Squeezing

career-long learning into busy professional lives

by Liwana S. Bringelson, PhD, PMP

Have you ever wondered how to keep up on new developments in your field? Or resented the time professional development keeps you away from job or home? A new internet-based program is making it easy for a virtual community of high-tech professionals to stay current in the field, get new ideas and be more innovative in their work.

TeleCHI

TeleCHI was named for the use of tele-learning for computer-human interaction professionals (CHI). Also commonly referred to as human-computer interaction professionals (HCI), their work is the study and design of the human-computer system. HCI professionals come from many different backgrounds, such as computer science, industrial engineering, psychology and English. TeleCHI was developed to address challenges for busy specialists who are frequently isolated on interdisciplinary teams or don't have the "free time" for formal learning and training, but need to keep up with the rapidly changing high-tech industry.

HCI professionals often work long hours on teams with other technical professionals who have different specialties, making it difficult to connect with other HCI specialists. Developed through the University of Waterloo's Department of Systems Design Engineering and the Centre for Learning and Teaching Through Technology, TeleCHI enables professionals to hear about new developments in the field, and network with other specialists. The TeleCHI project is supported by the TeleLearning National Centre of Excellence, IBM - Canada, Nortel Networks and Communications Information Technology Ontario.

TeleCHI can be accessed through www.telechi.org, which can be reached with a web browser (versions 3 or higher) and only one plug-in (RealAudio). This makes it possible for people to get engaging, multimedia content and interaction, with minimal effort. In fact, TeleCHI is designed to take advantage of "edge time"—the 10 minutes before leaving your office for an appointment, a coffee break or desk-side lunch. Since individuals have different edge times, the events in TeleCHI are designed for flexibility. Members can choose to participate in events requiring as little as one-to-two minutes of their time or ongoing discussions that might take one-to-two hours each month—and virtually "bump into" people with similar technical challenges in their jobs.

Online development for engineers

The Cardiff Engineering Learning Technology group, located in the United Kingdom, is currently working to develop a program called "Online Continuing Professional Development" for the engineering community. Visit the website for the group at http://www.celt.cf.ac.uk, or the site for online continuing professional development at http://www.ops.cf.ac.uk. This program is aimed at providing multimedia support for professional development for engineers via the web. ◆

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Making it fun: TeleCHI events

The TeleCHI community is developing opportunities for idea leaders to present their ideas to a variety of people, ranging in experience from knowledge apprentices, to founders of the field. Each of these series of activities requires a different level of time commitment from the participants, allowing individuals to participate as much or as little as they are able.

◆ TeleCHIghlights is part of the content for the opening TeleCHI homepage. It describes a website of interest to the HCI community, typically an online resource that knowledge leaders can share with their local HCI community.

◆ HCI Pulse, also part of the homepage, is a quick poll question designed to gather responses from the HCI community about a topic of interest. Results can be viewed after voting, and previous pulse results are archived.

◆ Each month, Eye on CHI presents three-to-four summaries of recent developments in the field in an infomercial format.

◆ HCI Aerobics is an opportunity for professionals to "exercise" their skills through a bimonthly webcast. It requires at least an hour's time commitment, with the opportunity to debrief following the class.

◆ HCI R@W, which is short for "Research at Work," is an opportunity to attend an online seminar presentation of recent research that has relevance to practitioners.

◆ Book Salon is an asynchronous threaded discussion of a book or article that relates to a special topic within the field of human-computer interaction.