

# e-Learning Readiness: An International Perspective

Approximately 35% of The Guild's current members and associate members are located in over 100 countries outside of the United States. Because the Guild is an international community of practice, it's important for all Guild members to reflect on the current global state of e-Learning. While much has been published to date about organizational e-Learning readiness, there have been no studies of factors that promote e-Learning readiness within a country.

Last year, the Economist Intelligence Unit, working in co-operation with IBM, published the first-ever e-Learning readiness ranking of the world's 60 largest economies. This is an important benchmark study for our industry. The white paper, *The 2003 e-Learning Readiness Rankings*, concludes that *there is no corner of the world without the need for e-Learning*. Whether it is an exodus of baby-boomers from the workforce that requires large-scale training efforts, or a health crisis such as the outbreak of SARS in Asia, according to the study, the utility of online learning becomes more apparent every day. e-Learning will become even more entrenched in all facets of society as political, and socio-economic factors continue to fuel the drive. Understanding these key drivers can help us anticipate global trends and provide useful models that may help accelerate e-Learning adoption in our own countries.

The e-Learning readiness study ranks a country's ability to produce, use and expand Internet-based learning — both formal and informal, at work, at school, in government and throughout society. For the purpose of the study, e-Learning is defined as formal and informal education and information-sharing that uses digital technology. According to the study, e-Learning readiness is a nation's ability to generate, disseminate and use digital information among its citizens to the betterment of the country's economic activity.

Nearly 150 qualitative and quantitative criteria, organized into four categories — Government, Industry, Education, and Society — were used to determine the rankings. Data in each of the four categories or "sectors" was assessed to determine the readiness of each sector to take advantage of e-Learning advancements, based on existing use of Internet-based learning programs as well as access, general use of the Internet and attitudes toward new internet technology. A country's overall score is a weighted average of

these four category scores.

Within each category, criteria were divided into four components: Connectivity (the quality and extent of Internet infrastructure), Capability (a country's ability to deliver and consume e-Learning), Content (the quality and pervasiveness of online learning materials) and Culture (behaviors, beliefs and institutions that support e-Learning development). Qualitative data was collected from UNESCO, the World Bank, the Economist Intelligence Unit, Pyramid Research and other public and private organizations.

As expected, the top-ranked countries have several characteristics in common: a high degree of IT penetration; strong educational systems; free economic markets; and governments, and businesses that have embraced technology on a cultural level. It is not surprising that many of the "most ready" are rich countries; what may be surprising to many, however, is that the world's three largest economies — the USA, Japan and Germany — came in 3rd, 17th and 23rd while smaller, less affluent economies ranked higher. The study acknowledges that in e-Learning, *creativity and determination go a long way*.

## Industry trends

The study notes three significant trends.

- In countries where e-Learning is developing quickly, governments play a significant role. For example, in Europe, the European Union's eEurope 2005 Action Plan encourages the development of broadband Internet access and e-Learning programs. Government initiatives are behind major e-Learning advancements in Sweden, Canada and South Korea.

- Countries that score high in the study also have a high degree of collaboration between corporations, industry associations and government agencies. e-Learning in these countries is viewed as a major component in plans to boost economic competitiveness.

- The third most significant trend in high-scoring countries is the degree of partnering between e-Learning producers and consumers who are joining together to pool infrastructure resources, costs and expertise. These partnerships also often utilize global outsourcing strategies to further reduce production and infrastructure support costs.

## Top 10 overall rankings

Sweden was the top-ranked country primarily due to a citizenry eager to integrate the

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Internet into all facets of daily life, saturation of mobile phones and broadband connections, a top-notch educational system, a government determined to provide online government services, and strategies to expand the role of e-Learning. Northern Europe in general has shown greater enthusiasm for information technology than Southern Europe. Finland, Denmark, the UK, Norway, and Switzerland were ranked 4th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th respectively.

Canada and the US placed 2nd and 3rd, respectively in the overall ranking. Internet culture, traditions of lifelong learning, and open access to education are strong in North America. With the Internet as a strong presence in North American schools and online university courses more developed or accessible than in other countries, it is not surprising that the US is ranked 1st, with Canada 2nd, in the Education category.

In the Asia-Pacific region, South Korea (5th) and Singapore (6th) are the top-placed countries. South Korea tied with the US for first place in the Industry category rankings. Korean industry groups and private companies are actively creating online content, and governments of South Korea and Singapore are aggressive in promoting online learning in their educational systems for children as young as kindergarten.

## The big picture

For readers interested in seeing how various countries scored, appendices in the white paper provide a detailed breakdown for 60 countries in the study as a score (of 10) and overall ranking (of 60) in each category: Education, Industry, Government, and Society. Whether we agree or disagree with the parameters of the study and whether we are surprised or not by the findings, this is an important study. I believe it provides all e-Learning producers and consumers with important insights into the powerful potential of e-Learning to dramatically impact our global future. The white paper is available as a downloadable PDF file at [http://graphics.eiu.com/files/ad\\_pdfs/eReady\\_2003.pdf](http://graphics.eiu.com/files/ad_pdfs/eReady_2003.pdf) and at <http://www.eb.eiu.com/upload/elearn.pdf>.