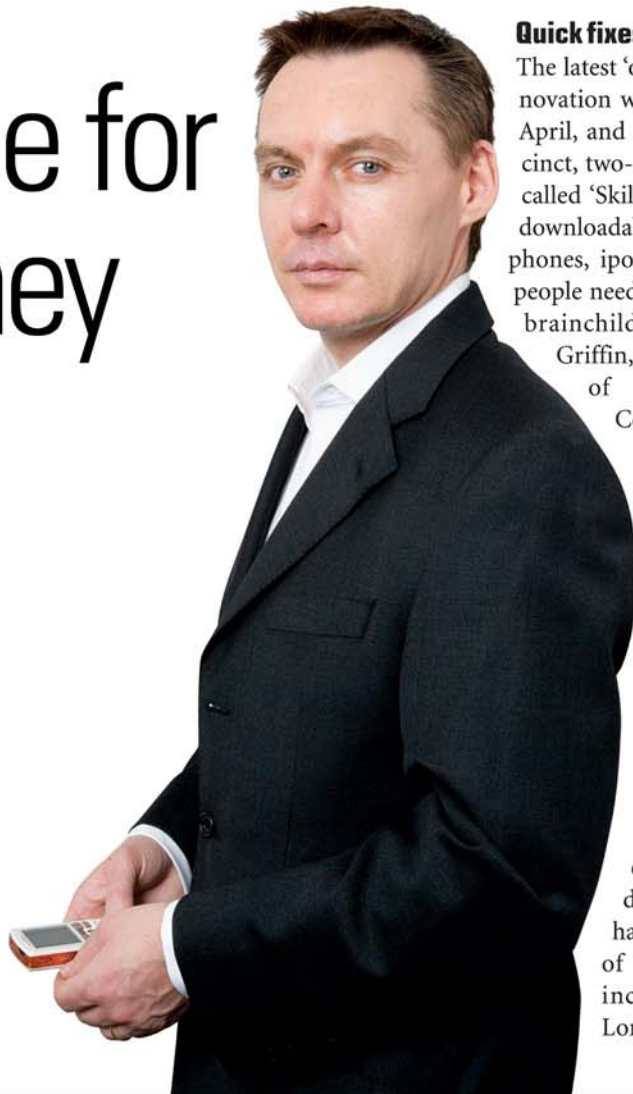


Value for money

90% of learning is lost. It's like sitting in the bath with the plug out...

Gerry Griffin
Skill Pill



Quick fixes

The latest 'on-demand' innovation was launched in April, and comprises succinct, two-minute courses called 'Skill Pills', that are downloadable onto mobile phones, ipods or PDAs as people need them. It is the brainchild of Gerry

Griffin, (left) founder of the Business Communication Forum, and is based on the fact that most people only need quick reminders on subjects such as giving presentations, and can take a Skill Pill as they need it.

As a methodology, on-demand courses have the backing of institutions including the London Business

School. Nigel Nicholson, professor of organisational behaviour, says: "Technology has become a major cause of information overload, but this way it can become part of the solution." In a swipe at the effectiveness of e-learning, early trials of mobile learning by Skill Pill have shown that 60% of users found it a very useful method of delivery, with 51% regarding it as more memorable than traditional 'talk'n chalk' courses.

But maybe the one true benefit of options like those by Skill Pill, Video Arts, and even those that offer the mentoring approach, is that in all these examples, the learning/training materials stay within the company. This, says Darryl Bibby, dean of the school of lifelong learning at Coventry University, is something course providers must accept that cash-strapped HR directors need to have. "So often you have to buy into a type of methodology that is non-specific to your company, and isn't transferable back to the business, while the materials are kept at arm's length," he says.

At Coventry, Bibby is providing on-site mentors for the Government's Capability Improvement Project, a scheme open to businesses that want to 'transform through learning', and which is already working with the likes of the AA. "The curriculum is based on people's work and monitors their ongoing skills. This way, the curriculum is left inside the company. When we leave, the organisation stays powerful."

When funding is tight, those courses that offer the greatest chance to retain knowledge clearly look set to win the day. The good news for HR directors is that there is still plenty of choice about which type of delivery they chose. ■

Gerry Griffin, founder of Skill Pill Mobile Learning and the Business Communication Forum, hopes 'taking a Skill Pill' will become as common a phrase as 'taking an aspirin'. Skill Pills are instant medicines for the mind – pain relief for the HR headache of escalating courses costs. "Each year £10 billion pounds is spent on executive courses," says Griffin, "but studies suggest that 90% is lost over the subsequent 12 months. It's like sitting in the bath with the plug out." Skill Pills range from 'Mind Mapping', to

'Persuasion' and Griffin has partnered with Pearson Education to offer its range of courses as miniature Skill Pills. "Time is more valuable and learning time is being squeezed," says Griffin. "Skill Pills tap into neurolinguistic triggers and help maintain knowledge in bite-sized chunks." Several corporations have already signed up to the concept. For example, FTSE4Good, the ethical index launched by FTSE in 2001, recently created top-line training for employees involved with green compliance issues.