



From Abrasion to Waldos: Connecting the Performance Support Dots

by Gary J. Dickelman

Welcome to another special issue of *Performance Improvement*—the third for which I have served as guest editor. The topic of my special issue series is *performance support*. Then why, I hear you cry, does this issue include articles about knowledge management, morphing waldos, diversity modeling, and video games? If you guessed that I’ve become bored with the standard fare and the usual suspects, you are probably right, but not because they are not interesting or even brilliant, it is just that the advocacy we call performance support takes its shape from many diverse fields. It is time to switch partners to obtain a fresh perspective and gain deeper insight.

Another reason for the switch is that I have been doing different things over the past year. I taught a graduate course of my own design at George Mason University called Performance-Centered Design (PCD) and discovered that many of my students were seasoned professionals working on real projects for which PCD was a great fit. The works of several of these students are embodied in “The Morphing Waldo”—Colby Chambers Howell’s conception of what a performance-centered interface *should* be—and the “Diversity Modeling” case study, in which Alesha Pulsinelli and Cynthia Roubie apply principles from Alan Cooper’s *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum* to assisting learning-disabled individuals experience and grasp the subject of physics through virtual representation.

In July 2000 I began a conversation with Hal Christensen, Michael Feldstein, and Barbara Cowley-Durst concerning the media hype that was, and is, knowledge management (KM). This led us to design a knowledge *econet*. To share these ideas with at least part of the world, we engaged Duane Degler and Douglas Weidner in a marathon roundtable discussion that uncovers the salient points of KM, connects the dots between it and performance support (etc.), and dispells a rather large list of myths. The discussion is pure *creative abrasion*—which is one of those key features of KM. Curious about the term? Read the lead article.

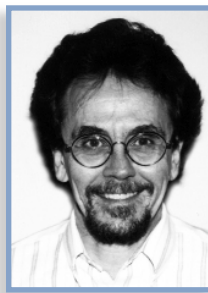
Last August I returned to my age-old love, which is playing the tuba. In the course of getting my “chops” back and searching for a new instrument, I discovered an interesting fusion and synergy between what was once a visceral antagonism between the world of the concert hall and that of the marching arts, where I was reared. I discovered that there exists a *convertible* tuba, for which the piston array is removable and switchable so that the instrument can be played either on the shoulder with a forward projecting bell for marching activities, or upright for the conventional orchestra or wind ensemble. It only took about 50 years for the convertible tuba to emerge. I have discovered convenience, cost efficiency, ergonomic delight, and pleasure, all in a single tuba. So why should my software be any different? I posed that question to Duane Degler and Lisa Battle, who consider the needs of diverse populations in software design and present us with “Around the Interface in 80 Clicks.” Thankfully, their attendance at my first recital was not a requirement for publishing their article!

If we were to drop all the published conceptual and theoretical articles on performance support over the past 10 years on one end of a see-saw and the aggregate of practical case studies on the subject on the other end, I’m afraid that the practical ones would be catapulted into outer space. So I asked Burt Huber to talk about his award-winning performance support system for Payless Shoes and other elements of his consulting practice. We do not usually talk about such commercial things in this journal, but its time has come. *Warning:* Burt will use words such as *client*, *sales*, *business results*, and *profit*. I have said for years that the word *performance* in performance support ultimately means *business* performance. So Burt’s insight and experience are long overdue.

Finally, my son was married this year. On the way to his wedding I had a chat with one of his former roommates and now associate editor of *Tips and Tricks* magazine, Ara Shirinian. We talked about performance support in the context of video games. Ara has had a foot in both worlds, having also worked at the University of Maryland’s Human Computer Interaction Lab and for a local performance sup-

port contractor. The topic of our conversation was: *What can performance support professionals learn from video games?* Ara deals with issues such as the emotional responses people have to games—because the goal of a good game is for people to keep playing and to *want to keep playing*. How different from the Enterprise resource planning system I just worked on...or is it? Not in the least. Performance support professionals want exactly the same thing the video game designers want. Ara explains why.

I invite you to read, no, to devour, every word of this issue. The authors have taken great pains to underscore their insights, their crafts, and their examples. The issue is as deep as it is diverse. Performance support professionals, the readers of *Performance Improvement*, should expect nothing less. I hope this issue contributes a bit of spice to your life as it adds tremendous value to your practice. 🍄



Gary J. Dickelman is the Chief Knowledge Officer for Christensen/Roberts Solutions of Woodbridge, Connecticut, and continues to develop and promote unique performance support tools with Epiance (formerly Guru, Inc.). He specializes in applying KM, human factors engineering, learning technologies, information technology, and business process engineering to the creation of systems that humans can actually use. Gary’s work includes electronic performance support systems for human resources management, customer service, financial services, health care, and business process re-engineering. He is a member of the International Society for Performance Improvement, the American Society for Training and Development, and the Association for Computing Machinery. He is a contributing author to *Using Computers in Human Resources* (Jossey-Bass, 1992) and *The Instructional Technology Handbook* (McGraw-Hill, 1993) and is the author of numerous articles for industry periodicals. He is webmaster for Innovations in Performance Centered Design (<http://www.pcd-innovations.com>), editor for *epss.com!* (<http://www.epss.com>), and guest editor for ISPI’s *Performance Improvement* journal. Gary may be reached at gdickelman@pcd-innovations.com.