

Beyond Plug and Play

A roundtable discussion sheds some light on Plugfest 9 and how the topics of the meeting will help establish tomorrow's learning environment for the military.

By Marty Kauchak

Q: What is a Plugfest?

A: (Paul Jesukiewicz, director of the ADL Co-Laboratory) The event brings together learning software developers and content providers from government, industry and academia to refine the Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) and associated practices, procedures and standards.

Q: This was the ninth Plugfest-what was different?

A: (Jesukiewicz) The scope and quality of our participants was unique. We had 384 registrants from 146 companies and organizations and 11 nations.
(Dr. Mike Freeman, deputy director, ADL) Our colleagues from the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers Technical Committee on Learning Technology conducted a workshop that provided Plugfest participants with a forum for sharing successful designs and implementation examples of the sequencing and navigation capabilities of SCORM.

Q: What is the purpose of the Plug N Play area?

A: (Freeman) Eighty six companies made SCORM-conformant systems, tools and content available in several large working areas, enabling attendees to share their experiences and lessons learned in implementing SCORM 2004.
(Dan Gardner, director of ODUSD/R (Readiness & Training) During my Wednesday afternoon visit to the area, one vendor told me that outside of Plugfest, there is spirited competition within industry to develop winning products and gain market shares. But during Plugfest, these same industry representatives gather in a collaborative, collegial manner to advance SCORM and its supporting tenets. This was a stellar example of industry-government partnering and cooperation.

Q: Please describe the outcomes from your executive session.

A: (Dr. Paul Mayberry, deputy undersecretary of defense for readiness) On Wednesday afternoon, leading members of the e-learning community gathered to ponder and discuss a range of issues. We were joined by Dr. Robert Kahn, a founding father of the Internet; Wayne Hodgins, a noted futurist from Autodesk; Elliot Masie of the Masie Center; Navy Vice Admiral Kevin Moran, chief of Naval Education and Training; and 40 other leaders from various federal agencies, academia, and the private and public sectors. This was our first executive session to be held in conjunction with a Plugfest. The discussions were stimulating, the ideas provocative, and the benefits of broad-scale partnerships were obvious. ADL has always been about partnerships, and the executive session was a true reflection of the power of partnerships.

Q: There was a lot of interest in ADL's CORDRA effort. Can you provide a quick explanation of CORDRA?

A: (Jesukiewicz) CORDRA stands for Content Object Repository Discovery and Registration Architecture. It works in conjunction with SCORM. CORDRA is based on the Handle System, a comprehensive system for assigning, managing and resolving persistent identifiers, known as "handles," for digital objects and other resources on the Internet. In the world of ADL, every SCORM "learning object" will reside in a repository and have a unique handle assigned to it.

Q: How will the U.S. Department of Defense implement SCORM and CORDRA?

A: (Dr. Bob Wisher, director of the ADL Initiative) We are in the final stages of coordinating a DoD Instruction that will mandate the use of SCORM for all distributed learning content and delivery systems. This has been widely anticipated by the services. In preparation, all have taken steps to be ready for SCORM-after all, the ADL Initiative started more than seven years ago. The instruction will also require that the metadata describing every SCORM "learning object" be centrally registered. This will occur through the ADL registry, an instance of CORDRA, which will be hosted by the Defense Technical Information Center.

Q: What is the level of interest outside the United States?

A: (Wisher) The international level of interest has been one of our biggest surprises. There are numerous vendors developing SCORM conformant products in Italy, Korea, Taiwan and Germany to name just a few. Australia already hosted a meeting on CORDRA. We have interest from various countries to host an ADL partnership lab.