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TVII banks on latest wave of online growth: e-learning

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Mark Thompson and Matt Beickert plan to focus their attention and their newly renamed company on the Internet's next wave of growth: e-learning.

The two have renamed the visual marketing and media agency they co-own from Thompson Beickert to TVII, to reflect a focus on the company's subsidiary, Thompson Visuals, as a content provider for companies seeking to train employees online.

Corporate online training is poised to explode, industry observers say. Companies spent \$100 million on Internet-based training last year, and that figure is expected to leap to \$6 billion by 2002, according to Internet research firm International Data Corp.

"E-learning is set to be the next killer app for the Internet," Thompson says. "It's a natural dovetail from what we were doing."

Thompson opened his marketing communications firm, Thompson Visuals, in 1989 and handled training and communications needs for clients like Tyson Foods and Arctic Alaska.

A few years later, Beickert began a production company, specializing in sports video and multimedia for corporate training needs.

Thompson and Beickert merged the two companies in 1996 to form Thompson Beickert Visual Marketing and Media, operating Total Video as a subsidiary production company.

"By 1999, it became obvious that e-commerce and the new economy was changing everything," Beickert says. "Corporate communications, through the use of video, audio, multimedia and, now, Internet content had become the company's strong suit and it was apparent that this was an industry which was about to experience explosive growth."

Though TVII uses different forms of media to help clients train employees, company intranets are useful for training online, Thompson says.

From transferring a company's sexual harassment training manual online to developing a new training module for a hazardous materials training session, TVII will work with a company to provide training tools that will help employees retain knowledge better than the traditional classroom settings, Beickert says.

"There's no better way of showing companies you care than to have someone there training," he says. "But online training saves costs for travel and technology-based training allows more room for individual differences in learning styles."

With 24 hour per day availability online, employees can learn at their own pace and review course material as often as needed, Thompson says.

The delivery of content in smaller units, such as those available online, contributes further to knowledge retention, according to W. R. Hambrecht + Co., a San Francisco-based investment banking firm focused on software, consumer products, and the Internet.

The firm found that the average content retention rate for an instructor-led class is only 58%, compared to the more intensive e-learning experience that enhances the retention rate by 25%-60%.

"Online training allows you to break up the module into many pieces to make retention better," Beickert says.

Adams Keegan, a professional employer organization, has found that online training for its client employees to be more efficient than traditional methods of training like manuals and classroom lectures, says company president Bob Adams.

Adams Keegan hired TVII to film training videos, transfer them online and implement a Power Point presentation to highlight topics discussed in the video so that employees could access the information at any time.

"With traditional methods of training, you're limited by your own resources of time, people and money," Adams says. "When you convert this type of content into a digital format online, then those resources don't hinder you as much."

TVII currently employs 13, but will hire about eight more employees to help work on online employee training projects for clients like Adams Keegan, BNSF Railroad and VVP America.

While the main hurdles to e-learning are lack of interactivity, content availability and disparate company technology standards, TVII will continue to offer a mix of all the training methods to

provide companies with options for employee education, Thompson says.

"There are some challenges with the technology curve for some companies," he says. "But there are other technologies to use to solve problems and we'll incorporate those to meet their needs."

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