

# Interview guide for case studies in the Megatrends project

## *Institutional factors*

Name of institution: CrossKnowledge  
Manager of e-learning: Mickaël OHANA  
URL of e-learning: [www.crossknowledge.com](http://www.crossknowledge.com)  
Number of online courses: 300  
Number of e-learning students: 250 000

% of e-learning students who could be said to be distance education students:  
(defined as students who do at least 50.1% of their programme online): 50 %

## **Historical context**

1. How would you describe the history of distance education in your institution?

Crossknowledge has passed through 3 stages

:

- Learning portals from 2000 until 2002
- Blended learning from 2002 until 2005
- Distance instructor-led training from 2005 until 2007

2. How has competence in e-learning developed in your institution and how has it contributed to your success?

Each Innovation has a market test in vitro & in vivo before global roll out. People competence has to change. We hire external consultants and invest a lot in existing team.

3. Has this development been abrupt or would you describe it more as a gradual step-by-step process?

This development has been abrupt. E-learning is growing at a 60% annual rate over the last 5 years.

4. How has online education been followed up by evaluation and research and how has this contributed to your success?

Every year we conduct surveys with our clients at 2 levels :

- Corporate satisfaction & needs
- Learner satisfaction & needs

Our clients are involved in R&D through deployment steering committees and board for e-learning research & development. This is key to success.

### Technical issues

5. How would you describe competence in information and communication technology in your institution?

CrossKnowledge brings together a strong blend of competences in order to address the whole e-learning IT value chain and integrate the different IT components:

- **E-learning modules:** we intensively use Flash animations and videos for our new generation of e-learning modules. We don't develop all e-learning modules in-house but we have the required competences to integrate these new technologies with our e-learning platform.
- **User interface:** our new generation of Player is displaying the e-learning modules using the latest Ajax and Flash technologies.
- **Web-based and database-driven applications:** in order to design scalable e-learning applications, we have competences in designing Web-based applications that access efficiently databases.
- **Networks and performance:** we have internal consultants that help our customers adapting their network parameters in order to optimize the delivery of our Rich Media content

6. To which extent are e-learning courses in your institution based on widely used technologies that can be taken into use by students without requiring them to buy additional hardware or software?

Our e-learning solutions are Web-based and only use open standards (HTML, Javascript, Ajax architecture) or widely used multimedia plug-in (Macromedia Flash Player) for animations, video and audio files.

These Web-based applications can be viewed using Explorer but also Firefox, the Open Source browser that run on Microsoft, Apple and Linux machines.

7. How would you describe the integration between different IT-systems that are involved in e-learning in your institution? How has this contributed to your success?

We have built strong integration links between the front office and back office systems, in order to speed-up the delivery of new modules and of new training courses. Our project managers can very easily roll-out new courses with few parameters, using our powerful back-office CrossKnowledge Deployer.

8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your e-learning administrative systems (from enrolment through delivery to certification)?

The main strength of our e-learning administrative system lies in the speed of delivery of our projects:

- Our CrossKnowledge Deployer system allows the project managers to deliver quickly and efficiently new courses
- New learners can be enrolled very quickly either through massive enrolment list uploaded with back office or with automated connections through powerful Web Services
- Learners can link directly from their Corporate Intranet environment to our LMS without entering again their login and password, thanks to our SSO interface (Single Sign On)
- Our powerful LRM system (Learner Relationship Manager)

We don't offer certification services and processes today.

## Courses

9. Which types of subjects are covered by online education in your institution and what is the relative importance of different subjects?

CrossKnowledge self-training sessions are 30-minute asynchronous training sessions covering key concepts, practices or managerial behaviours.

CrossKnowledge currently offers close to 300 sessions in seven different languages (French, English, Spanish, German, Polish, Chinese and Japanese) organised in almost 50 distance training programmes in three main fields:

- **Management fundamentals**: marketing, finance, management control, strategy and human resources; (40% of training programmes) ;
- **Management techniques**: employee and team management, project management, customer management and negotiation/sales; (40% of training programmes) ;
- **Personal management skills**: personal effectiveness, personal development and communication (20% of training programmes).

Intended to pass on fundamentals, **they are based on internationally recognised concepts and techniques** (e.g. mutual gains bargaining), allowing their use in any company and any culture.

10. How would you describe the “onlineability” of the subjects your institution has chosen for e-learning?

**CrossKnowledge Solutions are based on an exclusive teaching format tested by thousands of learners in more than 40 countries**, with an average level of satisfaction and perceived usefulness greater than 80% and a learning effectiveness that has been proven by pre/post training measurements:

- use of one or more voices that guide the participant;
- massive use of video to demonstrate good and bad practices;
- inductive teaching that promotes discovery as opposed to "top-down" methods; alternating between case studies, contributions and practical exercises, like in a training room;
- thorough feedback that does not judge or penalise the participant;
- frequent interactivity to pace training and keep users active;
- systematic practical exercises to check that know-how is really being acquired and not just presented.

Organised in a modular fashion, CrossKnowledge Sessions™ enable:

- individualised training on demand;
- training of geographically remote groups;
- provision of a training programme that is common to an entire group;
- training of large groups in shorter timeframes by using a pre-existing catalogue;
- optimisation of classroom training: better preparation and less time spent in the classroom because concepts and techniques were taught beforehand.

To provide a comfortable learning environment and to motivate and support learners, distance training programmes are all coached by CrossKnowledge tutors whose degree of involvement is determined beforehand with the customer.

### **Individualised tutoring**

CrossKnowledge distance training programmes can be followed through individualised tutored itineraries. In this case, CrossKnowledge implements an original educational approach based on a personal action project. A CrossKnowledge tutor with professional experience and a college degree helps the participant outline his or her project and monitors its implementation through regular feedback. Training resources such as CrossKnowledge Self-Training Sessions are therefore used actively through immediate application, the best way to ensure effective learning and assimilation. The tutor acts as a **coach who supports the participant's growth in skills.**

## Collective tutoring

CrossKnowledge distance training can be followed via collective itineraries that harness the power of collaborative work. In these collective itineraries, followed entirely through distance training, CrossKnowledge tutors give the participants problems to be solved and lead work groups through phone conferences, forums and chats. Work on performance and the beginning of behaviour change is facilitated by group discussion, just as in a classroom. Problem-solving concepts and techniques are conveyed through CrossKnowledge Self-training Sessions. CrossKnowledge tutors propose the work to be accomplished, lead the groups and stimulate discussion. This educational engineering represents the state of the art in distance training.

## Training support

Participants experiencing difficulties understanding the material can e-mail their questions to the CrossKnowledge training team, who answer in English or French within 24 to 48 hours, depending on the difficulty of the question. Training support is provided with the help of the experts who contributed to the content of the CrossKnowledge training programmes.

11. Do the online courses provided by your institution have flexible start-up and progression?

Thanks to CrossKnowledge self-assessments, each programme is individualised. Used in distance training, CrossKnowledge assessment solutions enable you:

- **prior to training**, to give motivating feedback to each participant on the main areas requiring improvement and if necessary, to prescribe individualised programmes based on the level and needs of each learner;
- **after training**, to measure what has been acquired in terms of both knowledge (measured immediately after the training session) and effective practices (measured several months after the programme);

The main original feature of these questionnaires is that they measure not only knowledge but effective practice as well, through questions that are focused on observable behaviour. **The CrossKnowledge Self-Assessments solution therefore allows you to measure the learner's development of operational skills** and not just his/her acquisition of theoretical knowledge (which is not always put into practice).

12. What is the role or importance of synchronous and asynchronous communication between students and teachers and among students themselves?

The synchronous communication represents, on one hand, the training in room and, on the other hand, the groupings in the conference call or in virtual class generally at

the beginning and at the end of the programme. It adds up approximately 60 % of the total course. The asynchronous communication serves 2 roles:

- Make everybody at the same level in an individualized way before the training in room
- Transfer techniques / process / concepts before the training in room to be able to concentrate the groups on the application.

With 100 % distance learning, the synchronous communication consists of phone points with the tutor, or of virtual classes and represents 10 % of the total course. CrossKnowledge actually launches programmes in which the asynchronous part (Eg : forum between students) will represent 30 to 40 % of the programme. CrossKnowledge consultants make recommendations on the type of training system to be implemented and the balance between synchronous and asynchronous communication, on-site and remote, and individual or collective training

### **Management, strategy and attitudes**

13. How would you describe involvement from the institution leadership in terms of being supportive, and how has this been important for success?

Like any other change, the introduction of new distance training methods first requires thinking about the best way to manage this change. CrossKnowledge helps its customers define **a change management plan** that includes very precise actions as well as:

- a marketing and communication plan for executives & sponsors
- an outline of the participants and identification of the sponsors to be called on;
- for the HR network, awareness initiatives (demonstration portals, presentations, case studies, newsletters, etc.) and training / certification in the new learning methods (see Empowerment below);
- for end users, push marketing and loyalty development initiatives (company executive videos, multimedia presentations for the launch, connection kits, goodies, promotional e-mails, etc.);
- study and feedback systems for completed projects (on-line surveys, focus groups, etc.).

Top management is necessary and key. Good products and services are also indispensable and key to deliver the promise.

14. How would you describe the attitudes of the different groups of staff towards online teaching? How has this affected your success?

Every e-learning project has to be transverse and involve staff from different teams : R&D, Technology, content, tutoring, consulting, and marketing.



17. How would you describe the effectiveness of your administrative routines in online education?

All processes have been organised in the Learning Management System. Equivalent of 3 full-time employees has been freed from administrative routines.

18. To which extent do teachers involved in online education have predictable and manageable workloads?

The Learning Management System organises planning with a 3 month visibility for distant coaching interviews or seminars.  
Tutoring online is organised on a yearly basis.

19. To which extent does your institution collaborate with other educational institutions and how has this affected success?

More than 30 partnerships have been signed.

Today, CrossKnowledge is the partner of the top three French colleges (HEC, ESSEC, ESCP) that use distance training solutions in their MBA and Masters programmes and of a growing number of regional schools. CrossKnowledge was also chosen as the main solution by Manchester Business School (United Kingdom), Brandeis University (United States) and ESMT (Germany). CrossKnowledge also co-develops training programmes with one of the leading universities in distance education worldwide: Open University.

The leading names in classroom training have chosen CrossKnowledge as their distance training solution, offering the market blended learning programmes.

Familiar with the CrossKnowledge approach, they are completely at ease with the blended educational engineering philosophy. CrossKnowledge develops part of its Training Sessions catalogue in conjunction with some of them. Some partners that work with CrossKnowledge on an international scale include:

- Mercuri International;
- Krauthammer International;
- Tea Cegos (Spain);
- MS Cegos China;
- BCon Japan;
- BCon USA...

These partnerships allow our customers to deploy blended learning programmes in more than **30 countries throughout Europe, North and South America, and Asia**. It's key to get "labels" and legitimate the quality of distance education.

20. How would you describe the credibility of your institution (both formal and informal) with the government and public administration and how has this been an important criterion for success?

In France, we have been audited to comply by the rules of distance education. It is a key criteria to integrate the cost into the legal constraint to be spent on training (1,8% of payrolls).

21. How are you able to handle the large number of online courses and students?

With 3 data centres in Europe, America and Asia. 10000 replicated servers throughout the world

The CrossKnowledge SIGAL® Learning Management System is the core of CrossKnowledge's technological platform. It combines ease of use, flexibility and power. Its advanced features allow mass customisation and quick deployment of customised training itineraries.

### **Ease of use**

The interface is accessible through a standard Web browser and its user-friendly ergonomics enables it to be used without any training required. The screens were designed based on the training itinerary creation processes.

### **Flexibility**

The deployment models designed by CrossKnowledge make it quick and easy to adapt training itineraries to the training objectives of each customer, in compliance with their graphic guidelines.

The new blended learning features make it flexible and easy to organise blended training itineraries by integrating all the distance and on-site training methods into a single management tool.

### **Power**

The CrossKnowledge SIGAL® LMS platform is designed to support massive e-learning solution deployments for populations of several tens of thousands of learners without affecting response times.

## **Economy**

22. How would you describe the cost-effectiveness of online education in your institution? How has cost-effectiveness affected success?

Blended learning is 20% less expensive than equivalent seminars.  
Distance training is 50% less expensive than equivalent seminars.

23. To which extent is income from operation of online education stable and predictable?

It is highly predictable : 50% annual growth rate. Costs are defined by investment (80%) and by recurring expenses (20%).

24. To which extent does your institution experience pressure to be flexible to be able to adapt to a changing market?

It is an always changing market and flexibility is key. 40% of our revenues are invested in R&D every year (- with 2 year projects on average – Eg : simulators with natural language)

25. To which extent does your institution apply a strategy of flexible employment and use staff to adapt to changes in markets?

We recruit about 20 new staff every year representing 25% of new entrants. We invest also 7% of payrolls in internal training and develop a “CrossKnowledge Academy”.

## **Additional factors**

26. What other factors have contributed to sustainability, robustness and the achievement of critical mass in your institution?

- International development: CrossKnowledge solutions are available in 6 languages (French, English, Spanish, German, Polish, Chinese and Japanese) and will be available in the year 2007 in German.

- A range of services with high added value to support human resources and training departments and help them successfully deploy distance training: upstream consulting to match skills development systems with the organisation's critical needs, educational engineering of training systems, change management planning, project management, back-office management, etc.
- Simple and powerful technologies for integrating and distributing distance and on-site training procedures: platform, tutoring tools, virtual classrooms, training site creation wizards, etc. (see p. xxx);
- High investment on quality and R&D.

Thank you