

Immersed in learning

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Agency: **Bob Little Press & PR**

Research is pushing back the frontiers of e-learning, allying the real and virtual worlds to enhance the learning experience.

Leading edge research under the 36 month, 12.9m Euro project awarded by the European Commission to a Consortium of 13 leading European organisations is close to using grid and cloud computing to provide the computing resources to bring learners together in both the real and virtual worlds. Known as the Interactive Realtime Multimedia Applications on Service Oriented Infrastructures (IRMOS) Project, the project recently passed its first – 12 month - review in a plenary meeting, held in Brussels, where European Commission representatives and an international panel of experts reviewed the first results of the project.

Fabrizio Cardinali, CEO of leading learning and mobile content management solution provider, Giunti Labs – one of the 13 companies involved in the IRMOS Project, revealed these preliminary results at the ‘Immersive Education Summit’ - held at the London School of Economics in London on 23rd and 24th April.

The project aims to develop ‘real-time’ interaction between people and applications over a service oriented infrastructure (SOI), where processing, storage and networking need to be combined and delivered with guaranteed levels of service.

The project’s key objectives relate to ‘extended geo-learning’, delivered ‘in-class’, ‘in-house’, ‘in campus and ‘in building’ on an urban, suburban and global GPS basis. Cardinali also stated that Giunti Labs is also working on ‘learner positioning’ in virtual worlds as well as in the real world.

Indeed, the aim of the project is to combine the two, enabling a learner’s avatar to be synchronised with that learner’s movements in the real world. Cardinali added: “And, of course, the learning content produced can be re-used and distributed via different delivery media – such as text books, web-based learning materials, mobile learning, digital boards and so on.

“Using the IRMOS-empowered set-up, learners will be able to meet in specific real world learning hubs, such as museums, tourist attractions, schools and/or industrial locations, and receive location-based learning materials and community services, geo-located on a matter of relevance and context awareness, while the real time system will ‘synch’ user interactions and information within a virtual reconstruction of the visited premises,” explained Cardinali. “This will empower learners to meet a community of mobile and virtual visitors, for a wider performance support and learning experience.

“Today, we’re not thinking about ‘e-learning platforms’ but, rather, about an ecosystem which knows – or discovers – who the learner is, what language s/he speaks, the learner’s background, learning delivery preferences and so on,” he continued. “This is helping to produce true personalised learning.”

Cardinali stated that ‘virtual worlds’ provide excellent research opportunities for Giunti Labs – which is Europe’s largest private research laboratory. He said: “Giunti Labs is, currently, working on personal ambient learning solutions.

“Since 2000, we have worked on more than 50 international research and development projects in this field – including the IRMOS Project - in over 500 EU academic and industrial partnerships. These partnerships cover new learning methodologies, technologies and solutions; new content repositories, management systems and architectures, and new learning content.”

Within the IRMOS Project, Giunti Labs studied both open and non-open source systems and is now developing a user scenario for interactive real-time location based learning, integrating its HarvestRoad Hive Digital Repository and learn eXact mobile learning technologies with the Wonderland and Darkstar Virtual Worlds and collaboration platforms by SUN, running on top of the IRMOS service oriented infrastructure (SOI) infrastructure.

Blending open source learning platforms, such as Sakai or Moodle, with Giunti Labs' mobile learning technologies, the solution constitutes a real time 'extended' location-based learning experience to learners active both in real and virtual learning worlds.

Cardinali said: "This has meant extending the HarvestRoad Hive digital repository into mobile and virtual worlds' content editors – to create content delivered via BlackBerries, PDAs and so on.

"Once the data is in the digital repository, Hive can determine who is attempting to download data, along with what device s/he is using and where s/he is. In other words, Hive will give each learner the right information for the right device in the right location – to create a community of those who are following the same studies, regardless of where the learners are."

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Giunti Labs is a leading Online and Mobile Learning Content Management Solutions provider with global headquarters in Italy and offices in London (UK), Frankfurt (Germany), Lund (Sweden), Boston (US), as well as Sydney and Perth (Australia).

Giunti Labs provides a wide range of solutions, in response to any content, learning and knowledge management need, covering:

- 24/7 multi language learning content production
- LCMS and Digital Repository Platforms
- Delivery solutions for mobile & wireless
- Consulting and professional services

Giunti Labs is part of Giunti Group, a leading educational and cultural heritage publisher with roots back to 1841. Over the years Giunti has built a catalogue of huge dimensions (over 7.000 titles) and acquired new brands in Italy and worldwide.

In 2008, Giunti Labs acquired the HarvestRoad Hive digital repository system, which manages any form of content used in online learning, corporate training and knowledge management initiatives. HarvestRoad Hive can interface with practically any ERP, Learning or Course Management System and is already integrated with several commonly used course management systems, authoring and content assembly tools.

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