

SOLID SIMS

Boasting lower costs and more technological bells and whistles, training simulations appear to be here to stay. **By Lorri Freifeld**



The U.S. military and NASA have the resources to use just about any training methods they desire, notes Ken Spero, Chief Marketing Officer, Humentum, Herndon, VA. Their first choice? “They chose computer simulation as one of their primary tools for teaching best practices and critical judgment that culminates in life-and-death survival skills and decision-making for their people. They have recognized the necessity of and benefit to embedding computer simulation as a way of training their folks in the use of critical thinking and judgment for a long time.”

Slowly but surely other industry sectors now are following suit, particularly as simulation costs have been steadily decreasing. An out-of-the-box simulation in which the decisions of the learner determine how it plays out probably runs in the \$100 to \$200 per named user price range, according to Clark Aldrich, co-founder of simulation provider SimuLearn. A customized simulation can cost between \$200,000 and \$300,000.

Spero says an interesting phenomenon seems to be that companies are latching onto the graphics

technologies and focusing on self-paced applications. “These can be very powerful,” he admits. “However, there are still many topics that benefit from classroom or at least live-virtual deployments.

In this case, simulation can be even more powerful as it also builds on the power of group dynamics. This will be recognized, and companies will find themselves doing more live programs going forward.”

That said, with so many new Gen X and Y managers and leaders part of the Internet gaming culture, BTS USA Director Dave Ackley believes there will be more requests for online simulations, not just

facilitator-led ones. “However, there has to be a realistic interactive approach. Going forward, we’ll begin to see more targeted use for specific job roles that drill down to help managers do their jobs better with very specific skills.”

Technology also will continue to develop very quickly over the next five years, Spero believes, with many new technologies on the horizon. Adam Nelson, VP, technology and product development, Ninth House, points to “the machinima-based simulations (an old video game term) that use a camera inside the game to makes movies, for instance, using Second Life, where you play out a simulation, record it, and export it. This can be done quickly, although the quality may be sacrificed.” And Jonas Åkerman, president and CEO, BTS USA, cautions, “You can easily get lost in the technology.”

Nelson believes story-based simulations are a big thing and will continue to grow, as will “open” simulations “where there’s a pedagogy to it, but the learner can manage the content and add more choices. I’m also seeing a lot of simulations developed for consoles, particularly in the military, for Wii and PlayStation.” ■