

# The art of learning online

Effective learning should combine sessions online and in a classroom

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ONLINE learning is not a natural way for students to study, according to Professor Joseph Holland of the University of Wisconsin at Stout.

The professor, who has been designing online learning for his service management and e-commerce courses, said online learning does not mean course material should be dumped onto the Net for students to read.

"Students don't naturally learn online," he pointed out, during a visit to Singapore to introduce Wisconsin's Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Service Management course at the CSM Academy.

An online education has to be combined with guidance from a tutor or lecturer who can prod the students, provide them with tips and give them real-life cases relating to the topics they are studying.

What an online faculty can do is to enable the students to study at their own pace within the pre-set schedule and to provide the lecturer with a ready database of the students' work,

grades and progress status.

Wisconsin has several campuses at different locations in the United States, of which Stout is known for its tourism, hospitality and service management studies.

The university's two-year BSc course at the CSM Academy is a combination of online study and classroom sessions, where students are exposed to Web-enhanced materials that include self-assessment questions and problem-solving scenarios. There are chat rooms for general discussion and case studies.

Service management case studies are one of the strong points of the course, said Prof Holland, and include issues such as how a new online store takes on a well-established brick-and-mortar set-up.

Contrary to popular perception, service management is not limited to the public sector, retail, tourism or hospitality trade.

Almost every industry needs good service managers for its back-end business process, sales support, management of customer relations and its IT



Successful online learning requires tutors and lecturers to provide guidance and supervision, says Professor Joseph Holland of the University of Wisconsin at Stout.

help desk and call centres.

The BSc course, the first of its kind in Singapore, will start next month at the CSM Academy in Shenton Way. CSM Academy is a local educational institution that specialises in

service management and related studies.

The minimum entry requirement for the course is a polytechnic diploma.

For details, check out [www.csmacademy.org](http://www.csmacademy.org).

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## Manage risks and reap the profits

RISK in business is about spotting opportunities and earning profits because you have better services and products than your competitors, said Mr Marc Ronez, managing director of the Asian Risk Management Institute.

Almost all risks can be identified and managed through analysis and planning, in a process known as risk management, he said.

Proper risk management improves the effectiveness of every aspect of a company's operations, including finance, marketing, production and human resources.

During a product launch, risk management will provide frameworks and procedures to identify the critical risks at each stage in a product life cycle. Once these risks are surfaced and assessed using a risk management model, the company can implement a strategy to ensure that the product is launched within the time frame and budget.

Companies that make digital lifestyle gadgets like mobile phones, cameras and personal digital assistants face high risks because of the short market life of such products, usually no longer than three months, before a new model appears. As such, risk management is essential when investing in the production, research and marketing for a new gizmo.

An unpredictable business climate is another risk factor. The interest in risk management among Singapore companies was aroused by the Asian financial crisis in 1997

and the consequent economic slowdown, the Sept 11, 2001, terrorism attacks in the US and Sars.

Risk management also includes security measures for an organisation's network. Mr Ronez cited the example of a hacker breaking into the database of an IT firm's client.

A risk management plan would have stipulated the processes of recovering the database and reinstating security, managing the information flow between the company and the customer and reassuring employees, shareholders and the press.

Small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) are particularly vulnerable. SMBs that ignore risk management may find their survival threatened. These enterprises make up a dynamic part of many economies and are often agile and innovative compared with larger companies.

A company with a good product that has been selling well may suddenly see copycat versions. Unless a strong sales and marketing strategy is in place from the beginning, the company may not react fast enough to tackle the competition.

The Asian Risk Management Institute provides research and professional education in risk management and is funded by educational institutions and private investors. It also provides corporate training. Costs for a one-day seminar start at \$250. Details at [www.arimi.org](http://www.arimi.org). — Michele Soon

## Think big, start small for data storage

WHEN it comes to using technology to manage information for competitive advantage, most people think of multinational companies that use technology intelligently to build closer relationships with customers and create operational efficiency.

But technology is also vital to building productivity and boosting revenue at small to mid-sized businesses. It helps growing companies stretch resources and manpower.

Nowhere is that more important than when it comes to mining corporate information on a company-wide basis and finding vital nuggets of corporate data that can provide valuable analytical insights or new product ideas.

The key to success in managing information growth is to think big but start small — taking progressive steps towards an information life cycle management strategy.

Information life cycle management is a strategy that uses people, processes and technology to store and tap critical business data throughout its life span of value.

Small to mid-sized companies can perform information life cycle management and they need to do it in a way that suits their business strategies and budgets. The smart strategy is to break information life cycle management into smaller, more easily implemented components.

The following process tends to work well in small to mid-sized businesses:

**1. Consolidate storage:** For smaller companies, storage consolidation does not have to mean storage area network or network attached storage. It can be done with one storage array with a mix of fibre channel and standard drives. It does not mean more expensive storage; it means getting more out of the storage you have.

**2. Address back-up issues:** Many companies with a small storage infrastructure have no company-wide back-up strategy. Instead, they address recovery issues on a piecemeal, server-by-server basis. The risk is huge, but they balk at the time and money necessary to build a comprehensive information protection and recovery policy. Information life cycle management, which automates back-up procedures, can in itself constitute a simple back-up policy.

**3. Build tiered storage:** Implementing tiered storage is simple. It can be as basic as having an EMC CLARiON array and having fibre channel disks and standard disks and making snapshot copies.

**4. Optimise with management tools:** By layering software on top of the storage infrastructure, IT managers can set automated data policies and manage information better, saving money and streamlining operations.

— Ravi Rajendran

The writer is the country manager of EMC Singapore.