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eLearning Africa 2009 from Dakar, Senegal

By Simon Birt, Paris, France

What a great trip once again. This year's elearning show from Africa was action-packed with thousands of visitors from all over the world. The welcoming speech was delivered by President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal. He talked about initiatives in his country and other African nations to develop education and learning using technology. His overall message was that it is recognised as extremely important that Senegal embraces elearning and moves forward to implement the necessary infrastructure to allow this to happen.

Over the next two days we heard from speakers about all aspects of eLearning and the resources available for support in Africa. Unfortunately, too many speakers sessions were thinly-disguised sales pitches for products and technology, and it would be nice to see this better policed going forward. The programme is also heavily weighted towards presentations from Universities and other educational establishments, and it would be valuable to see more companies relating the benefits of using elearning in the corporate workplace.

In general, the programme reflected the state of the progress of elearning in Africa I thought. Much is still made of the lack of resources and infrastructure, evoking the conclusion that even though many understand the potential of eLearning for African nations, without financing, much of the good work done so far will go no further. That is why it is encouraging to see the involvement of the President of the host country supporting the event. However, someone close to the organisation of this year's event also remarked to me, that without the participation at the highest level of the host country, the event would have almost no impact.

Of the people that came by the Trivantis stand a general assessment would be that there was plenty of interest and enthusiasm, but very few serious buyers with funded projects looking for tools to develop and manage elearning. Still, there was definitely a silver-lining for us; if money is short in Africa to develop elearning, it favours those organisations that are prepared to enter into their own authoring programmes to develop content. In fact, if established properly, there is every opportunity for an organisation to create a decent revenue stream from it's elearning programme. Those that manage to do this will develop self-funded, engaging and rich content-full programmes.

Next year the show is going to be hosted by Zambia. I sincerely hope we'll be there with a stand and participating in the show itself. Every year we go we learn about the progress of elearning and I am convinced that in the next few years, there will be quite an explosion of elearning in Africa. If you make it out there be sure to drop by the Trivantis stand and say hello!