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A few years ago, my favorite TV commercial was an ad in which two guys were sitting at a computer and putting animated flames onto what would become their company's Web site. One guy said something like "Well, gee, does it sell products?" And the other guy answered, "I don't know. But doesn't it look cool?"

We all have a tendency to fall in love with glitz. And even in learning, glitz matters -- but it isn't the only thing that matters. There are Web sites that are wonderful from a look-and-feel perspective but that can't teach a thing. And some of the most boring-looking Web sites can teach volumes. Learning is the bottom line: Does a site teach what it's supposed to teach, as effectively as it possibly can?

The need for e-learning systems that are substantive, as well as integrated into business processes, points to the big breakthrough in learning today: knowledge management -- the delivery of exactly the right information to exactly the people who need it, when they need it. A salesman on the road wants to know about changes in his company's product line and about what his competitors are doing. He doesn't want a 10-hour course. He wants to go to a Web site where someone has posted the information that he needs.

That's knowledge management. With that model, the Web begins to look more like a library than like a classroom. You can use whatever helps you learn: courses, articles, collaboration tools like email. And you can draw on information that's organized to be easily accessible. That way, the Web becomes a place where you're learning all the time.

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