



## NCTI 2008 Innovators Conference

<b>Session Title</b>	What's Next for Learning and Assistive Technologies?
<b>Names of Presenters</b>	Tracy Gray, Mary Furlong, Lawrence Grossman, Noel Gunther, Marshall Raskind, Jeff Zimman
<b>Date</b>	Friday, November 21, 2008

**Summary** The panelists discussed how the demographic shifts and other business pressures are changing their perceptions of the disability market and offered advice on how to take advantage of the changes to maximize opportunities.

**Tracy Gray**, Director, [National Center for Technology Innovation](#) (NCTI) (*Moderator*)

Tracy's presentation set the stage for an engaging panel on the future of learning and assistive technologies. Globalization, she explained, is reframing the disability marketplace. Her presentation identified the following globalization-related trends that the technology market ought to consider in the coming years:

1. The rise of an aging population
2. The explosion of information around the globe
3. The rise of developing economies across the globe as competitive centers
4. Continued convergence of platforms, applications, and modes of computing into evermore portable devices, and
5. Assessment data pointing to U.S. students' lack of competitiveness with global peers.

**Mary Furlong**, President and CEO, [Mary Furlong & Associates](#)

"Technology is going to be a big part of how we get old," said Mary Furlong. No longer desiring the idle lifestyle of their parents, older adults are seeking to redefine the categories in which they live. Technology can make this happen. Seeking to reinstate older adults as leaders in society, Mary wants to empower senior citizens with digital skills. This demographic represents a very important and largely untapped market for assistive technology, and Mary's presentation informed her audience of this fertile ground for technology innovation. The presentation concluded with the realization that the real gift of effective innovation is the way it frees the human spirit of older folks so that they can share their personality, their thoughts, and their human good.

**Lawrence Grossman**, Co-chair, [Digital Promise Project](#)

Once in each century, the U.S. has produced a great education effort. Each began in a modest way and grew with force toward national improvement. The 19<sup>th</sup> century had land grant colleges, the 20<sup>th</sup> century had the G.I. Bill, and now the 21<sup>st</sup> century has the National Center for Research in Advanced Information and Digital Technologies. The new national research center will organize research efforts, supporting comprehensive research and development of digital



technologies to improve all levels of education in order to help our students compete in the global economy. Larry explained the importance of this effort in this global information age by arguing that we cannot be ready for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century if our schools are rooted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Noel Gunther**, Vice President, Learning and Interactive Media, [WETA-TV-FM](#)

Brain damage is the leading cause of death for people between the ages of 15 and 45, and many are living with the permanent effects of brain damage, including a large number of wounded warriors from current wars. Noel and the folks at WETA launched the [Brainline.org](#) project on Veteran's Day. It serves people with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and provides information on other issues related to preventing, treating, and providing care for those with TBI. Brainline has created a powerful model of public education. Noel identified heightened expectations for learning: websites like YouTube and iTunes have made video absolutely necessary. Learning has also become increasingly community-oriented with the use of websites like Brainline, and Noel expressed his belief in a future based on the ability of the media to continue to make a difference with technology-based platforms.

**Marshall Raskind**, Former Director of Research and Special Projects, Schwab Learning; Fellow and Vice President, International Academy for Research in Learning Disabilities

Marshall's presentation outlined the purpose of assistive technology for learning disabilities and highlighted the benefits of the web for students with learning disabilities. He explained that the line between compensatory and remedial technologies has blurred, and that the gold standard for assistive technology has become tools designed under the principle of Universal Design for Learning. With regards to the web, Marshall explained that its ability to provide an anonymous, safe space is very important for students with LD who can now explore their disabilities without the risk of social rejection. Web 2.0 in particular helps individuals with learning disabilities by fostering their talents and reducing their limits; in doing so we move beyond a deficit-driven, compensatory view of learning disabilities to an outlook that fosters and values unique abilities. He ended with a call for those in the room to begin to think about our use of computer equipment that is creating toxic waste and think how we can move more of our work to the cloud.

**Jeff Zimman**, Co-founder, President, and CEO, [Posit Science](#)

Jeff explained his desire to get extraordinary inventions out of the laboratory and into the world, and addressed the difficulty of diffusing innovation. While it will take time, we need to make the bell curve shorter and taller – people need to receive more information faster. Adoption certainly is not a straight line, he explained, but there are ways to improve the movement of great inventions out into the world where they can be widely adopted. The keys to this movement are: a good argument for the technology and proof of its success, referenced sites that can speak to the usefulness of the tool, adjacent markets in which to expand, and record of a positive experience with the tool for users. Technology spreads by word of mouth, said Jeff, and all of these factors will improve that message.

## **Discussion**



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1. *Comment: Thank you for touching on the TBI caused to our servicemen and women. Assistive technology will clearly be a critical tool for those individuals as they try to accommodate and mitigate their disabilities. We need to equip them with the technology tools, and it helps tremendously if there is a family member who makes sure that each individual gets the help he or she needs.*

2. *What about standards?*

Jeff Zimman: A lot of times we can develop qualitative and quantitative efficacy standards.

3. *What's being done to alert the boomer generation of the quality of products out there for them?*

Mary Furlong: I've recently said that there is more money exchanged when a woman falls than when a baby is born. Mobility is just an enormous category. It's hitting the parents of the boomers. What I see in the next five years is the confluence of information around mobility and technology. One example to think of is the doctor's office table – is it accessible to older adults with limited mobility? We are now inviting the disability service providers into the conversation. We have a willingness on the part of service agencies to provide nonprofits with materials, and for-profit organizations like the new distribution channels.