

LGUIDE
The E-Learning Experts™

**E-Learning Course Publishers:
A Comparative Analysis
and Industry Directory**

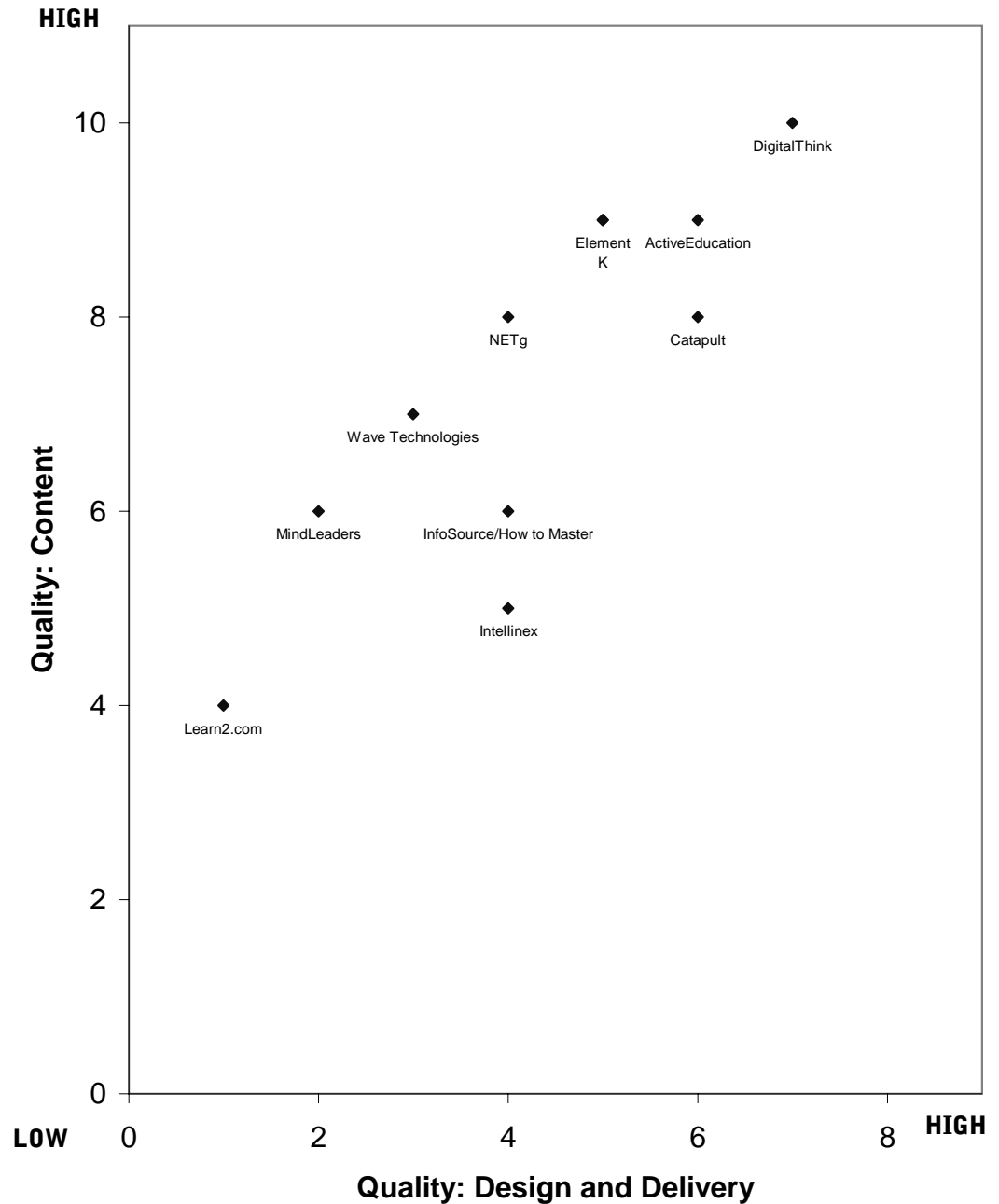
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Desktop Applications: Publishers at a Glance



The above graph is a map of the publishers Lguide has examined, based on the average content and instructional design quality of their desktop application skills courses. Publishers that provided very limited course access to Lguide reviewers are not represented here.

The detailed chart on the next page displays Lguide’s analysis of content and instructional design. The data for the graph above was calculated from the detailed chart by assigning two points for each area in which the publisher was ranked “good,” one point for each area in which the publisher was ranked “adequate” or “variable,” and zero points for each area in which the publisher was ranked “poor.” Note that these are averages: publishers with particularly large catalogs are more likely to have individual courses that are outside of this range.

Publishers at a Glance

Desktop Applications				Content					Instructional Design				
Publisher	Catalog Areas	% of Catalog Evaluated	Average Rating	Accurate	Concise	Logical	Useful	Contextualized	Engagement	Skills Practice	Assessments	Usability	Custom Path
FULL EVALUATION													
ActiveEducation	MS Office	42%	3.37	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Catapult, an IBM Company	MS Office	N/A	3.28	●	●	●	●	↑↓	●	●	●	●*	●
DigitalThink	MS Office and Others	30%	3.83	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	~
Educational Multimedia Corp.	MS Office	5% **	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	~
Element K	MS Office and Others	19%	2.98	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	~
Intellinex (formerly Teach.com)	MS Office and Others	19%	2.58	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●
Learn2.com	MS Office and Others	9%	2.35	●	○	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	●
MindLeaders	MS Office and Others	41%	2.73	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	●	~
NETg	MS Office and Others	23%	2.90	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	~
Wave Technologies	MS Office	N/A	3.00	●	●	●	●	●	↑↓	●	○	●	●
BRIEF EVALUATION													
InfoSource/How to Master	MS Office and Others	4%	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	↑↓

Key to Rankings Chart

Desktop Applications

Catalog Breadth:

"MS Office" indicates publisher offers courses for all applications in the Microsoft Office suite.
"MS Office and Others" indicates publisher offers courses for all applications in the Microsoft Office suite, as well as other desktop applications.

% of Catalog Evaluated

"N/A" indicates publisher's catalog size is rapidly changing (as of February 2001)

Average Rating

Average number of stars on Lguide's five star rating scale. See Appendix for more information about this scale. "N/A" indicates that Lguide has not written formal reviews of a sufficient number of courses to calculate an average rating.

Content and Instructional Design

- good
- adequate
- poor
- ↑↓ quality varies

Custom Path

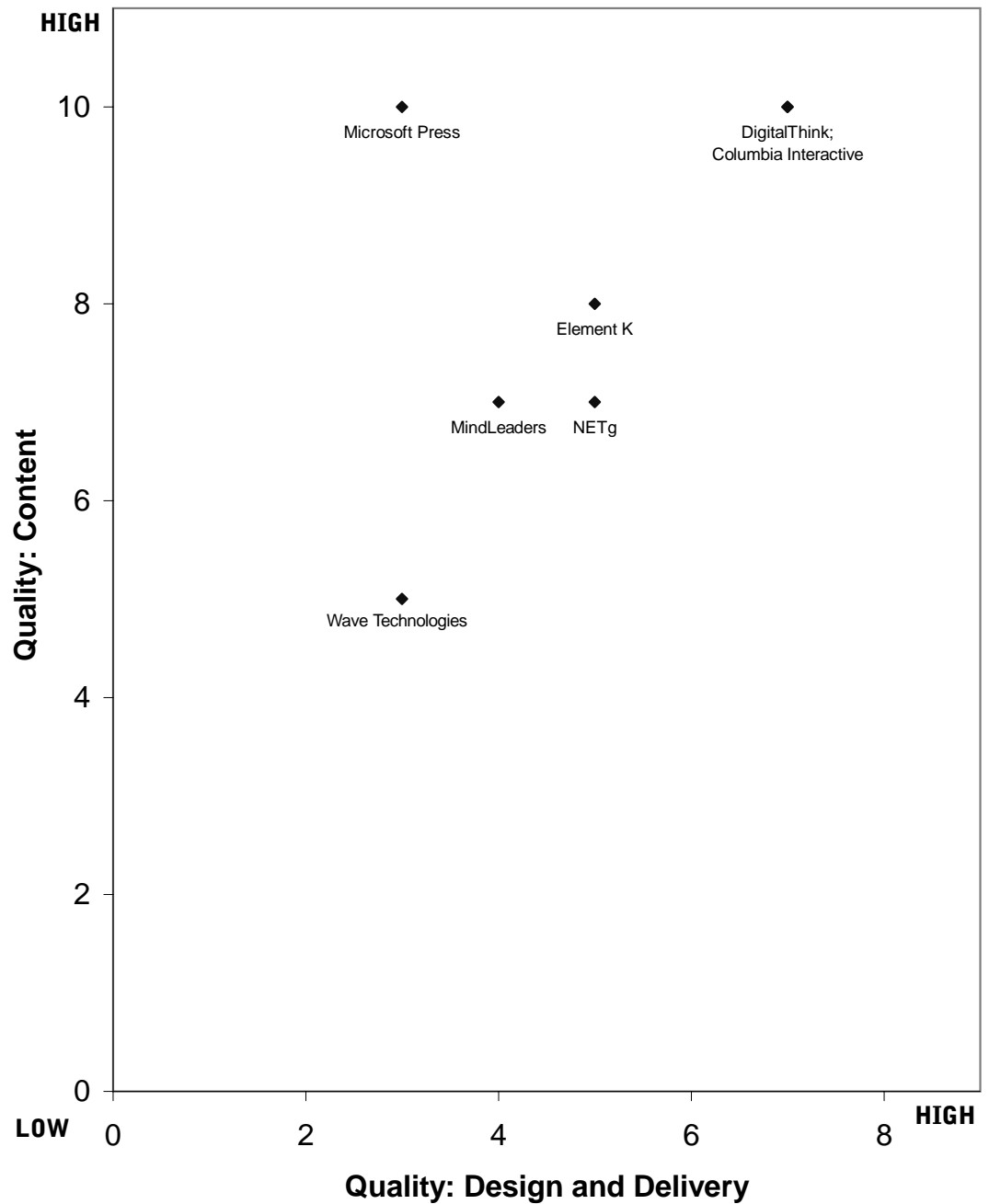
- ~ Indicates that a custom path is not necessary because course navigation is flexible
- ↑↓ Custom path option varies from course to course

Desktop Applications Footnotes

*Catapult, an IBM Company is rated ● for usability, because the utility of their courses depends upon bandwidth capability. At high bandwidths, Catapult courses are usable. Courses taken on a connection less than a T1, however, involve long downloading waits.

**Publisher provided Lguide with access to a limited number of courses.

Professional IT: Publishers at a Glance



The above graph is a map of the publishers Lguide has examined, based on the average content and instructional design quality of their Professional IT skills courses. Publishers that provided very limited course access to Lguide reviewers are not represented here.

The detailed chart on the next page displays Lguide's analysis of content and instructional design. The data for the graph above was calculated from the detailed chart by assigning two points for each area in which the publisher was ranked "good," one point for each area in which the publisher was ranked "adequate" or "variable," and zero points for each area in which the publisher was ranked "poor." Note that these are averages: publishers with particularly large catalogs are more likely to have individual courses that are outside of this range.

Publishers at a Glance

Professional IT					Content					Instructional Design				
Publisher	Catalog Size	Catalog Areas	% of Catalog Evaluated	Average Rating	Accurate	Concise	Logical	Useful	Authentic	Engagement	Skills Practice	Assessments	Usability	Custom Path
FULL EVALUATIONS														
DigitalThink	Medium	Broad Range	34%	3.71	●	●	●	●	●	↑↓	●	●	●	~
Element K	Medium	Broad Range	15%	3.16	●	↑↓	●	↑↓	●	○	●	○	●	~
Microsoft Press	Small	MS Topics	33%	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	~
MindLeaders	Large	Broad Range	16%	3.09	●	○	●	↑↓	↑↓	○	○	○	●	○
NETg	Large	Broad Range	17%	2.85	●	○	●	○	○	↑↓	↑↓	●	↑↓	●
SmartForce	Large	Broad Range	1%**	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
Wave Technologies	Medium	Broad Range	N/A	N/A	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
BRIEF EVALUATIONS														
Columbia Interactive	Small	Programming	N/A	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	None
Pearson Technology Group Interactive	Large	Broad Range	1%	N/A	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	None

Key to Rankings Chart

Professional IT

Catalog Size:

Small = Under 100
Medium = 100-200
Large = 200+

% of Catalog Evaluated

"N/A" indicates publisher's catalog size is rapidly changing (as of February 2001)

Average Rating

Average number of stars on Lguide's five star rating scale. See Appendix for more information about this scale. "N/A" indicates that Lguide has not written formal reviews of a sufficient number of courses to calculate an average rating.

Content and Instructional Design

- good
- adequate
- poor
- ↑↓ quality varies

Custom Path

~ indicates that a custom path is not necessary because course navigation is flexible
None indicates course structure merits a custom path, but one is not available

Professional IT Footnotes

**Publisher provided Lguide with access to a limited range of courses.

Contact Information



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Full Evaluation: DigitalThink

www.digitalthink.com

DigitalThink's Professional IT and desktop catalogs offer excellent learning experiences. Their ability to consistently produce top-notch training materials for technical subjects is currently unmatched.

Company History

DigitalThink, a San Francisco-based company, was founded in March 1996 by CEO and President Pete Goettner, Vice President Steve Zahm, and General Manager of Products Umberto Milletti. The company went public in February 2000, and is traded on the Nasdaq under the ticker symbol DTHK.

DigitalThink has specialized in e-learning from its inception, and significantly expanded its LMS capabilities by acquiring Arista Knowledge Systems in July of 2000. DigitalThink offers both off the shelf courseware and customizable solutions, all hosted on DigitalThink's servers.

Other Products and Services

Business Courses

DigitalThink offers a few business courses in value selling and e-commerce that use the same general format and features as DigitalThink's IT and desktop offerings. DigitalThink has also produced courseware in conjunction with the American Bankers Association. The majority of the American Bankers Association/DigitalThink courseware is slated for release in March and April. Lguide will review those courses when they are available.

E-learning Solutions

DigitalThink offers large-scale e-learning solutions that combine off the shelf courseware and custom-developed courses with client provided content.

Reporting Tools

DigitalThink also offers Web-based reporting tools.

Awards

Forbes.com

Forbes Favorite

PC Computing

As Good as it Gets

NewMedia

Gold and Silver Invision Awards

CIO Web Business

50/50 Awards

Lguide.com

Editor's Choice Award, "Introduction to C++"

Foreign Language Availability

Courses are currently available in Spanish, German, French, and Japanese. Courseware can be customized to other languages.

Resellers

DigitalThink's courses can be purchased from the following portals:

- BlueU
- IQdestination
- KnowledgePlanet
- Knowledge Max
- THINQ
- VirtualLearn

Major LMS Experience

The following major Learning Management System providers report having successfully integrated DigitalThink's courses with their systems:

- Saba

Management Team

Chairman, CEO, and Co-Founder: Pete Goettner

Before co-founding DigitalThink, Goettner was director of marketing for Knowledge Revolution, a developer of educational and engineering software. He has experience in the marketing and promotion of educational software, product marketing, corporate partnership development and general management. Goettner has a BS in Computer Engineering from the University of Michigan and an MBA from the Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley.

President: Jon Madonna

Before joining DigitalThink, Madonna was President and CEO of Carlson Wagonlit Travel, a business travel and expense management company. Prior to that, he was Vice Chairman of The Travelers Group, a financial services and insurance company, and CEO of its personal lines business. Previously, Madonna was with KPMG for 28 years, and was chairman of KPMG Consulting International from 1995-98. He holds a BS in accounting from the University of San Francisco.

VP and Co-Founder: Steve Zahm

Prior to co-founding DigitalThink, Zahm was Director of Digital Media/High-Tech Consulting at Prophet Brand Strategy, a strategic management consulting firm. He holds a BA in Economics from Stanford University and an MBA from UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business.

General Manager of Products and Co-Founder: Umberto Milletti

Prior to co-founding DigitalThink, Milletti was Director of Product Development at Knowledge Revolution, in charge of both the professional and educational software product lines. His experience includes product development management positions, as

Notable Clients

3Com
Adobe Systems
American Bankers Association
Charles Schwab
Circuit City
Cisco Systems
COMPAQ
Deutsche Bank
KPMG Consulting
Lockheed Martin
Oracle
Texas Instruments
USWest

well as marketing product management, management of technical documentation, product engineering, and quality assurance. He holds a BS in Electrical Engineering, Summa Cum Laude, from Tufts University and an MS in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science from UC Berkeley.

Content Partners

American Bankers Association (ABA)
Adobe
Gold Standard Multimedia
iGeneration
Microsoft
Red Hat
Siebel
Zyman Marketing Group

Financial Overview

DigitalThink went public in February 2000, and is traded on the Nasdaq under the ticker symbol DTHK. Their market cap as of February 2001 was \$315 million. Revenues for the nine months ending December 31, 2000 were \$25.8 million.

Mergers and Acquisitions

Acquired

Arista Knowledge Systems, July 2000

Notable Clients

Intuit

In December 2000, DigitalThink was chosen by Intuit to develop an online training program for Intuit's QuickBooks and QuickBooksPro small business financial management software.

Sun Microsystems

SunU launched a pilot program with DigitalThink in 1998 with 12 catalog courses on Java programming. DigitalThink's e-learning courses were offered in conjunction with instructor-led classes on identical subjects. According to DigitalThink, the pilot program was successful, and SunU is continuing and expanding its use of DigitalThink.

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Course Analysis: DigitalThink Desktop Applications

DigitalThink is your best bet for desktop application topics. Their courses are clean, simple, and well-designed. The writing is excellent, the testing useful, the interactive features engaging, and the exercises intelligent.

Average Lguide Rating: 3.83 stars

Pros

- + Excellent explanations
- + Use of actual program in exercises
- + Varied and instructive exercises, mouse-overs, flipbooks, simulations, and quizzes
- + Low bandwidth accomodated
- + Plug-ins not required
- + Tutors available for help via e-mail
- + Automatic bookmarking

Cons

- No custom learning path
- Underused chat rooms and discussion boards

About the DigitalThink Desktop Application Catalog

Size: 43 courses (as of February 2001)

Types of Courses: Desktop Applications

Adobe Products	Internet Use
Application Suites	Mail and Time Management
Design, Multimedia, and Presentation	Microsoft Products
Desktop Computing	Spreadsheet and Finance
	Word Processing

Strong Courses

The Access 2000 and Excel 2000 Series are particularly strong. Approximately 70% of the DigitalThink desktop courses reviewed by Lguide have 4-star ratings or better.

Weak Courses

None. The lowest rating a DigitalThink desktop course has received from Lguide is 3 stars.

Technical Specifications

OS Compatibility

Windows 95

Windows 98

Windows 2000

Windows NT

Macintosh OS

Unix/Linux

Browser Requirements

Internet Explorer 4.0 or later

Netscape Navigator 4.0 or later

Minimum Bandwidth

56 Kbps

Plug-ins

None required

Taking a Course: DigitalThink Desktop Applications

Introduction

DigitalThink desktop courses use text-based Web pages that also incorporate simulations, quizzes, audio clips, mouse-overs, and flipbooks. Skills practice comes in the form of exercises that you perform in the application on your computer.

DigitalThink does not offer pre-assessments or custom learning paths. The detailed menu, however, makes it fairly easy to skip material you are already familiar with.

The overall aesthetic of DigitalThink's interface is pleasing to the eye. Graphics are generally simple, but appropriate to the material and quick to download.

DigitalThink offers text explanations of all simulations and demonstrations that require plug-ins, making these courses viable and complete even if your computer is behind a firewall and limited in its use of plug-ins.

Strengths of Courses

DigitalThink desktop application courses offer stellar explanations in a conversational style. The clear structure and various interactive elements keep the courses engaging.

DigitalThink courses also skillfully anticipate the needs of the student. Nearly every time our reviewers felt confused, the course provided a check-up exercise or recapitulation.

The bulk of the course exercises, which are completed in the actual application on your desktop, offer intelligent practice that avoids the limitations and pitfalls common to in-course simulations. After each exercise you are shown a screen shot of what your file should look like.

Weaknesses of Courses

Completing tasks in your desktop has the following drawbacks: you can't return to the course later to practice individual skills without recreating the course file, and you must flip between the desktop application and the course windows.

The student chat rooms and bulletin boards, which DigitalThink offers as a way of softening the isolating nature of online learning, are more often than not neglected and unhelpful.

In some courses, the simulation pop-up windows are awkwardly small and require extensive scrolling.

Navigation

Navigation is simple and straightforward. You proceed through the course with forward and back arrows, and a navigation bar gives you continual access to a menu, glossary, help button, and other resources. You can use the menu to jump around within a course.

Simulations

Some desktop courses use limited simulations to demonstrate a course feature.

Assessments

Most DigitalThink desktop courses have short quizzes that do a good job of evaluating your knowledge retention. Correct answers are given immediately.

DigitalThink does not offer pre-assessments.

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Course Analysis: DigitalThink Professional IT

DigitalThink's large catalog of IT courses deserves its excellent reputation. Good writing and a clean interface set DigitalThink's courses apart from their competitors. Navigation is also easy.

Average Lguide Rating: 3.71 stars

Pros

- + Clear instructions and useful examples
- + Information presented in a conversational style
- + Varied and instructive exercises, mouse-overs, flipbooks, quizzes
- + Exercises graded within 24 hours by a tutor via e-mail
- + Easy navigation
- + Progress tracking in syllabus

Cons

- A few courses have little interactivity and exercises
- A few courses lack depth and breadth of coverage
- No custom learning path
- Underused chat rooms and discussion boards

About the DigitalThink Professional IT Catalog

Size: 100+ (as of February 2001)

Types of Courses: IT Professional

Adobe products	Macromedia Products
Certification	Microsoft Products
Design, Multimedia and Publishing	Networking and Operating Systems
Internet Use	Programming
Lotus Products	Web Development

Strong Courses:

DigitalThink's IT catalog is strong in nearly every category—approximately 70% of the DigitalThink IT courses reviewed to date by Lguide are rated 4 stars or better. DigitalThink's most impressive IT courses include "XML Fundamentals," HTML Programming Series, "Creating Basic UNIX Shell Scripts," and "Essentials of C Programming: Introduction."

Weak Courses:

Two of the courses in the "Essentials of C Programming" series: "Pointers and Arrays in C" and "Building Your C Skills," are disappointingly weak, as is the "Introduction to SQL" series.

Technical Specifications

OS Compatibility

Windows 95

Windows 98

Windows 2000

Windows NT

Macintosh OS

Unix/Linux

Browser Requirements

Internet Explorer 4.0 or later

Netscape Navigator 4.0 or later

Minimum Bandwidth

56 Kbps

Plug-ins

None required

Taking a Course: DigitalThink Professional IT

Introduction

DigitalThink's standard format is text-based Web pages with quizzes, flipbooks, and mouse-overs. Most courses also assign exercises that you submit to a tutor via e-mail. Graded responses are returned promptly.

DigitalThink does not offer pre-assessments to create a custom learning path, but some IT courses have short "Skills Check" quizzes that allow you to see if you're comfortable with what is about to be discussed. The detailed menu, which tracks your progress through the course, makes it easy to skip topics with which you are already familiar.

DigitalThink's IT courses tend to be lengthy, but the interface is clean and aesthetically pleasing, broken up with simple graphics and interactive exercises.

Strengths of Courses

The writing in DigitalThink IT courses is excellent. It's engaging even in courses on highly technical topics, with content delivered in a conversational style. DigitalThink courses skillfully anticipate the needs of the student; nearly every time our reviewers felt confused, the course provided a check-up exercise or recapitulation, and re-emphasized what needed attention.

The response by tutors to submitted exercises is prompt and helpful. Quizzes are usually challenging. DigitalThink IT courses are almost always comprehensive and lengthy, but worth the time.

Weaknesses of Courses

Some courses lack breadth or depth, and a few are rated relatively low because of a lack of interactivity.

The student chat rooms and bulletin boards, which DigitalThink offers as a way of softening the isolating nature of online learning, are more often than not neglected and unhelpful.

Navigation

Navigation is simple and straightforward. You proceed through the course with forward and back arrows, and a navigation bar gives you continual access to a menu, glossary, help button, and other resources. You can use the menu, which tracks your progress, to skip around within the course.

Simulations

A few IT courses offer simple simulations of program environments. Some courses also offer access to DigitalThink's online lab. A UNIX course, for instance, allows you to telnet into the lab to view sample scripts, write your own scripts, execute them, and see how they break.

Assessments

Most DigitalThink courses have quizzes, which do a good job of evaluating your knowledge retention.