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## “Bricks And Clicks”

Presenter: Sue Gillard, Managing Director, Ausmusic Ltd.  
Institution: Ausmusic Ltd., a Registered Training Organisation  
Contact Details: T: (03) 9696 2422  
F: (03) 9696 2879  
Email: [sueg@ausmusic.org.au](mailto:sueg@ausmusic.org.au)  
Postal: PO Box 307, Port Melbourne 3207

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### Bionote/s:

Sue Gillard, B Mus Ed (Melbourne) has been involved as a lecturer, teacher and consultant at all levels of music education and in music business studies at tertiary level. The lack of access to professional studies in contemporary music motivated her to develop a comprehensive music training program, with an on-line option. This program, titled musicIT, is now offered by Ausmusic through a licence arrangement, to 250 institutions in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Sue is the Managing Director of Ausmusic Ltd.

### Abstract:

This presentation will outline the processes that have been involved in developing and delivering a commercial on-line educational site. It will include the particular features that make this site unique in the world and its potential application for educational institutions in any subject area.

Released in October 2000, musicIT.com is already attracting international interest from a diverse client base, including placement of our product on z.university, a professional international music business journal based in the UK wishing to value add to their subscribers, and government departments interested in on-line applications for vocational education and professional development in the arts.

Two key unique features of musicIT.com are its “smorgasboard” structure from Certificate 1-Degree, which allows individuals, educationalists and employers to package their courses and the mentor system which allows industry professionals and/or educationalists to participate.

The paper covers the strategic thinking and action behind the establishment and delivery of musicIT.com. It explores the future of on-line education, a future which requires a balance, a balance of “bricks and clicks”, ie the best of on-line with the best of traditional learning, and a balance of educational and commercial imperatives.

The presentation will include practical demonstrations of the musicIT.com site.

# 1. THE musicIT.com PROGRAM

## 1.1 Introduction

It is with much pleasure that I present this paper to you. It is my hope that by sharing the experience of developing and implementing musicIT.com, other education and training providers in Australia will gain significant insights and directions for their own on-line endeavours.

In October 2000, Ausmusic launched musicIT.com, an on-line training option for the individual “leisure” market and the “education” market. This paper covers the establishment, the delivery and the future for musicIT.com. It recommends that a balancing act is required to maximise the future of on-line learning in Australia. This balance involves the combination of “bricks and clicks”, ie. the bricks and mortar existing models of learning together with on-line learning. For survival, a balance of educational and commercial imperatives is also needed.

## 1.2 Ausmusic

Ausmusic Ltd., a Registered Training Organisation, was originally established by the federal government and the music industry in 1989 to develop the Australian music industry, with a focus on training and promotion of contemporary Australian artists. From 1992, an extensive training program from Certificate 1 to Degree level, in performance/composition, business and technology has been implemented around Australia into 250 licenced educational sites, catering for a predominantly classroom environment. These sites include schools, TAFE colleges, universities, community and private colleges, along with pilots in South Africa and direct sales to New Zealand. To maximise the quality of delivery, and overcome the lack of industry expertise by classically trained music teachers, extensive resources were developed in conjunction with industry professionals and educational practitioners.

In 1996, Ausmusic ceased being funded by government, and in 1998, the company was purchased by a privately-owned Australian company, Entertainment World Ltd. The challenge for Ausmusic was then very much more focused on the balance of the commercial and educational imperatives, a challenge which is increasingly relevant for all educational institutions.

## 1.3 Defining MusicIT.com

MusicIT.com was launched with 13 on-line modules, with more gradually being added during 2001. The on-line option was embraced to meet both commercial and educational objectives. The objectives were to-

- 1) Provide access to established “bricks and mortar” programs in the domestic market, and,
- 2) Build export markets. The export potential was in the licensing of the unique content and structure of the program.

As Mr Brian Cadd, Australian rock legend and Chair of the Ausmusic Industry Advisory Committee says, “There is nothing like this musicIT.com program anywhere in the world...my education and industry colleagues in the US can’t believe the enormous potential of this program, and how much it hits the mark in the future of learning” (1)

MusicIT.com offers a number of unique features, or success factors-

- 1) **It is based on a successful “bricks and mortar” model in Australia.** As with almost all successful .com businesses that survived the .com stock market adjustment in 2000, a solid core business with on-line value-added service is now a preferred model to build a .com business. Educational institutions offering on-line education are using this model.
- 2) **It is based on popular music – a universal language.** With this advantage, musicIT.com will be able to deliver educational content to any international marketplace. An international musicIT.com Advisory Committee has been established to maximise consistency across territories. At conception stage, Ausmusic explored the possibility of using translation software, but it is still is not a viable option. In the meantime, Ausmusic is using a “flashing flag” icon where the text requires more detail from different

territories- eg different copyright laws. All references in the business stream are presented in territories. For non-English based territories, Ausmusic intends to use Australian music industry and education professionals with language and cultural skills to customize material for different territories, along with the SBS Translating Service.

A further strategy to maximise international acceptance of musicIT.com, each territory is invited to provide customized material on contemporary music in their territory. For example, a current module, titled “Indigenous Music in Australia” will have a concurrent offering from other territories, such as “Indigenous Music in New Zealand” developed and owned by Maori communities.

- 3) It is based on vocational education driven by industry, which can be customized to meet the academic rigour and “branding” required by a university. The ten subjects in the Diploma Of Music Business are customized to meet the six subject requirement at universities, along with some different assessments required for academic rigour. Ausmusic has found that the “outcomes” based learning of vocational training, which involves more “empirical” learning than “cognitive” learning adapts more easily to on-line learning.
- 4) It can be aligned with educational systems in any territory. Any education institution or educational system, anywhere in the world, can customise this program, can market this program as their own, and make it work for them.
- 5) It Has A Flexible, Adaptable Structure. The full musicIT program consists of a complete Bank Of Modules, a “smorgasboard” of offerings. It is structured with four streams, which are broken into 21 Areas Of Study and 799 individual modules. Each module ranges from a 3 hour “introductory grab” of a subject matter, through to 30 hours in length. Each module also has a level of difficulty- from Level 1 (entry level training) through to Level 8 (final degree level). The costs are structured to reflect the hour and level allocations, with significant discounts available for education institutions using their own mentors. The system also offers a Recognition Of Prior Learning option, for students with the skills and wanting the qualification. The four streams in musicIT are- Music Performance/Composition, Music Technology, Music Business and General & Professional Studies. For example, in the Music Performance/Composition Stream, an Area of Study is Performance Skills, which has four modules-

PS Performance Skills		hrs	Level	Cost
mIT2 PS1	Preparation & Process In The Recording Studio	6	3	\$60
mIT2 PS2	Producing A Backing Track for Performance	30	4	\$375
mIT2 PS3	Developing A Busking Act	30	5	\$450
mIT2 PS4	Managing Technical Systems For Performance	30	6	\$450

- 6) It allows individual industry mentors to oversee a student’s progress. This is a unique feature of musicIT.com. One of the greatest functions on-line delivery can facilitate, is to be able to connect “anyone who wants to know, with anyone who knows”. In music content terms, this means that if a student wants to Release An Independent CD, he/she could select a mentor from a territory that they hoped to penetrate. Once broadband technology is more common, jazz students could work with a specialist rock improviser in New York, or a specialist Jazz improviser in London, depending on their preference.
- 7) It offers individual modules, a package of modules or a full course. This means that an education institution or an individual can “package” a course, brand it and promote it as their own offering. For example, a student could choose a module on songwriting, then modules on playing and performing, and then modules in event management.
- 8) It is formally aligned with the Australian national training agenda. Ausmusic has completed “mapping” the musicIT modules against the Australian National Music Training Package and will also “map” against the South African and New Zealand training frameworks when they are available.

- 9) **It caters for a diverse client base, catering for: the individual – from 15 year-olds to baby boomers to 80 year-olds, the Educational Institution – schools, private providers, community providers, TAFE colleges, universities, and the employer.** Ausmusic has established most of these markets in the existing “bricks and mortar” musicIT business and is implementing pilots with those not yet established.
  
- 10) **It provides full career pathway models-** for students at entry level training, for professionals wishing to up-skill, and for students wanting degrees in music performance, music composition, music theatre, acoustics, sound production, sound recording, multimedia, international and domestic music business, music marketing and music management.

#### 1.4 Delivery Format for musicIT.com

Given the range of potential students interested in musicIT.com and their different technological and academic backgrounds, the format needed to be a **user-friendly, people orientated format**, with **humorous interpretations of the learning, easy to navigate around, allowing students to move quickly through tasks and assessments, and have limited use of constant text**. The extra challenge for music.IT.com was how to assess the practical components. The solution was found by using local assessors, who provide the “eyes and ears” of the on-line mentor. These could be people such as the local private music teacher, or a venue manager, or a professional local musician, or an education institution.

Traditional learning in the music industry has been very much a peer driven activity and as much as possible Ausmusic is keen to ensure that musicIT.com reflects the way skills are accrued in the workplace. As the program develops, the use of chat sessions and forums will increasingly play a larger role and with the broadband technologies, international, interactive masterclasses with Billy Joel or the Bee Gees, will be a regular feature. This importance of peer interaction was identified by Ausmusic as a key tool of the learning process and is reinforced through research, such as ANTA’s Research Project in Online Teaching & Learning Styles that Facilitate Online Learning, “the ability to use the technology to contact other people was regarded as at least as important as the ability for students to view Web pages, or to use interactive programs”. (Marie Jasinski, Feb 1998) (2)

MusicIT.com uses a number of technologies to deliver its content- web pages, emails, hyperlinks, web forums, search engines, and it has a number of videos and CD Rom products that complement the on-line delivery. In the future “Hit Squads” of musicIT mentors will conduct national and international seminars. All on-line material is developed, at this stage, using minimal graphics, but with the opportunity to easily extend the material once broadband is a more common medium of delivery.

It is considered bad practice in on-line delivery, to take a text and place it on-line. Ausmusic however, has found that for Levels 1-3, it is effective and economical to use the same text and assessments for on-line delivery as the student workbooks for classroom delivery. It works because the text for Levels 1-3 is limited with lots of graphs, images and practical activities that require minimal bandwidth to place on-line. By organising the material this way, licensed institutions are able to offer learning simultaneously for on-line and on-campus students, where they can easily refer to assessments, tasks, page numbers. From Certificate 4 to Degree, musicIT.com focuses on the more traditional format of a Study Guide, with support publications, recommended readings, additional references, chat rooms, emails, and subject specific forums.

Well..... that’s the musicIT.com program outlined. We’ll now have a look at the thinking and the actions that have taken place over the last two years to create the musicIT.com product and where Ausmusic believes its future lies, and the future of on-line education in Australia.

## 2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF musicIT.com

### 2.1 The Strategy

The commercial success of operators in the music industry is significantly based on the successful exploitation of intellectual property. For Ausmusic, the copyright owners of their training materials, the challenge was to seek out ways of exploiting that material. The on-line option was chosen for two major reasons-

- 1) The prohibitive cost of other options- such as preparing CD Roms, interactive televised instruction courses, video conferencing or presenting face-to-face workshops/masterclasses or study blocks.
- 2) The nature of knowledge in the music industry- an industry where change is constant and where a music product usually has a very limited shelf life of about four weeks. With Ausmusic's published resources, only 500-1,000 copies are printed at anyone time, in order to keep the material up-to-date. The cost of keeping material up-to-date is relatively minimal with on-line delivery. On-line delivery also reflects the constantly changing, interactive, tribal, technically literate nature of people in the music industry, particularly with chat sessions and forums. This issue of working with a medium that accommodates the provision of current and relevant information in our constantly changing world, is applicable across all educational learning.

Other factors that made the internet the logical choice, included the already established relationship between the internet and music, and most importantly, the internet made the international marketplace a reality, providing the opportunity to exploit Ausmusic's unique copyrights around the world.

### 2.2 The Markets For On-Line Learning

Ausmusic identified three major international markets for their on-line product-the employer, the education institution and the individual leisure/education market.

#### *The Employer Market-*

Employers are attracted to on-line training for their staff, because it is cost-effective and staff do not have to be away from the workplace. They can also "tailor" the training to suit their needs, rather than fit into the offerings and the time restraints of an educational institution. The practical learning can be done "on-the-job", with the employee adapting their new skills/knowledge into the workplace much more efficiently and economically.

Research confirms this, as can be seen from America's FORTUNE On-Line Learning Supplement, 1999- "Industry analyst and researcher Brandon Hall has studied return on investment (ROI) of on-line learning across a spectrum of industries and companies. He concluded that companies experience a 40-60 percent cost savings when comparing instructor-led education with technology-delivered courses." (3)

#### *The Education Market*

The education market has a number of considerations. It is:

- 1) A Growing Market- Throughout the world, this market is growing significantly, as we can see from the same On-line Learning Supplement- "According to a 1999 study by Framingham, Massachusetts-based International Data Corporation (IDC), the on-line learning market is currently generating \$600 million in annual receipts and will exceed \$10 billion by 2002." (3) As well, all sectors of the education market can benefit from on-line delivery and Ausmusic has existing relationships with every one of them- universities, colleges, schools, private and community providers.
- 2) Supported By Government- The Australian Government is very aware of the growth of the education market and very interested in the potential cost efficiencies of on-line learning.

VET/higher education sectors continue to attract a far greater proportion of school leavers and lifelong learning continues to expand the higher education market for mature age students- students who are, in the main, capable of paying their way. The current government is focussing on the technical infrastructure supporting on-line delivery, including the implementation of the Instructional Management System to maximise consistency with international standards. As well, the government is assisting regional universities with restricted bandwidth and promoting on-line activities in the schools sector. The government in opposition is promoting as a major platform, “A Knowledge Nation”, with a commitment to making Australia the on-line leaders of the world.

3) Supported by some Educators- Many institutions are interested in a more open and flexible entry and delivery system to accommodate an increasingly diverse student population. They are also interested in accommodating the different learning styles and needs of students who might learn better by asynchronous, self-paced means. In early 1999, Ausmusic’s research showed that approximately half of the Australian universities had on-line offerings, and none of them were in contemporary music.

4) Not Supported by other Educators- There is considerable resentment from many academics, at both vocational and higher educational level, for the on-line option. Their concerns are mainly about the impact of the quality of the education, the constant focus on “cost savings” in education, the guarantee of a particular students’ participation, and the real time involved by academics in meaningfully working with students on-line.

#### *The Individual Leisure/Education Market*

Ausmusic found that many of their students were less interested in a full qualification and more interested in finding out what he/she wants to know, when he/she wants to know it and finding out NOW! This is particularly true amongst the younger generation of technically literate students used to having information at their fingertips. Some students were participating in the learning as a leisure activity, others were building their skill base for current or potential employment.

The growing “baby-boomer” leisure market is also more inclined to select the subject matter they just want to know, to have control of their learning and to seek out “niche” subjects that can be viably offered on-line.

The challenge for educators is to recognise that because access to information is available to anyone, their role will change, and be more about providing the infrastructure, the logic of the learning, and, most importantly, the motivational activities to keep the students interested. “Research in Australia and overseas has consistently shown that school leavers, for socio-psychological reasons, are not generally successful at independent, non-social, non-contiguous, self-paced learning” Associate Professor, Colin Latchem, 2000, pg 3 (4)

Ausmusic believes that learning will be increasingly driven by the student. The student makes their own decision of what and when they want to study...“no longer are the teacher and the textbooks the sources of all knowledge. The teacher becomes the director of the knowledge access process”- Heinich, et al., 1996 pg 8 (5)

Ausmusic initially focused on this individual market for musicIT.com. It was the market Ausmusic already serviced through face-to-face seminars/workshops with industry professionals. It was the market that best reflected the music industry, where “speed” and “being on the ball”, and being “entrepreneurial” and “working intuitively” played an enormous role. Ausmusic also knew that most current or aspiring workers in the music industry did not want to participate in full courses, but were interested in a specific package of information - ie to find out what was happening in an international territory, or how to place their music on the web, or how to perform a song for a certain audience. They needed the latest, up-dated information. They did not want rigid timetables, predominantly pedagogical learning, nor a program driven by the requirements of an educational institution. The attraction of the education institution was more in terms of socialising, networking and accessing facilities.

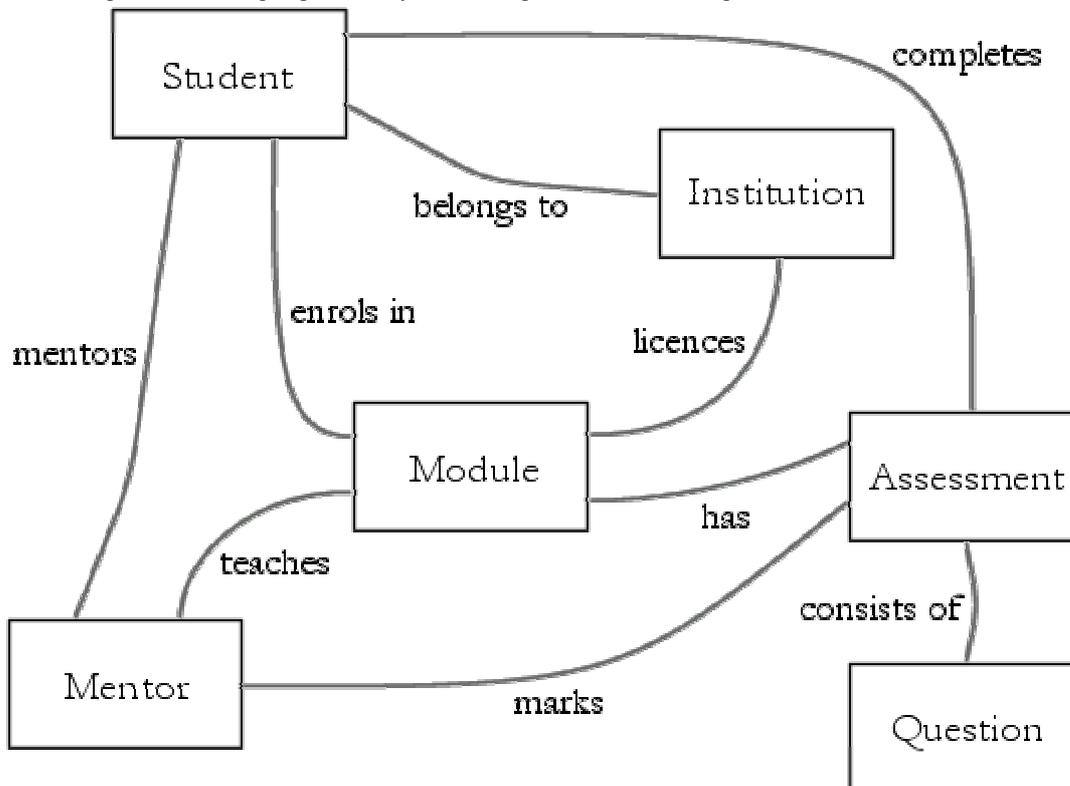
## 2.3 The Development of The Software

During December 1999, twenty-five multi-media organizations, capable of building a back-end software system were interviewed. The key function of the back-end software was to administer the access, the assessments, the mentors and the financial transactions for participation by anyone, anywhere in the world. Their quotes to do the job ranged from \$50,000 to \$800,000.

Infobrokers, a small IT company, based in Melbourne, was successful because it had a proven record of providing on-line accounting software, it demonstrated an ability to deal with the abstract and innovative concepts required of musicIT, and the company demonstrated a realistic approach to the development of the software, both in terms of processes and expenditure. Most importantly, the staff at Infobrokers demonstrated an ability to effectively communicate, a key ingredient for a team of specialists from different backgrounds.

The web enabled software behind musicIT.com has been custom developed to provide a highly flexible learning tool for music online. The creation process of musicIT.com means that this technology is easily transferable to other subject areas.

The diagram below highlights a very basic insight into the workings of the musicIT.com software.



The musicIT.com software caters for four main players- students, mentors, institutions and administrators- with the first three playing an active part in the education role, and the Administrator providing the technical support for the system.

### *Students*

As with any other educational process, the students are central to the on-line education system inherent in musicIT.com. The student will commence their interaction through exploring the modules/subjects that they wish to complete and confirming any requirements of their education institution. Once enrolled, either through an institution, or as an individual, they are provided with a username and password. The student then has ongoing access to the system, on a personalized level. Payments can be made by credit card or cheque.

Students will then be able to enrol in modules based on a selection available from a smorgasbord. They can choose “packages” for full course programs. After enrolling in a module and processing payment, (options of credit card or cheque), the student then selects a mentor from a chosen list that have been made available for the particular module of choice. If the student is studying through an institution, the education institution is selected as the mentor.

Upon selection of the mentor the student gains access to the module content and any associated assessments. To complete the module the student must complete all assessments, details of which are stored in the database. Some assessments are automarked, others require marking from the mentor. After completing all of the assessments successfully the student will be issued with a draft Statement of Attainment. To confirm that a particular student completed the module, a hard copy Statement of Attainment/full Certificate is available from Ausmusic for individuals not attached to an educational institution, once a “Confirmation Of Participation” form is completed by a locally based Person of Responsibility.

#### *Mentors*

The main role of the mentor is to guide the student through the learning process. This includes both informal and formal. The formal part of the mentor's role is to provide feedback to students on required assessments, whilst the informal contact can be anything including phone and email contact to chat room facilitating for groups.

#### *Institutions*

Whilst students can study directly through musicIT.com, the system also offers other institutions the opportunity to offer musicIT subjects to their own students. The payment can be made by the individual, or by the education institution, depending on the arrangement the institution has with the student. Institutions can also elect to offer particular packages to students that can provide them with a recognized qualification at the completion of a particular set of modules.

#### *Administrators*

Whilst the administrative function of this online learning is essential, it does not play a direct role in the educational process. The administrator basically facilitates the process and has an authoritative role in monitoring the online content and issuing credentials.

## 2.4 The staffing of musicIT.com.

As well as the software developers, other personnel required to deliver this comprehensive training program involve a project manager (covers overall co-ordination, funding and marketing) an administrator (covering day-to-day administration, placing the material on-line, fixing hitches and improving the “look” and “functionality” of the site), a content manager (co-ordinating the content of each module, the structure of the packages, the education system requirements, multi-media resources, lay-out), three content specialists (worked with writers and industry advisors to develop course material, study guides, lists of other support resources, any multimedia applications) and administration staff (processes the fees, issuing certificates, student clearances, queries).

## 2.5 The cost of musicIT.com

The cost for the development and implementation of musicIT.com is over \$1 million. This covers the initial research, the development of the software, the development of new content and the up-dating of existing materials, the placement of the material on-line, plus the administration and management of the program. Minimal costs were allocated to the marketing of the program, which was mainly due to the realisation that the only true testing we could do of the product was in the marketplace. By limiting our marketing to launches in Melbourne and Sydney, by placing ads and editorial in local street press (the main communication medium to individual consumers and workers in the music industry), and offering discount “pilots” to individuals and educational institutions, we were able to test the market response and functionality of the program and make the appropriate adjustments.

### **3. THE CONSOLIDATION PHASE**

#### **3.1 The Success and The Challenge**

Since its launch in October 2000, approximately 250 students have been involved in the program, with only 10% of those students participating as the targeted "individual" market, the rest as part of the "education institution" market- as a "value add" to Ausmusic's existing client base.

This participation rate of the individual purchasing learning on-line was below expectation, but balanced by a significant interest by the education market. The difficulty in convincing an individual to purchase on-line is reflected in all .com ventures during 2000. The "individual" market requires an enormous amount of marketing dollars to create any sort of attention. The Australian education software company ISIS spent millions of dollars in an attempt to penetrate the individual education market with their products, with very little success. The lack of security with payment of the internet continues to be an obstacle. But the main barrier to success in on-line purchasing, is the need for consumer/students to feel a "relationship" with the seller- both in terms of a human face at the point of purchase and the security of an infrastructure, such as a building and a masthead that is known.

The major income sources for musicIT.com, as outlined in the Ausmusic Prospectus (Feb 2001), will be realised through international licensing arrangements- with universities, international territories, corporate music retailers and publishers.

#### **3.2 Building On The Success**

Ausmusic's licensed education sites are purchasing musicIT.com because the relationship already exists. Ausmusic is now value-adding to its existing "bricks and mortar" business by providing another service- if institutions have students who have a time-table clash, they can complete the module on-line. If institutions have students that have to travel long distances, they can complete the theoretical concepts on-line and participate in intensive face-to-face workshops/assessments at monthly/yearly time allocations. If education institutions don't have enough classroom space or lecturers with the time or expertise, they can offer certain parts of a degree to their students, the rest they can complete on-line.

The slower than anticipated growth in sales has allowed Ausmusic to "fine-tune" its product. No amount of pre-testing can anticipate the different ways in which a student will use the on-line service. Simple issues like a student logging on to complete an assessment and then going off to make a coffee, and coming back and finding he/she had failed because they didn't complete the assessment within the required time frame require constant reiteration in the student manual and on the on-line assessment guide.

Ausmusic is continuing to prepare all their material in anticipation of broadband, but has shelved any future developments of multimedia products at this stage. In the meantime, Ausmusic is making existing multimedia product available as a VHS video, as a stand alone CD Rom, or as a CD Rom which is inserted into the student's computer and activated from the on-line module. Partnerships with multimedia companies are also being explored.

Ausmusic is also focussing on using the internet to administer, as much as possible, their existing "bricks and mortar" business. This includes the downloading of information, resources and course details, processing enrolments, re-designing the musicIT website to cater for the education market and establishing a workable student assessment log book on CD Rom, with the results being automatically registered at Head Office, or when education IT systems are compatible, registered automatically with education institutions.

#### **3.3 Consolidating Partnerhips and Networks**

A further extension of Ausmusic's awareness of the need for combining the "bricks" with the "clicks" is to establish infrastructure partnerships with institutions, organizations, companies and governments where mutual benefit and synergies can be achieved. Currently we have partnerships established or being developed, with the following:

- 1) Victoria University, offering our full program from the Certificate 1&2 in their feeder schools, through to the TAFE campuses offering the Certificate 3 to Diploma and the Degree in Music Business offered at the Footscray campus, which is a “value-add” to a traditional business degree.
- 2) Curtin University in their regional campus at Kalgoorlie, is offering a pilot for their music students
- 2) The Yothu Yindi Foundation will establish various pilots with isolated Aboriginal communities
- 3) Education Media Australia, as sister company to Ausmusic, will provide quality resources for the generic subjects in musicIT.com.
- 4) The Federal Government’s Arts funding body, the Australia Council, Ausmusic and the Australian Music Foundation Inc are working together to build skills in presenting entertainment in the local community, with local personnel completing musicIT’s on-line module in Event Management.
- 5) The Board Of Studies in Victoria now offers Ausmusic’s training program as part of their Year 11 & 12, Victorian Certificate of Education. All other states are considering the relevance of VET music in the Board Of Studies offerings.
- 6) Ausmusic is working with professional music organizations/networks in performance, composition, business and technology, to build mutually beneficial relationships. An example is the Australian Songwriters Association’s National Songwriting Competition, offering awards to Ausmusic students for the best national student song, together with performance opportunities.
- 7) Ausmusic is building excellent relationships with international universities and commercial operators. Formal arrangements are already in place with the University of North Carolina to co-present musicIT.com on z.university.
- 8) Links with music retailers to train their staff and to on-sell other related material on-line are being explored, along with links with publishers and record companies to joint venture with artist content
- 9) Distribution Arrangements with four Australian publishers for reference books are in place. Many more are being considered.

Ausmusic’s emphasis on building these “bricks and mortar” partnerships with the “on-line” offering of musicIT.com is in keeping with strategies adopted in the business .com world. An assessment by McKinsey & Company, looking at more than 700 on-line deals announced in the US between 1997-2000 shows that the greater success comes from integrating on-line and offline capabilities- of complementing the new markets and dynamic nature of the on-line with the “materials assets of brands, products, distribution, supplier networks, customer relationships and physical sites”. (6)

## **4. A NEW BEGINNING**

### **4.1 Ausmusic’s Game Plan**

Ausmusic now looks more soberly, and with greater wisdom, at the realities of on-line learning as a viable learning tool and how it can be best applied, in the short term and the long term, to maximise both the commercial and educational imperatives of Ausmusic’s charter.

For 2001/2, the priority for musicIT.com is to consolidate its “bricks and mortar” business, to “fine-tune” the on-line software/support service and to further build and exploit its intellectual property. The Directors of musicIT.com are very ambitious and positive about the long term future of the company,

but are now focussing on activities that will bring income into the company- by creating investment opportunities, by licensing its current software, by building and consolidating more partnerships.

The quality of delivery is also being addressed from the evaluations we have to date from our pilot programs. These include a more sophisticated training program for on-line mentors and writers, an induction program for students able to be customised for each education institution, and a recording system for assessment results that can be adapted to the requirements of each educational institution. The intention is to increase the interactive learning, with module forums, chat sessions and initiatives with local partners, as the market builds.

Currently, Ausmusic is seeking three key areas for partnerships.

- 1) Education institutions with quality contemporary music programs, resources and expertise interested in a joint partnership with musicIT, to place their content into the musicIT program.
- 2) Business Faculties interested in “value-adding” to their existing Bachelor/Diploma Of Business, with a specialisation in the music business. The institutions would have the option of licensing the course content and delivering the specialisation “on-campus” with assistance from Ausmusic, or taking an on-line option, whereby the institution can use their own mentors, or the on-line mentors.
- 3) Education Institutions wanting to begin or improve their on-line offering. For any institution interested in on-line learning, but lack the expertise or funds to implement it, Ausmusic will licence musicIT.com’s backend software and provide administrative support, if required. This would allow an institution to cost effectively place their courses onto an existing, functioning on-line delivery system.

It is still Ausmusic’s belief, that the individual market, where the student drives the learning, will be the biggest market in the future for musicIT.com and on-line learning generally. It is an emerging market, and will only have mass support when broadband technologies and on-line learning is commonplace, which we anticipate is in about five years. As well, to succeed, the individual market will need partnerships or franchises in each territory, to promote and value-add to the musicIT.com website.

The “smorgasboard” model, allowing education institutions, employers and individuals the opportunity to package a program to suit their needs, and to “brand” the program as their own, is very definitely the right structure for future learning. All musicIT material will continue to be prepared for the individual, employer and education markets, and the delivery of the practical modules will explore relationships with initiatives such as Interactive Televised Instruction. “ITV, particularly as it merges with the internet, holds potential for reaching student populations within and without the traditional music classroom.” Australian Journal For Music Education Vol 1, Pg 40, 2000 (7)

## **5. THE FUTURE OF ON-LINE LEARNING IN AUSTRALIA**

The following summarises what Ausmusic believes is needed to maximise the long term success of any on-line learning venture in Australia. There are two imperatives - the educational and the commercial.

### **5.1 The Educational Imperative looks at four areas.**

#### *1. “Bricks and Clicks”*

As has been shown by the musicIT.com experience, the focus for on-line learning, should be a balance of offering, “the factual learning” in the on-line mode, together with a physical, “real people”, support structure, “the interactional learning”. Ausmusic’s experience is that the vocational learning, which involves outcomes based learning- facts about sound behaviour, electricity, music theory, and music business/legal information-could be effectively covered on-line, with sometimes up to 95% automated responses. Learning which involves practical assessment/observations, requires “bricks and mortar” partnerships. Learning which involves more pedagogical thinking, which hopes to stimulate higher order cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, creativity and critical evaluation is much more difficult to transfer meaningfully into on-line delivery.

## *2. Flexibility of Educational Format*

The “smorgasboard model” of musicIT.com allows for all types of packaging options, delivery options and client users. It also provides recommended structures of delivery, from a Certificate 1 through to degree level. The model can be easily adapted to existing on-line structures.

The flexibility in being able to quickly alter or add to information cost-effectively, is crucial for any future learning structure, particularly in today’s fast changing world. To be able to make those changes efficiently, a sophisticated IT management system needs to be part of the customised software.

## *3. Co-ordinated IT Support Systems*

On-line Learning will not have a future without a co-ordinated and compatible technical infrastructure which is compatible across all educational sectors and compatible with international practice. At the moment there is no compatibility between the school and higher education systems, and no international standard in place.

## *Co-ordinated Research*

Much more work needs to be done to ascertain the validity of learning via distance education and to coordinate evaluations of the various methods of on-line delivery in Australian institutions. The research should include independent financial analysis of the true costs of delivering on-line materials, along with the cost to human resources within the education institution. The establishment of a Research Centre for On-Line Learning which could catalogue the extensive international research available, identify “best practice”, lobby for international standardisation of IT support systems, and co-ordinate any future local research would make an invaluable contribution to the Australian on-line education industry. “Bricks and mortar” activities such as this ODLAA conference play a key role in sharing information and building professional networks.

## 5.2 The Commercial Imperative looks at four areas-

### *“Steady As She Goes”*

For those institutions already involved with on-line learning, “steady as she goes” is a good strategy to adopt. It is also being adopted by .com businesses that have, since the .com crash, gone back to focussing on the fundamentals of running a business. A survey at the Forum Conference for Training Directors in Minneapolis, in June 1999 summarised it perfectly, “Online learning is here, it is going to get bigger, but they are still groping to figure out how to use it appropriately”. (8)

### *A Business Structure*

Any educational institution considering on-line learning needs to prepare, in essence, a business plan, which clearly outlines what the institution hopes to achieve and how it intends to achieve it. It should undertake a SWOT analysis, covering the **Strengths** of the educational institution – its masthead, its academic staff, its feature courses, the **Weaknesses** of the proposal- staff resistance, lack of technological infrastructure, the **Opportunities**, such as a government grant and increased off-shore interest with universities in other territories, and **Threats** could include lack of government support for infrastructure, or the possibility of a national staff strike on the issue of on-line delivery. And most importantly, the plan must be able to answer “Why are we doing this?”. It also must ensure that there is enough financial support for the project and have a realistic time-frame, preferably beginning with a small offer contained within one department, which is then evaluated, prior to any larger scale implementation.

### *Financial Viability:*

One of the key reasons for .com business failures identified by McKinsey & Company, in their evaluation of businesses from 1997-2000, was the failure “to commit the people, software, relationships, liquidity and capital that were needed to give the venture true autonomy.” (6) The typical up-front costs of a CD-ROM on a topic constituting one-fifth of a university subject or two Diploma subjects are likely to be at least \$120,000. To maintain a newsgroup or bulletin board for student on-line learning, a significant on-going expenditure on tutors and support staff is required. The updating of electronic materials continuously draws upon intellectual and pedagogic resources. All costs must be itemised and budgeted for.

Partnerships provide the opportunity to minimise the initial costs and risks involved in implementing an on-line program, whilst at the same time, maximise the marketability, the relevance and successful implementation of the program. Most on-line initiatives for educational institutions will be driven by one particular faculty. Partnerships with other faculties, or industry or related organizations should be explored as well as outsourcing areas of the venture where the infrastructure and/or expertise are not available.

#### *Marketing Skills*

Education institutions interested in offering on-line should try to maximise the markets that could potentially access part/all of their on-line offerings and build their relevance to particular markets. Their feeder institutions would be a logical target- schools into TAFE, TAFE into university, schools into universities -and then ensure that each sector can adapt the offerings to suit their clientele. A significant % of current on-line students live within relatively close proximity to the education institutions. Institutions could consider offering some “bricks and mortar” options as a value-add for those students and therefore increase the university’s masthead and income stream.

MusicIT.com places the student at the centre of the learning, encourages the institution to “market” the courses under their own banner and encourages the employer to “package” a program to suit their skills shortages.

## **8. SUMMARY**

“Australia has always been a leader in distance education- we’ve had to be because of our size and geographic position. We are very good at multimedia and speak most of the languages of the world, We can use these advantages to lead in on-line education if we act now”- from the Leader of the Federal Opposition, the Hon Kim Beazley, 24 Jan 2001. (9) Or from the Liberal Government’s Strategic Framework For The Information Economy, March 1998 “ Technologies offer the potential to transform the ways in which teaching and learning occur.” (10)

Make no mistake, the politicians are keen to explore ways of further reducing the costs of education- through options such as on-line learning and getting non-tax payer dollars to pay for education- targeting user pay options and industry contributions. On-line learning and vocational education are the two major growth areas for the education industry. Educationalists can sit back and become irrelevant, or do what they can to ensure that the best possible balance of commercial and educational imperatives is in place.

Throughout this paper, Ausmusic, has argued that as Australia develops an on-line education industry, that there is need for balance- a balance of the “bricks and clicks” educational model which combines the advantages of on-line learning- the cost efficiencies, the flexibility, the access, the speed of the on-line, together with, wherever possible, the human interaction situation. And, at the same time, this “bricks and clicks model” must be balanced with the commercial realities of a .com venture.

I thank everybody associated with the development and implementation of musicIT.com and look forward to this new mature phrase, as a more experienced deliverer of on-line learning. I hope that this insight into musicIT.com has provided you all with some valuable insights for your own on-line activities.

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