shown by the fact that all processes have been organised in the Learning Management System. The equivalent of three full-time employees have been freed from administrative routines. The Learning Management System organises planning with a three-month advance for distance coaching interviews or seminars. Tutoring online is organised on a yearly basis.

CrossKnowledge collaborates with other educational institutions as follows:

More than 30 partnerships have been signed. Today, CrossKnowledge is the partner of the top three French colleges (HEC, ESSEC, ESCP) that use distance training solutions in their MBA and Masters programmes and of a growing number of regional schools. CrossKnowledge was also chosen as the main solution by Manchester Business School (United Kingdom), Brandeis University (United States) and ESMT (Germany). CrossKnowledge also co-develops training programmes with one of the leading universities in distance education worldwide: The Open University of the United Kingdom.

The leading names in classroom training have chosen CrossKnowledge as their distance training solution, offering the market blended learning

programmes. Familiar with the CrossKnowledge approach, they are completely at ease with the blended educational engineering philosophy. CrossKnowledge develops part of its Training Sessions catalogue in conjunction with some of them.

Some partners that work with CrossKnowledge on an international scale include:

- Mercuri International;
- Krauthammer International;
- Tea Cegos (Spain);
- MS Cegos China;
- BCon Japan;
- BCon USA...

These partnerships allow CrossKnowledge customers to deploy blended learning programmes in more than 30 countries throughout Europe, North and South America, and Asia. This is key to getting “labels” of acceptance and to legitimate the quality of distance education.

Credibility of the institution with government and public administration is shown because in France, we have been audited to comply by the rules of distance education. This is a key criterion for the integration of the cost into the legal constraint to be spent by companies on training (1,8% of payrolls).

The way CrossKnowledge is able to handle the large number of online courses and students is with three data centres in Europe, America and Asia and 10.000 replicated servers throughout the world

The CrossKnowledge SIGAL® Learning Management System is the core of CrossKnowledge's technological platform. It combines ease of use, flexibility and power. Its advanced features allow mass customisation and quick deployment of customised training itineraries.

#### *Ease of use*

The interface is accessible through a standard Web browser and its user-friendly ergonomics enables it to be used without any training required. The screens were designed based on the training itinerary creation processes.

#### *Flexibility*

The deployment models designed by CrossKnowledge make it quick and easy to adapt training itineraries to the training objectives of each customer, in compliance with their graphic guidelines.

The new blended learning features make it flexible and easy to organise blended training itineraries by integrating all the distance and on-site training methods into a single management tool.

## *Power*

The CrossKnowledge SIGAL® LMS platform is designed to support massive e-learning solution deployments for populations of several tens of thousands of learners without affecting response times.

## **Economy**

CrossKnowledge uses these measures for the cost-effectiveness of e-learning:

- Blended learning is 20% less expensive than equivalent face-to-face seminars.
- Distance training is 50% less expensive than equivalent face-to-face seminars.

Income from e-learning is highly predictable : CrossKnowledge has a 50% annual growth rate. Costs are defined by investment (80%) and by recurring expenses (20%).

E-learning is an always changing market and flexibility is key. 40% of our revenues are invested in Research and Development every year.

CrossKnowledge recruits about 20 new staff every year representing 25% of new entrants. It also invests 7% of payroll in internal training and develops a "CrossKnowledge Academy".

## **Additional factors**

Additional factors that have contributed to sustainability, robustness and the achievement of critical mass are:

- *International development.* CrossKnowledge solutions are available in 6 languages (French, English, Spanish, German, Polish, Chinese and Japanese) and will be available in the year 2007 in German.
- *A range of services* with high added value to support human resources and training departments and help them successfully deploy distance training: upstream consulting to match skills development systems with the organisation's critical needs, educational engineering of training systems, change management planning, project management, back-office management, etc.
- *Simple and powerful technologies* for integrating and distributing distance and on-site training procedures: platform, tutoring tools, virtual classrooms, training site creation wizards, etc;
- *High investment* on quality and R&D.

