

Response to LETSI White Paper Solicitation on
SCORM® 2.0

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Summary

In many ways, the publication of the SCORM 2.0 reference model has been both a blessing and a curse to the field of learning and development. SCORM 2.0 offers up a recommended framework for learning and development professionals. However, it does not address the true benefits and consequences of following this model. As a result, a volume of courseware has been produced with the “SCORM compliant” stamp of quality. Learning management system providers also tout the benefits of their systems being able to readily load and deliver SCORM-compliant courseware, but what does this truly mean? The purpose of this white paper is to define and address some of the common challenges that occur when learning professionals view SCORM as the definitive standard for learning and development.

Requirements and Needs

Problem Statement One: A Reference Model, Not a Standard

One of the key challenges associated with SCORM 2.0 is a general misunderstanding within the learning community of the difference between a reference model and a standard. SCORM 2.0 is a reference model; it is a stated rough guideline for the development of online learning that was written at a time when few could predict what the future of learning technology may hold. A standard, on the other hand, is a more rigorous guideline which hopefully yields in the delivery of a quality product. This distinction has in many ways limited the advancement of quality online learning solutions; practitioners have become so wrapped up in maintaining SCORM compliance that they have lost the essential focus they need to create quality, measurable learning events that discourage cheating and cater to multiple learning styles. Contributors in this next evolution of SCORM need to keep this one simple statement in mind: *We can do better for our learners.*

Problem Statement Two: Don’t Forget the K.I.S.S. Principal

It is commonly known that the current SCORM reference model, when printed, is a series of weighty binders with a great deal of information. This represents a divergence in the simple philosophy that so many trainers teach, “*Keep It Simple, Stupid.*” Knowing what we do know today about online collaboration tools, knowledge bases, and wikis to name a few, the next version of SCORM should opt to keep the delivery and access of SCORM simple and accessible via multiple methods in order to increase adoption and spread competence throughout the community of SCORM users.

Problem Statement Three: Stronger Anti-Cheating Functionality

While the promise of guided learning paths and ease of use remain positive features of an online learning experience, still many SCORM-compliant learning modules do not take into account anti-cheating functionality. There are many modules sold by vendors today that enable learners to bypass their required learning content and navigate straight to a module’s final exam, and take it multiple times until they pass with the minimum score. At this stage, as SCORM is poised to be revised, we must ask ourselves this difficult question: Is this truly learning? Are we doing enough? In many industries, especially those regulated by state and federal agencies, a record of a passed test simply doesn’t replace the thorough completion of a learning module. There needs to

be a method for dictating role-specific learning paths without compromising the depth and quality of instruction needed.

Problem Statement Four: Stronger Definition of Bandwidth Requirements

In considering how to revise the current SCORM 2.0 reference model, it would be wise to address the production of low-bandwidth online learning in keeping with the SCORM standard. Since the publication of SCORM 2.0, a great volume of tools have been created to guarantee “rapid-release” online learning. These tools cater to learning practitioners who may or may not have an understanding of the principles of web-based software design and how it impacts network bandwidth. These learning practitioners may not also understand their organization’s network parameters or how the production of large courseware files affects the overall performance of the organizational infrastructure. For this reason, it would benefit practitioners if the next edition of SCORM were to provide simple guidelines for practitioners to use in order to produce low-bandwidth, high-quality courseware.

Problem Statement Five: Support of Multiple Learning Styles

The current SCORM 2.0 reference model provides direction on the appropriate tagging of objects and elements. This is a firm and positive start and a practice used by the software industry for some time. In this next version of SCORM, however, it would be beneficial to move even closer to a learner focus, which means designing courseware that attempts to embrace multiple learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic) given organizational technology parameters with each module created. Luckily, since the publication of SCORM 2.0, many organizations have made significant enhancements to their bandwidth, and a decent amount of organizations now offer computers including soundcards as the price of computer hardware has dropped. This creates the opportunity to evolve the standard not only to include more stringent assessment parameters, but also to specify online learning design that caters to multiple learning styles.

Problem Statement Six: More Targeted ROI

In including this problem statement, the author is aware that this challenge will likely not be able to be addressed in the next version of SCORM, however it is a challenge that needs to be mentioned. At the current time, given the current reference model and learning management system configurations, it is extremely difficult in terms of time and cost to measure the return on investment associated with online training efforts. This is a dialog that needs to be opened up between training development practitioners and learning management system providers alike, working together in partnership. Poor ROI has been a detriment to training departments across multiple industries, and because of poor ROI training departments are often included in the rounds of layoffs that occur when industries take a downturn and/or organizations are faced with acquisitions or restructuring. These next few years will be a critical period for the training industry at a whole; it is a time during which education and evolution must take place so that the training function can assert itself as a critical enterprise business function for years to come.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the above-mentioned problem statements are as follows:

- **Problem Statement One: A Reference Model, Not a Standard** – Training practitioners must be educated on the core differences between reference models and standards.
- **Problem Statement Two: Don't Forget the K.I.S.S. Principal** – Concise, easily accessible tools must be developed for practitioners to improve the quality of training efforts within the organizations they serve.
- **Problem Statement Three: Stronger Anti-Cheating Functionality** – SCORM must evolve to provide greater proof of full completion and mastery of content.
- **Problem Statement Four: Stronger Definition of Bandwidth Requirements** – SCORM must evolve to include a new component that addresses bandwidth so that training practitioners can improve the delivery of training.
- **Problem Statement Five: Support of Multiple Learning Styles** – SCORM must evolve to include guidelines for catering to multiple learning styles in order to improve upon retention associated with online training efforts.
- **Problem Statement Six: More Targeted ROI** – Future discussions must take place between training development practitioners and learning management system providers to enhance ROI options.

Closing Statement

To my colleagues, I acknowledge and appreciate the opportunity to participate in this process and I look forward to the opportunity to collaborate with you in an effort to improve our field.

Respectfully,

Jane Haag