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Why **E-Performance Tools** Are Integral to **End-User Education**

by Richard Strattner, SAP

As IT systems and the businesses that use them become increasingly broad and global — and as information becomes more complex, voluminous, and out-of-date in a shorter period of time — traditional, in-classroom training is not enough for today's knowledge workers. They also need on-the-job support to help them perform their daily tasks efficiently. And in the 21st century, workers expect that support to come to them electronically — a concept referred to as *e-performance*. Let's explore this concept and what it means for SAP customers.

The Evolution of E-Performance

The concept of e-performance first developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when electronic performance support systems (EPSS) emerged in the field of IT training. Definitions of EPSS vary, but they all center on the idea that an effective EPSS provides end users with targeted, on-the-job information and guidance in an on-demand, easily accessible structure to supplement formal training and enable task completion.

Early EPSS scholar Dr. Deborah Alpert Sleight of Michigan State University characterized the three ranges of EPSS technology: minimal, mid-level, and optimal.[1]

A *minimal* EPSS is comprised of a front end that contains only the five key EPSS characteristics:

- Provides access to key task-related information as the task is being performed
- Is computer-based
- Is used on the job
- Is controlled by the worker
- Reduces the need for prior training

In addition, a minimal EPSS is built onto an existing system without changing that system, and it cannot stand alone.

A step up from a minimal EPSS, a *mid-level* EPSS supplements an existing system and contains more than just the key EPSS characteristics, but not enough to provide optimum support for the task or tasks at hand.

An *optimal* (or high-level) EPSS is designed specifically with the necessary EPSS characteristics for a task. It stands alone, addresses multiple types of learners, directly correlates to content required for a specific user, and is accessible at all times, regardless of geography. It also allows for database editing and updates so that users can maximize the usefulness of content.

It is in this last high-level scenario that we can see the transition to true e-performance. That is, we see the start of a shift from an EPSS — a supporting tool for which higher productivity is only a potential, indirect outcome — to the newer option, e-performance solutions — learning tools designed specifically to improve performance.

The Benefits of E-Performance

The most obvious benefits of e-performance solutions include improved productivity, accuracy, and quality of performance, since training becomes continuous, on-the-job education, not just a one-time learning experience. However, the benefits go beyond that. Because e-performance

[1] "Types of Electronic Performance Support Systems: Their Characteristics and Range of Designs" by Dr. Deborah Alpert Sleight (www.msu.edu/~sleightd/epss_copy.html).

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delivers training directly to your workers, it reduces the costs of travel and time out of the office, which are often associated with classroom-style training. It also lowers support costs because users are empowered and enabled to address questions themselves. Lastly, leveraging solutions that can be modified and updated easily, as well as delivered virtually, means that information can be disseminated quickly, efficiently, and consistently, regardless of the size or geographic distribution of an organization's workforce.

How SAP Education Meets the Need for E-Performance

"Training" can be defined as that point in time when we first acquire knowledge. But putting that knowledge into effective practice — especially when there is a considerable period of time between knowledge acquisition and its application — calls for on-the-job educational support as a supplement to in-classroom training. This is where SAP Education's offerings can come into play, bringing you the next generation of true e-performance technology.

For example, the **SAP Productivity Pak** and **SAP Productivity Composer** applications are e-performance solutions that help maximize employee proficiency and deliver greater value from your enterprise's systems. These tools enable you to easily create documentation, context-sensitive online help, and transaction simulations that end users can then work through as needed. With SAP Productivity Pak, in particular, your company can provide "fingertip knowledge" to your end users. The application's enterprise architecture, as well as its collaboration and communication features, allows your organization to create a fully interactive learning environment. To see what SAP Productivity Pak looks like, see the online version of this article at **sapinsider.wispubs.com**. And to learn more about SAP Productivity Pak and SAP Productivity Composer, please visit **www.sap.com/services/education/softwareproducts/rwd.epx**.

SAP Knowledge Acceleration takes the platform of SAP Productivity Pak and goes a step further by including content from the full range of SAP and SAP BusinessObjects solutions, directly within the tool. This customizable, web-based learning tool uses job-specific scenarios focused on key functionalities to accurately render your company's processes and data so it can deliver training that is relevant to your workers. SAP Knowledge Acceleration is also organized by different training modules to allow users to focus on the functions and concepts they need to know (see **Figure 1**).

Because SAP Knowledge Acceleration is available on demand, learners can refer back to tutorials or performance-support documents whenever they need more information on a particular topic. What's more, the application has flexible deployment options and delivers training capabilities that are directly embedded in the design of your SAP solutions, so you can train and support several thousand users at their own desks more effectively and affordably.

Please visit **www.sap.com/services/education/softwareproducts/knowledge-accelerator.epx** to learn more about SAP Knowledge Acceleration.

The Real Meaning of a "Well-Trained" Workforce

However your company approaches its IT learning needs, it is important to understand the key role that ongoing learning support plays in improving performance. A well-trained workforce has a material impact on organizational productivity, cost reduction, and quality improvement.

But being well-trained involves more than initial in-classroom training; it involves on-the-job and easily accessible e-performance learning tools. Providing these tools should be an element of any strategic IT education plan. ■

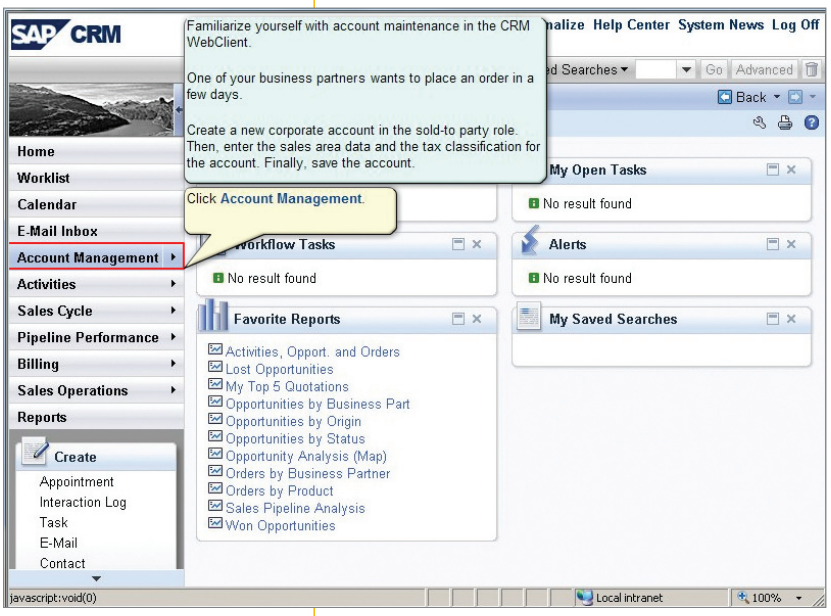

FIGURE 1 ▼ SAP Knowledge Acceleration is organized by various training modules, allowing users to focus on the functions and concepts they need to know