

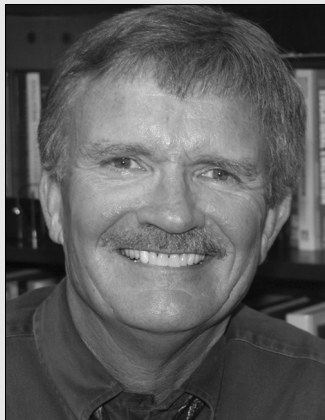
Distance Education as a Disruptive Technology

Michael Simonson

A disruptive technology or disruptive innovation is a technological innovation, product, or service that eventually overturns the existing dominant technology or product in the market. Disruptive innovations can be broadly classified into lower-end and new-market disruptive innovations. A new-market disruptive innovation is often aimed at nonconsumption, whereas a lower-end disruptive innovation is aimed at mainstream

customers who were ignored by established companies. Sometimes, a disruptive technology comes to dominate an existing market by either filling a role in a new market that the older technology could not fill ... or by successively moving up-market through performance improvements until finally displacing the market incumbents...

By contrast, "sustaining technology or innovation" improves product performance of established products. Sustaining technologies are often incremental however they can also be radical or discontinuous. (as cited in Wikipedia, in Teets, 2002)



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Thus, technological innovations might be categorized along a continuum, from sustaining to disruptive. In education, a sustaining technology might be a SmartBoard, which in most applications is a way to present information dynamically and efficiently—a sustaining upgrade to the chalkboard and overhead projector.

As a matter of fact, most attempts to integrate instructional technology into the traditional classroom are examples of sustaining technologies—computer data projectors, DVD players, e-books—all which "improve product performance of estab-

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