ARIA KAPLAN: THE HOT LINE

CYBER-DONATIONS—PHILANTHROPY OR THEFT?

WITH THE RECENT SURGE IN CHARITABLE DONATIONS around the country, I wonder if this penchant for giving will spill over into PC philanthropy, i.e., sharing unused computing power and hard disk space for the benefit of medical and other research. There are already several projects out there that allow you to do this, often simply by installing peer-to-peer software similar to Napster and Gnutella that initiates when a screensaver is activated. Recent high-profile examples include Intel’s collaboration with United Devices of Austin, Texas, in a study to develop better drug treatments for cancer. The essence of these projects is to allow almost anyone with a computer to collaborate on profound social issues by helping provide some of the many millions of hours of data processing cycles needed for research.

But if you are sitting in your office thinking “Wow—this is such an easy way to help a great cause—I’m in,” hold your horses, techno-cowboy. Unless you obtain authorization from your employer before using its computers to get involved in such projects, you could find yourself facing legal problems, even jail time.

Consider the case of David McOwen, a former computer administrator at DeKalb Technical College in Clarkston, Ga. In December of 1999, McOwen reportedly loaded an unauthorized distributed computing program—used for conducting software encryption research—onto a few hundred campus computers. When school officials finally confronted him about this over a year later, he resigned. Now, according to press reports, he is facing possible criminal charges, including 30 years in prison and hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines under the Georgia Computer Systems Protection Act.

Again, developing the courseware for self-directed e-learning would have taken too long—not a good thing when you need to stay competitive. “We knew we wanted to deliver learning to more people around the world, and we knew we had to deliver it faster,” said Peterson, in Oakland, Calif.

While developing content for live e-learning is quicker and less expensive, it’s not simply a matter of repurposing classroom materials, experts caution. “You just can’t take classroom slides, convert them to HTML and have a talking head deliver it,” said James Lundy, an analyst at Gartner. Instead, material such as PowerPoint presentations should be interspersed with engaging, interactive activities, whether it’s conversation with an instructor or simulations of lab environments.

Although live e-learning represents significant advantages over self-paced e-learning, it’s not the answer for every learner, experts say. What really matters is the training objective. If, for example, there’s good off-the-shelf content for subjects such as IT or professional skills, there’s no need to reinvent the wheel by turning to live e-learning. However, in many cases, off-the-shelf content fills in the gaps only when it comes to rudimentary skills, but then enterprises need to bring all learners together to go over how those skills are applied in a particular business. That means, in many cases, there’s a case for a blended solution...

UNLESS YOU GET AUTHORIZATION, YOU COULD FIND YOURSELF FACING LEGAL PROBLEMS, EVEN JAIL TIME.

Ari Kaplan is an attorney at the New York law firm of McDermott, Will & Emery. He is concentrating on e-business legal issues. The information in this column is intended for reference only and should not be construed as legal advice.

E-LEARNING from Page 50

same users are giving “very positive feedback” on their initial exposure to the pilot version of live e-learning in which instructors can check in with students to see if they are indeed flummoxed by the technology and need a helping hand. Instructors can also use the application to get a report that shows which students didn’t show up.

APL, a 152-year-old, $2.3 billion global container transportation company, is another enterprise that turned to synchronous e-learning because it enabled It ain’t cheap if nobody uses it