Why go digital?

There are a number of reasons for the current move toward digital materials and digital delivery of learning experiences, including:

The impact of ICTs (Information Communication Technologies) in Australian society
For children to be able to participate fully in society, and for our country to engage successfully with the rest of the world, a solid working knowledge and understanding of the technologies being used in the workplace and in society are crucial.

Advances in our understanding of the learning process
How young people learn is strongly linked to how information is presented. There is evidence to suggest that learners retain more information when material is delivered using computers (digital delivery), because the learner is more actively interacting with materials and learning experiences (Kozma, R.B. (1991). "Learning with media." Review of Educational Research, 61(2), 179-212, http://robertkozma.com/images/kozma_rer.pdf accessed 9/4/07). Learning is an active process - learners take information from the learning setting or materials and meld the new information with the knowledge they already have. This happens more effectively when the links are easy to see, easy to access and visually engaging. Digital materials are often presented as interactive and lifelike activities, which encourage deep learning, engagement and independent thinking skills.

Simulated experiences
Some digital materials are presented as realistic simulations or scenarios, giving learners the opportunity to develop and demonstrate skills in a safe and flexible environment, and to experience and react to what may be dangerous situations or contexts without having to actually face the inherent danger. Digital scenarios and simulations (often animations) give learners the opportunity to explore theory and abstract concepts in relation to real-world situations. This can be more effective in promoting learning than reading from a printed text or listening to an expert explaining the concepts.

Federally, we see it in the push to integrate ICTs across all primary and secondary curriculum (http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/key_issues/support_teaching/ict/default.htm (accessed 9/4/07)).

In distance education, government initiatives have been put in place over recent years to ensure that distance education keeps pace with mainstream education in providing the same learning opportunities to students regardless of their geographical location or the nature of their schoolroom. One key strategy is the utilisation of information technologies in learning materials and in the delivery of these materials (e.g. the use of the internet, email and computer-based learning experiences - digital materials and digital delivery).

Of course, there are many other related reasons for 'going digital':
- Digital materials can be engaging and useful for both learners and teachers;
- Offers access to vast and varied resources from all over the world;
- Students develop a range of skills for their work and personal lives; and,
- Digital content can be readily updated so that students and teachers can access information which is current where print-based materials cannot respond so quickly to change.