



Not-for-profit's AIDS program is labor of love, free to schools.

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Perhaps no disease is as misunderstood and feared as AIDS, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Many people have formed uneducated opinions about HIV and AIDS, and as a result, those with AIDS are often ostracized from society and the workplace.

Education may be the best defense against a killer virus like [HIV](#)--and the misconceptions that come with it. So thought Will Grasse of Atlanta, Ga., and nine other volunteers who formed the not-for-profit Inner Action Corp. to develop educational multimedia courseware.

Their first course, AIDS Interactive Information Series (AIIS), is a comprehensive, DOS-based program on AIDS. It was inspired by Grasse's brother-in-law, who contracted HIV from a blood transfusion.

"When Jay was diagnosed with HIV, I realized how little I knew about the [virus](#)," Grasse confesses. "I decided to find out everything I could about HIV and AIDS, and doing so made me realize that many of my fears--and most everyone else's--are completely unfounded. I thought that a multimedia course could help alleviate fear of the unknown surrounding AIDS and help people be more sympathetic towards HIV patients."

*** Authoring by Day & Night**

Grasse works by day as a CBT developer for Synesis Corp., a company that also distributes the Quest multimedia authoring system from [Allen Communication](#) in Salt Lake City, Utah. He was therefore very well-versed in authoring, with 87 projects under his belt.

"I know about six other authoring programs," Grasse comments, "and I chose this one for its ease of use; speed; and ability to create complex interactions, dissolves and animation."

Synesis allowed Grasse and the others to use Quest at home on their own computers. Just recently, Inner Action was able to purchase a copy of Quest for themselves.

*** Friendly and Motivating**

One year after the initial idea, a two-and-a-half hour CBT course has been completed and is being used in 50 states and around the globe.

"The interactive format is friendly and motivating," says Randy Freese, superintendent at West Depere School District in Depere, Wisc., one of several beta sites for the [AIDS](#) course. "Multimedia allows students to learn in different modalities. It puts a lot of challenging ideas and information within reach."

The AIIS course includes graphics, animation, text, digitized video stills, an extensive glossary and many other features. It would cost an institution from \$60,000 to \$80,000 to develop from scratch based on the cost of research, design and development; quality-control; overall time; and complexity of interaction.

AIIS is broken down into six main lessons: What Is AIDS?, [HIV Infection](#), Biological Effects of AIDS, Treatment of AIDS, Living and Working with AIDS Victims, and Prevention Against AIDS. Within each are several subdivisions. For instance, in the "What Is AIDS?" lesson, the history of AIDS, a description of it and risk groups are discussed.

At all points in the course, the learner has complete navigational control and the opportunity to either escape or dive deeper into the information.

"We didn't want anyone to feel trapped, so we designed the course with an 'escape route' on every screen," Grasse explains. "But we've also included lots of information, so if you want to research AIDS extensively, this course lets you. We also wanted to maximize the learning experience, so the beginning of each subdivision states what the learner will be taught in that subdivision, and at the end, the learner is reminded of its key points."

The course also includes special functions that appear at various points throughout, including a print icon and an animation icon. The print icon appears at the end of each lesson segment, so learners can get a hardcopy of the information presented.

The animation icon allows learners to see an animated version of whatever process is being discussed. For example, learners can view an animation of an HIV cell attaching itself to a white blood cell and injecting its DNA.

"When these processes are described in just words, it's up to the imagination to visualize the information," says Grasse. "When we animate the process, there is no question as to how things happen, and the information is much more memorable because the words are reinforced with animated illustrations."

*** A Chain Reaction**

The target audience for the AIIS course is high school and college students. "Our main goals are to teach young adults how dangerous AIDS is, how it is a chain-reaction virus, and to instill a fear of what can happen so these young people will seek protection," Grasse states. "We feel that starting the educational process strongly at this young age is imperative to stopping the spread of AIDS."

Several businesses who have heard about the project, including DEC, IBM, Southern Bell and Georgia Pacific, have requested copies of the course for use in their employee education departments. The Atlanta Center for Disease Control will also use the course extensively in its AIDS clinic.

The course will be given free-of-charge to any high school, college or other institution desiring it. The only cost to the school is postage and the price of diskettes.

Inner Action plans to develop other not-for-profit educational programs. A second version of the AIIS course under development for grade school children uses gaming strategies to help youngsters understand AIDS. Due out in another year, it will employ cartoons and be a bit more fun in nature.

A second program will focus on drug and alcohol abuse for high school students. A general discussion on the dangers of using controlled substances, the program will also explain about how drugs change one's personality and provide counseling information. Animation and digitized photos will be used throughout.

Plus, Inner Action will work with White Bison Foundation to modify that program for Native American youth. It will incorporate content on traditional tribal values and stress pride as a people as well as personal health.

Happy about the interest in the group's work, Grasse harkens back to the reason he became involved in creating the first program. "Volunteers range from housewives to mechanics to CBT developers. Of the ten volunteers," he says, "three have relatives with AIDS. We just decided that it was much more important to get the information out there."