



Jumpstart an E-Learning Program in Eight Easy Steps

A Research Bulletin by:

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eLeaP™ is a SCORM compliant training and learning management platform helping organizations quickly create and track online training and e-learning to maximize performance while minimizing costs, IT and compliance headaches.

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A company's biggest investment is its employees. Training and development can lead to the best, most productive members of any company's team. But training methods of yesterday are no longer adequate to build a team of top-notch professionals.

E-learning has become a primary way to train employees at all levels due to lower costs and higher convenience. Starting an e-learning program can seem daunting, but it actually can be broken down into eight easy steps. Before launching an e-learning program, it is important to understand what e-learning *is* and how it fits into the contemporary business environment.

Doing More with Less

Today's business culture is fast-paced and constantly evolving. Financial constraints are also more of concern than ever before.

One of the biggest challenges in training today is trying to do more with less money. It's a vicious circle because training employees directly relates to being able to develop them into better employees. Better employees are more productive, more professional and more knowledgeable, but companies have less money to invest in training initiatives. Online learning can offer companies the opportunity to provide training and development without having to sacrifice a lot of money, time or the quality of the content they deliver.

Understanding E-Learning

There are many ways to describe and define e-learning, also commonly called online learning. At eLeaP, we define e-learning as *the digital delivery of interactive educational material that is adaptive and therefore experienced differently by each learner. It is active, versus passive, learning that is often delivered via a learning management system.*

The key element to launching an e-learning program is aligning the curriculum with business strategies and goals. According to the American Society for Training and Development 2013 State of the Industry Report, the percentage of training used by employees in traditional instructor-led classrooms has been steadily decreasing over the past three years. In 2012, traditional classroom learning accounted for 55 percent of training hours, down 6 percent from 2010. Simultaneously, technology-based learning methods increased to 10 percent in 2012, compared with 8 percent in 2010.

Companies of all sizes can benefit from online learning. Whether small, medium or large, companies engaging in online learning can:

- Reduce training costs.

- Save employee time and frustration.
- Increase training skills over more traditional methods.

E-Learning brings content and information to employees *where* they are and *when* they need it. E-Learning courses tend to be delivered via the Internet or Intranet, making it a convenient, efficient on-demand process for employees.

Jumpstarting an E-Learning Program

Establishing an online learning program is something that most any company can do at little expense.

Use these [eight easy steps to jumpstart an e-learning program for your business](#):

#1 Understand What E-Learning Is

The landscape of learning today includes accessing information online via desktop computers, laptops, tablets computers and mobile phones. E-learning encompasses all of the information employees need and deliver it using various forms of content and various forms of technology.

Features that make e-learning unique to other forms of training:

- It offers what seems like an infinite amount of information employees can access online and/or on-demand.
- Information is available for various job roles and tasks.
- The content meets the needs of various styles of learning.
- Content is on-demand, so trainees can access it anytime and anywhere.
- Different types of content is available (ex. video, eBook or online or SCORM courses) at the same time or at different times during the training program.
- Training materials can meet the needs of one trainee or numerous trainees.
- It allows flexibility to work in any type of setting.
- Employees can train and work simultaneously.

E-learning uses all of the avenues available to create and deliver content to trainees via an online training program. An effective course contains all of the features listed above.

#2 Embrace the Benefits of E-Learning

You can think of the benefits that e-learning brings to a company similar to that of Russian nesting dolls. Russian nesting dolls have a big doll on the outside. When you open the big doll, you find another doll that is slightly smaller inside. When you open this doll, you find another doll inside. The benefits of an e-learning program grow as the size of the doll grows.

Assume you have a set of two nesting dolls. The two big dolls represent the two primary benefits that e-learning brings to a business. E-learning saves the company time and money.

Now, within the smaller nesting dolls, you can find additional benefits:

- **Reduces travel expenses:** Companies can fill up one of their nesting dolls with all of the money they are saving by not having to pay for travel expenses for employees to attend traditional training sessions.
- **Easily shares content:** Because trainees do not have to leave the comfort of their desk chair to obtain the information they need, it is quick and easy to share the training content across all of the organization.
- **Blends with other types of training:** E-learning can be combined easily with other types of training, including on-the-job training and traditional classroom training.
- **Increases retention rates:** E-learning puts employees in control of how they learn and access information, which helps them to retain more information than some traditional methods.
- **Retains a higher quality employee:** Companies that train and develop its employees also tend to retain its employees. With more employees sticking around, companies have less of a turnover rate and less of a need to continuously replace employees with new employees.
- **Increases engagement level of employees:** Trained and developed employees tend to be more engaged in their roles in the company. The dedication to their position increases the quality and productivity of their work output.

The breakdown of these benefits include quantitative and qualitative measurements. The quantitative benefits include the cost savings that e-learning programs provide companies. Qualitative benefits include an increase in employee productivity.

#3 Think Informal

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, approximately 70 percent of what employees learn occurs outside of formal training sessions. The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) backs up

this statistic, saying that 70 percent of learning occurs in informal settings. An e-learning program provides the ultimate informal setting without sacrificing the quality of the information that employees have at their fingertips.

When starting to develop content for an e-learning program, these stats come into play. Consider all of the ways you can deliver content to trainees so that delivery is informal enough that employees actually learn and retain the information. Informal e-learning allows employees to access the information they need during their work.

For example, consider an employee that is trying to complete a work project. They reach a certain point of the project and realize that they do not know how to complete the next step. They stop and pull up the e-learning program their company provides to its employees.

The employee searches for the topic they need help in completing. They access the module that covers the topic. As the employee reads the online content, they pause at certain points to complete the step. The employee continues to do this until the part of the work project is complete.

Training becomes seamless because an employee is able to learn and complete their work simultaneously. The information employees need is immediately accessible and immediately applicable in this type of an e-learning situation.

#4 Select the Right Content

The content of the e-learning program is really the meat and potatoes of training. Selecting the right content to deliver to trainees can be one of the biggest challenges in developing an online training program.

Select an e-learning program that:

- **Teaches new skills:** Content should contain information that teaches employees new skills or builds on their existing set of skills.
- **Teaches directly transferrable skills:** Content should contain information that employees can acquire and apply to their jobs right away.
- **Engages students with appropriate learning activities:** Activities that employees engage in as part of the training should be relevant to the objectives of the company and the job role of the employees.

- **Employs a wide range of content:** Content is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, e-learning content should be as varied as the learning styles of the trainees, and include websites, eBooks, videos, books, manuals, reports and audio files.
- **Contains searchable content:** It is not always necessary for employees to complete an entire program to access the information required. Instead, use content that employees can easily search and locate the information they need.
- **Contains content developed by experts:** The content developer should be a professional or expert in the field. Make sure that the content you are providing to employees is from an authoritative source. Additionally, the content should be arranged and delivered in an organized and professional manner.
- **Takes a collaborative approach:** Search for content that combines informational instruction with activities to reinforce the learning. Employees who are able to apply what they learn tend to retain the information better and can find ways to apply what they have learned to real-world situations.

#5 Build the Content

Once the right type of content is identified, decide how to assemble it.

You can:

- buy the content
- create the content
- use a combination of purchased and created content

Of course, each method of building content for an e-learning program has its advantages and disadvantages, which is why some companies combine purchased with created content.

Buy Content

Numerous companies sell or lease content to businesses that they can then use as part of their training program. One of the primary advantages of paid content is that it is “off-the-shelf” so it is ready for you to use right away. As information changes, subscribers and purchasers of the content typically have access to updates and downloads so that the content always stays current and up-to-date. Updates can have additional fees associated with obtaining them. One of the biggest disadvantages is the cost to purchase ready-made content. Additionally, existing content can be generic. Sellers of the content have to provide information to a wide variety of audiences, which prohibits them from customizing, personalizing and tailoring it. This means the content might not exactly fit the needs of your organization.

Customization is possible from some content suppliers. Of course, there is an additional fee or cost for personalization. At times, this makes purchasing custom content unattainable because it is too expensive. You always have the option of altering existing content or filling in the gaps with your own content.

Should you choose to purchase content, make sure it is compatible with your learning or delivery tool. For organizations which use a learning management system to deliver and track content, ask the content provider to provide the content in the relevant format for your LMS. Common e-learning formats include SCORM and AICC. You can ask eLeaP (877-624-7226 or www.eleapsoftware.com) for free consultation on the best format for your organization.

Create Content

The primary advantage of creating content is that it can be customized. Turn generic topics and information into valuable information pieces that directly relate to your business, industry and the employees that have to learn the information.

The two primary disadvantages of creating your own content are cost and time. Not only do you have to create all of the content from scratch, but you are also responsible for updating the information as information changes over time.

#6 Combine Learning Methods

Combining learning methods relates to two different areas of building an e-learning program.

- Integrate the settings for training so there are formal and informal information sessions. Social learning sessions should be part of the program as well. Of course, formal and informal settings should complement each other to broaden learning capabilities.
- Combine learning methods relates to the course material itself. It is best to include:
 - reference materials such as books, instruction manuals, white papers and more
 - classroom training with an instructor
 - expert mentoring sessions/programs

When an e-learning program combines learning methods appropriately, trainees have the opportunity to choose what they learn, how they learn it and where they learn it.

#7 Choose the Topics

Training topics can really run the gamut. In general, training topics fall into one of four topic areas. Choose the general training area you want to start with building your e-learning program.

Typically, the first topic you choose is the most immediate need your company has. Once you have the training program up and running, you can expand the existing general topic area or develop a program that covers an entirely new training area.

Four areas of training

- **Business skills:** Training that covers business skills provides information that pertain to the professionals and knowledge workers in your organization. Training materials for teaching on these topics tend to be e-books, books, training courses, videos, simulations and other E-Learning materials.
- **Leadership skills:** Supervisors, managers and leaders in the organization require development of their skills as well. Great leaders can help to shape and form great employees, so it is essential for leaders to continuously develop and refine their skills. E-learning courses can help to meet these training needs without taking managers and supervisors out of the office.
- **Technology skills:** Technology is continuously evolving. Technology plays a pivotal role in employees being able to complete their daily job tasks. This means that as technology changes, the technology skills of employees also have to change.
- **Certifications:** Certifications allow professionals in your organization to reach expert status. E-learning can help relevant professionals and individuals in your organization efficiently access required training to gain valuable certifications.

It is difficult to take employees out of the office today to obtain the training and information they need to excel in their job positions. E-learning solves this problem because it brings the training to the employees.

#8 Add the Features of a Successful E-Learning Program

While e-learning programs can differ from organization to organization, all successful e-learning programs share the same features.

Here are some of the features you will want to infuse into your e-learning program so you can help to ensure success of the program:

- **Select the right e-learning partner:** An e-learning partner provides you with the technology you need to build and implement your e-learning program. The right e-learning partner meets or exceeds all of the needs your organization has for training and developing employees.
- **Create a learning culture:** Connect the dots between learning and performance so that employees can see how e-learning makes their jobs easier and makes them more productive. Upper management should also embrace learning so it reinforces how important it is for the employees to receive training and development.
- **Scalability:** Learning needs of today can differ quite drastically from what they are in the future. Invest, develop and implement in an e-learning program that is scalable so that it changes as your business environment changes.
- **Combination design:** Choose an e-learning program that combines formal and informal settings with social learning.

Conclusion

When companies invest money in e-learning programs, they are investing in their employees. Since employees play a pivotal role in the success of a business, it is wise to build an effective e-learning program. Because the training methods of yesterday are not as effective as more modern and innovative techniques, it is essential that companies embrace the multiple benefits of an e-learning program.

When it is time to build or rebuild your training program, use these eight steps to ensure that the program is as successful and effective as it can be.

About eLeaP

The eLeaP learning management system empowers businesses and nonprofits to rapidly and easily create intuitive online learning courses from existing files. Organizations no longer need to rely on inadequate and off-topic pre-existing training courses --eLeaP creates the precise training materials that fit specific needs.

With eLeaP online learning software, it is possible to incorporate PowerPoint, PDF files, pictures, audio, video, Microsoft Office, SCORM and many more file types into customized courses. Organizations can even send the files to eLeaP's course creation experts to build customized courses to their exact specifications.

The eLeaP learning management system can save any business or nonprofit a vast amount of both time and money, while allowing it to create sophisticated training packages custom-built for its precise needs.

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