

# TRAINING

November 2000

## a new breed of **VISIONARY**

### Marc Prensky

#### TWITCH-SPEED TACTICIAN

**OCCUPATION:** CEO and Founder  
**COMPANY:** Games2train.com  
**LOCATION:** New York



Photograph by Jim Allen

**T**hough much of Marc Prensky's educational software is modeled after the grisly, post-apocalyptic computer games *Doom* and *Quake*, his vision for the 21st century training industry is anything but gloomy.

The Harvard Business School grad and former vice president of Bankers Trust—whose eclectic past includes stints as a concert musician and a Broadway actor—is one of the forefathers of digital game-based learning. An approach to training, Prensky says, that “makes the boring fun.”

Prensky's customized software combines the excitement of playing a computer game with educational content on everything from sexual harassment prevention to financial derivatives. The *Monkey Wrench Conspiracy*, an epic, 3-D extravaganza he designed for Think3 in Santa Clara, CA, is a first-person video game that puts the learner in the role of an intergalactic space agent on a mission to save the universe. The agent's only tool? A mechanical design software program that he must learn to use in order to build the instruments he'll need to complete his mission. Or else. ...

Prensky caters to a demographic he calls the “twitch-speed generation”—the twenty- and thirty-somethings who came of age during the era of Atari and MTV and who are bored silly by the dull training videos and “tell-test” learning that have been the mainstays of technology-based training for so long. “Speedwise, we effectively give them depressants,” says Prensky.

His self-termed crusade is to redefine the way training is packaged. “Up until this generation, learning has been associated with pain, but that's changing because the new generation doesn't accept it,” says Prensky. “They don't buy the fact that fun and work *have* to be different.”

In January, Prensky will take his mission a step further with his new book, *Digital Game-Based Learning* (McGraw-Hill). He'll also continue to spread the word through his consulting business, Games2train.com, in which he develops digital game-based training for delivery over the telephone and via handheld, wireless computers. “I get my kicks,” he says, “out of saying ‘Guess what? This hasn't been done before; I'm going to do it.’” —S.B.

# Newsweek

November 30, 1998

WORKPLACE

## Just Don't Shoot the Client

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**How do you train Nintendo-generation workers?**

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*By Michael Meyer*

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Marc Prensky's epiphany came during a routine airline flight. "Everyone was sitting there, laptops open, playing solitaire. 'How could we make this useful?' I wondered." And so a business was born. Prensky, 52, is a vice president of human resources at Bankers Trust in New York --and founder of Corporate Gameware, the bank's interactive-learning subsidiary. His improbable mission: to bring the excitement of Nintendo and computer gaming to what he calls the needlessly "dry and boring" world of executive training.

Zap! Pong! Crash! Blam! The noisy fun coming from his computer might sound misplaced in the moneyed hush of a Wall Street bank. But brace yourself. Prensky's unorthodox methods of teaching young business people the rules of corporate life may soon be coming to a workplace near you.

Since his moment of inspiration, five years ago, Prensky has produced a dozen training games for Bankers Trust (and other clients) covering everything from derivatives trading to policies on sexual harassment. They range from simple card games and quizzes to twitch-speed extravaganzas modeled on Doom and Quake, the hugely popular PC games. His version of solitaire, among other things, tests employees on the arcana of administering Windows. In Straight Shooter, players negotiate their way through a 3-D maze of streets and offices in different cities of the world, zapping villains and winning points by offering answers to typical problems their clients might face. It sounds a bit hokey, but clients say it works. Prensky explains: "Do you think people thoroughly read those three-inch-thick employee manuals? Forget it! If you want people to learn everything they need to know for their jobs, you sometimes have to divert them."

For a Nintendo generation of younger workers, fun is often associated with computers and fast-paced videogames. Prensky's innovation is to meld that fun with business to create better and more engaging training programs. He's got company, of course. Organizations from the U.S. Marine Corps to university business schools have in recent

years discovered the education value of interactive computer simulations. But Prensky is going further.

Take his latest creation, commissioned by a California company, CadLab, as a tool for teaching industrial engineers how to use its new 3-D design software. The Monkey Wrench Conspiracy, as it's called, features an intergalactic secret agent (the user) dispatched to deep space to rescue the Copernicus station from alien hijackers. To succeed, he must design everything he needs for the job, starting with a simple trigger for his gun. Along the way there are spacewalks, bad guys and booby traps. If your designs are flawed, you die.

Joe Costello, chairman of CadLab, considers the game critical to getting designers to learn and adopt his software. He interviewed dozens of "computer-based training" firms, most of which offered to do little more than put a manual on the company Web site. "Turning the training into a game--and a good one--just wowed us," he says. Tom Cernikovsky, vice president for information services for Reuters, which uses Gameware's technology to train its foreign-exchange specialists, calls it "very cool stuff," adding that the games are also useful in ascertaining "what people know--and don't know." A little fun, it turns out, can go a long way toward narrowing the gap.

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

October 6, 1998

By Hal Lancaster

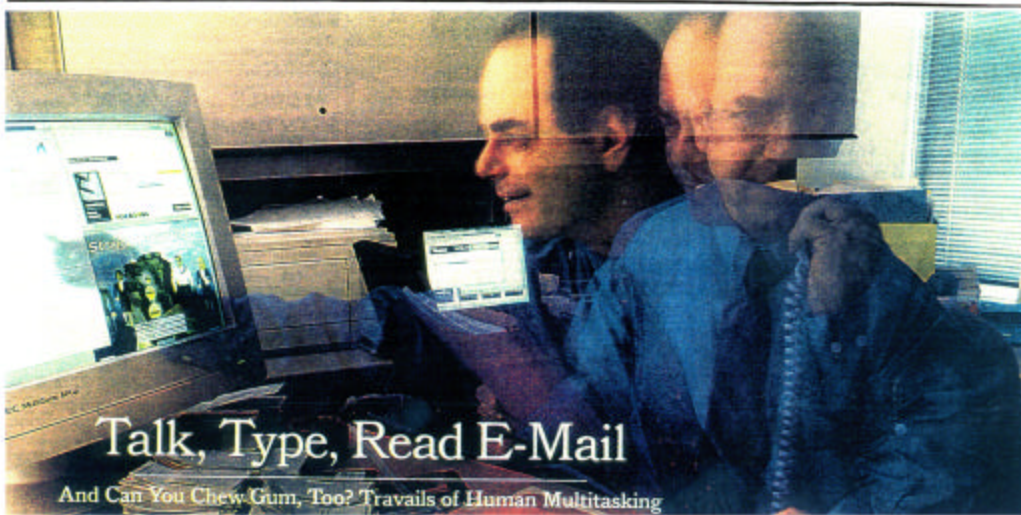
A video game operates at twitch speed when “your thumbs are going a million miles a minute,” explains Marc Prensky, a vice resident of Bankers trust who has been using the phrase to describe how today’s younger generation absorbs and uses information. Mr. Prensky created some twitch-speed training games designed to keep younger workers from lapsing into narcolepsy in traditional training sessions. Now, Bankers trust has formed Corporate Gameware to sell them to other companies.

The Nintendo - and - MTV generation, Mr. Prensky says, prefers graphics to text, absorbs images at rapid speeds, and works on several fronts at once. He tells of trying to converse with a young subordinate who began reading his email during the conversation. “I was angry,” says Mr. Prensky, who is not a Nintendo child. “He says, ‘I’m still listening. I’m parallel processing.’”

# The New York Times

## Circuits

THURSDAY, JULY 21, 1999



### Talk, Type, Read E-Mail

And Can You Chew Gum, Too? Travails of Human Multitasking

Marc Prensky, a vice president at Bankers Trust, has jumped enthusiastically into the new you-can-do-everything-at-once culture of a new generation of employees and says businesses need to embrace it, too.

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By AMY HARMON

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... To the extent that multitasking depends on a certain prowess at filtering huge amounts of information without actually absorbing all of it, there is reason to believe that a generation that is growing up watching "Celebrity Death Match" on MTV while instant-messaging one another on America Online may be better at it than their elders. Observing the awesome multitasking skills of the younger traders at Bankers Trust, Marc Prensky, a vice president there, has advocated a new management approach for them.

"If people are really good at processing information from lots of different sources and you don't give it to them, you stifle them," said Mr. Prensky, an avid multitasker himself. "I think it's a real sea change. We should understand it first and then use it to our advantage."...