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# I'm Just a Few Clicks Away...

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**A**s professional speakers, we are privileged to be able to leave a piece of us behind each event through our books, audio tapes, videotapes and other products.

But what if we could be there for our clients 24 hours a day, seven days a week? What if we could be guiding, coaching, counseling, teaching just in time, precisely when they need it? Better yet, what if we could help our clients tangibly improve individual and organizational performance?

We can—virtually.

There is a group of tools called Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS), that takes the knowledge, skills, and training we provide in our speeches and presentations and provides on-demand access to integrated information, to enable high-level performance with a minimum of support from other people.

An EPSS is more than putting your book on your Web site. It's more than a Computer Based Training (CBT) program, which delivers classical instruction via the computer. An EPSS serves as an integrated system that captures learning applications, text materials, references and other media into one powerfully linked structure. With an EPSS, the user can immediately access key information, processes and procedures that enable him or her to perform on the job.

An EPSS ties together traditional materials, such as books, handouts, media, process sheets and other performance support tools, and it can also help you market to increasingly technologically sophisticated users. Whether you bundle it with your existing products, put it on a Web site or deliver it as a separate contract item, an EPSS enables you to leverage your materials across a wider audience.

In fact, surveys from the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) and International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) showed that between 8 and 14 percent of U.S. organizations used EPSS in 1995 with a fairly consistent upward growth curve. Although most users are larger government, corporate and military organizations, the technology now exists for speakers to cost-effectively create EPSS, for the ultimate benefit of our clients.

Using the EPSS to translate your expertise and message to a less seasoned user has the potential to become a very marketable and valuable addition to your product line. For example, we are currently developing an EPSS to serve as a companion to our new book,

*Team Basics: Practical Strategies for Team Success.* The EPSS translates the general content of the book into specific recommendations and processes that a team member can use immediately to enhance his or her team work. Whether the user wants to plan the next team session or develop strategies to intervene gracefully, the EPSS will guide him or her through the thought processes and provide a deliverable answer, agenda or strategy, just as we would if we were coaching them right then and there.

An EPSS serves as an excellent bridge from on site consulting, coaching and training, to improved just-in-time performance directly at the job site. Many human resource departments struggle with translating training and consulting into effective workplace behaviors and actions. An EPSS built around your message can help them achieve that elusive return on investment so often predicted but rarely achieved with traditional training and seminar programs.

The specific steps needed to create an EPSS often vary between applications and work environments (*i.e.*, an EPSS for an office setting may require different materials and methods than one designed for a production environment). Still, the basic principals are consistent between applications. We've outlined a ten-step general process to create an EPSS tailored to your message and typical client base:

#### **1. Understand the Environment**

Who is your target market or typical user? Do they have the equipment, opportunity and skills needed to use an EPSS? The best EPSS in the world can't help a user without access to a computer or the program! Aim for clients that value having high-tech solutions.

What are your performance objectives? How is your EPSS going to add value to your client's performance and/or bottom line?

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Is your concept feasible? What are the costs involved compared to the benefits they will receive? Will your product sales be able to amortize the development costs? Better yet, do you have a client who might partner with you in the development of the product?

#### **2. Define the Content**

As professional speakers, we consider ourselves to be experts, and hopefully, we have already captured "best practices." You already have multiple source materials you can draw from with detailed process, procedure and content (*e.g.* handouts, transcripts, books, audios, videos, presentation visuals). As you sift through your materials, you may want to add to or tailor the content for your target market.

#### **3. Select the Media**

How do you intend to capture the accomplished performance? Options include using text, stills, audio, video, rendered images, forms, learning applications/objects and other source materials. Determine the costs and

methods to convert or digitize your materials.

#### **4. Collect, Digitize and Structure Materials**

Gather and digitize all your source materials, media and documents. Ideally, you'll want to select an authoring tool or system that enables you to use existing digital material with a minimum of rework.

Authoring tools and materials vary widely, but we decided to develop our EPSS using standard commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) tools that require little custom programming and reduce the need for expensive software development teams. Considering that most of our products, processes and tasks are currently text descriptions, we built our EPSS around a standard word processing program. We then developed an interface that includes word search, topic identification, indexing, book-marking, annotation and integration of media and other applications.

### **5. Determine the Basic Framework**

Build a solid framework to serve as a blueprint as you (or your production staff) import your source materials and media. We took our two core processes (planning and intervening) and used them as the backbone to our EPSS framework. We then used a storyboard format to lay-out the big picture, the major components and representative samples of the type of media we intended to use. This allowed us to make major directional changes prior to expending too much time and effort developing solutions that will not meet the performance objectives.

Not to forget our customers, we also brought in some "typical users" to ensure the interface and content areas were appealing and usable for our target market.

### **6. Fill in Content on the Framework**

Like hanging ornaments on a Christmas tree, import the content you identified in the early development phases. Beware of adding content that doesn't support the performance objectives. (Gee, wouldn't it be nice if...)

### **7. Build a Prototype**

Create the prototype EPSS based on the design plan. Carefully test the prototype to include checking content, text and media for production errors, spelling, dead links or program triggers.

### **8. Conduct a Dry Run**

After your initial internal testing, release the prototype on a limited basis to a few key clients. This limited release is designed to check the methods, content and interface. Bottom line: Does the EPSS do what it is supposed to do? Gather customer/product satisfaction measures as well as performance improvement data? After initial trials and feedback, update the prototype for widespread release.

### **9. Release Your EPSS**

Integrate your EPSS with your other product lines, including your marketing plan and practices. Make sure you have a process in place to assist the user in installing and integrating the EPSS into the workplace.

### **10. Maintain It**

Be ready to make a commitment to update and maintain the EPSS based on user experience and feedback, changes in the workplace environment, and any other factors that will alter the EPSS' content, structure and design.

Sounds like a lot of work, doesn't it? Well, it is. But once you have developed your spiffy new EPSS, your clients are just a few clicks away from having unlimited access to knowledge and information that will enable them to perform on the job. While an EPSS will never replace you, it's the next best thing to being available to our clients 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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