

Exactly What are the Options When It Comes to Online Learning Solutions

- What Executives, HR and Training Professionals Need to Know

A Research Bulletin by:

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How do you improve performance, reduce costs and strengthen compliance? Simple; give your staff the knowledge they need to excel at their jobs. Training is perhaps the greatest source of untapped value and competitive advantage available to any organization.

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Two recent surveys have CEOs of companies citing that while they agree training and development is important, they want it the fast and easy way. Not only do they want these two characteristics for their own training, but they also require it for training their employees and other staff members.

Respondents of the two studies say they place more importance on the length of the training rather than the content. Additionally, the brevity of the training session is more important to them than the quality of the training. It looks as if the fast pace of life has hit the training department as instant gratification in training is in the here and now.

The moral of the story is that executives, human resources and training professionals are going to have to focus on training solutions that can deliver high-quality content in a short period of time. Primarily, this points everyone in one direction - online training and development solutions.

Online Learning Solutions

Fortunately, when it comes to online training options, executives, human resource professionals and training professionals have several different options from which to choose. Some of the online options include:

- Web-based/Online training
- Email
- Tele- or video conferencing
- Collaborative document sharing
- Online colleges and universities
- Teleseminars
- Webinars

Each option offers slightly different choices to training attendees. Additionally, each online training solution also carries its own set of advantages and disadvantages. Prior to getting into the details on each online training alternative, executives, human resource professionals and training professionals can see the overall benefits and drawbacks that online training opportunities provide to companies and to training attendees.

Advantages of Online Learning Solutions

Online training options meet the needs of the CEOs that responded to the two surveys. E-learning allows attendees to gain the training and development they need quickly and easily - usually via a mobile device or a computer with Internet access. For companies that want to excel in training and

development programs, meeting the requirements of the CEO is typically the first hurdle to overcome in gaining buy-in for training to be available in the first place. Once that is accomplished, then it is possible to move on to the next level, which is choosing the right training format.

Numerous advantages exist for companies to turn to online training options.

Location Isn't a Factor

The first advantage of using online training solutions is that it breaks down the geographic barrier. Trainees can be anywhere in the country, or even anywhere in the world, that has access to a mobile device, computer and an Internet connection. E-learning programs are especially helpful to companies that have employees working in multiple locations. One training session can handle the needs of all the employees without having to bring all of the employees to one central location.

Saves the Company Money

Online training sessions also save the company money. First, online courses tend to cost less money for the hosts. Primarily, it costs less to host an online event because it doesn't require renting a venue, paying for snacks, beverages and meals, and covering the costs for table, chairs and certain equipment. This cost savings carries over to the companies paying for employees to attend the online training. Registration fees tend to be less expensive for the attendees than when registering for in-person events.

Second, the company saves money in travel expenses when participants attend online training and development events. Companies no longer have to cover employee costs for travel, meals, rental cars and hotel stays.

Puts the Professionals in Front of Attendees

Online training options also have the advantage of getting your attendees in front of the experts and the professionals in their fields and in your industry. This too saves the company money. Companies no longer have to lay out the big bucks to hire the best of the best. Instead, online and e-learning solutions provide more equal access to these professionals.

Online learning levels the playing field between companies with big training budgets and those with little training budgets. Companies that do not have as much money to spend on the best training for employees can now afford it using online training options.

Provides a Fresh Look

E-learning is used in various circumstances. It can be as advantageous for training employees on a new concept as it is as a refresher training course for employees. Online courses and training sessions do not require employees to leave the office, therefore, minimizing the employees' downtime. Online learning permits the attendees to freshen up their skills and knowledge from the comfort of their home, office, or during their waiting time in the airport.

Self-study

Attendees have different learning styles when it comes to training. Some of your employees and training attendees learn better when they learn at their own rate. This too is where some online training options are advantageous. Another advantage of e-learning courses is it is a good alternative for self-directed learning.

Attendees can "attend" sessions and complete sessions at their own rate. When they finish with one training module or concept, they can move on to the next module. If a module or concept is difficult for an employee to comprehend, they can spend some extra time working on the information without holding back the rest of the training participants.

Easy to Update

The world is constantly changing. When something changes in your business, industry or the topic covered in training, it is much faster and easier to update it in an online training course. More importantly, it is faster and easier to convey this change to participants because online training occurs more frequently or is available on-demand than in-person training. Even if something changes internally in the company, such as policies and procedures, it's easier to update employees in online training sessions.

Matches Programs with Skill Levels

Because of all of the cost savings and ease of delivering online training, these programs allow trainers to match sessions with the skill levels and knowledge of the employees attending the sessions. Attendees can be appropriately assigned to different training sessions based on skill sets and knowledge to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the training programs. Beginners can be provided with beginner trainer, while intermediary and advanced learners can be provided with intermediary and advanced training sessions.

In addition, this creates a more effective learning environment. Beginners are not mixed in more with more advanced learners, so they are not holding these participants back from excelling. In turn, more advanced learners are not prohibiting beginners in learning foundational information they need to become advanced learners in the future.

Disadvantages of Online Learning Solutions

While there are numerous advantages to e-learning programs, there are some drawbacks executives, human resource professionals and training professionals should be aware of as well.

Require Computer Literacy

One of the first drawbacks employers have to consider for online training is the computer and technology literacy level of the trainees. Online training can be a challenge to those who are technologically challenged. Whether training sessions are accessed on a mobile device or computer, attendees need to know how to use the technology in order to benefit from the training. After all, it is a different form of training from attending seminars, conferences and courses in-person.

Too Generic

A second disadvantage is that training courses offered online can be generic, so not specific enough to cover precisely what employees need to know. If the courses are too generic then it might not fit the training needs of the business or company. This is a concern of training sessions no matter whether it is in-person training or online training, however. Conduct the proper research and investigation to ensure the course covers the information you need attendees to learn.

It's Impersonal

Since there are different styles of learning, some employees can find online training too distant and impersonal. Trainers are not in the same room as participants. In some cases, a trainer is not associated with a person at all, but is just a PowerPoint presentation or written correspondence. There is not a face or a voice associated with the training session. If employees need to relate to a human being to learn new information, the employees can have a hard time learning and retaining information from the online session.

Lacks Structure

Online training can lack the structure that standard classroom training offers. Classroom training tends to have a strict agenda. Additionally, the trainer is in the same room as the participants to help keep the participants in line and sticking to the agenda.

Online training sessions tend to rely more heavily on the participant being plugged in and engaged in the session. Training at a computer in an office or at home can be distracting to some employees. Instead of paying close attention to what is unfolding on their computer screen, for example, employees can surf the net, talk on the phone or attend to work.

Intimidating

Employees can also feel intimidated about asking questions during online training sessions. It can be the technological aspect of figuring out how to ask a question that prohibits them from asking the question. It can also be the fact that hundreds or thousands of people might be attending the online sessions. It can embarrass employees if they feel the question they want to ask is a dumb one.

Lack of Access

Technology plays a role in this drawback too. If the company doesn't have enough computers available, this can prohibit employees that want, need or should attend the training to be there. Online restriction can also be a factor. Employees that lose Internet access on their mobile device can have interrupted training or be prohibited from getting into the online session at all.

Technical Difficulties

Company hardware has to be compatible with the online program the trainer is using to administer the course. If there is any incompatibility, this can deny attendees access to the course or make it impossible for them to attend. Malfunctions can occur because of inadequate or outdated sound cards, graphic accelerators, local area networks or Internet servers.

Impedes Expert Advice

For online courses that are self-directed, another drawback of online training is it limits the opportunities for attendees. It can preclude access to professionals and experts that would normally lead the discussion. Attendees can miss out on expert advice and opportunities to ask questions because there isn't a human trainer involved or there isn't someone who is standing in the same room with them.

Now that you know and understand the overall advantages and disadvantages of online training and development, it is time to delve into the specific types of online training solutions available.

Online Training Solutions

When it comes to online training options, there are seven primary options available. Some options lend themselves better to specific training requirements over other options. Cost and delivery are other considerations for executives, human resource professionals and training professional to weigh before making a final decision.

Web-based Training

Web-based training is one form of online training. With this method, training modules or sessions are accessible online. Employees can access the training on-demand via the Internet or the company's Intranet. This type of training is self-directed so employees can work at their own pace.

During the sessions, employees can apply what they learn with hands-on and interactive activities. Web-based training offers a standardized way to train employees because all attendees have access to the same information. It is easy to update training materials so employees always have access to the latest information.

Finally, web-based training is typically linked with a learning management system (LMS). This makes it possible for managers, human resource professionals and trainers to track the progress of trainees. This helps for recordkeeping purposes and to assess the skill sets and knowledge employees are acquiring from the training sessions.

Web-based training is best for teaching employees technology, such as software programs. This type of online training allows employees to sit in front of a computer and apply their new knowledge with hands-on learning and activities.

Email

Some online training courses are offered via email. Some training programs refer to email courses as autoresponder courses as well. When an attendee registers for an email course, they receive a set number of emails over the course of a set time period.

Each email contains training information pertaining to the topic. These courses often introduce a topic and include an activity or homework the attendee should work on prior to receiving the next email that is part of the training series. Email courses also typically allow interaction between the host of the course and the attendees via email.

Email courses tend to be on-demand courses. Once attendees register for the course, they start to receive emails on a prescheduled basis. This doesn't permit attendees to work at their own pace because when they finish one email, they have to wait for the next email to arrive, since the arrival rate is according to the trainer's schedule.

Email training works well for training where employees can read information and then take the steps necessary to practice what they learn in each email. Email courses tend to be limited in the amount of information delivered, so it tends to work best when the information teaches one concept rather than various concepts.

Tele- and Video Conferencing

Two additional methods for online training are teleconferencing and videoconferencing. In some training instances, both methods are used simultaneously. Teleconferencing permits training attendees

to attend training sessions via telephone. While attendees can call into the training via a cell phone or landline, attendees can also access the training by calling in the phone line from their computers.

Video conferencing adds a visual concept to the training process. Not only can attendees hear the training, but they can see the trainer, whiteboard or training materials on their computer screens. For attendees that cannot access audio on their computer screens, they can call into the training on a phone line and watch the video training portion on their computer screens at the same time.

The advantages to this type of training are trainees can be in several different locations. Since the trainer or trainers are in one central location, they can answer questions on the phone line or via a webchat feature. A final advantage is the training appeals to two types of learners - those who learn by listening and those who learn by seeing.

Collaborative Document Sharing

Collaborative document sharing is another method for trainers and trainees to interact online. This particular method is especially effective in situations where written reports or other correspondence is the focus of the training. Collaborative document sharing sites allow trainers and trainees to have access to the same document or documents.

Trainers can provide trainees with feedback on the work they have done on the document. Trainees can then see the feedback and make adjustments, where necessary. Document sharing programs eliminate the need for trainers and trainees to email documents back and forth to each other. It also eliminates the need for trainers and trainees to be in the same location. Instead, trainees and trainers are accessing the same document via an online website.

The advantage of this type of training is it is visual and hands-on learning. The disadvantage is that there is no audio component involved in the training. Document sharing ends up working better for those who learn by doing or learn by what they see. Additionally, the only ways for the trainer and trainee to communicate tends to be through the document itself or via email.

Online Colleges and Universities

Training is also available through online colleges and universities. For training purposes, attendees are not trying to earn a degree. Instead, the training session is simply for adult learning purposes - gaining new skills or advancing existing skills. In some cases, attendees can, however, earn a certificate for completing the training.

This method does not require attendees to go to the college or university campus. It does, however, provide a learning environment where attendees can learn information as if they are attending classroom instruction. Additionally, online college and university training courses permit interactivity among the various attendees in the course. Often, these training sessions combine learning methods so there is some combination of visual presentation, hands-on activities and audio presentations.

A major advantage of this type of training is there tends to be a variety of courses available. Attendees tend to be able to find a course to fit almost any learning or skill need they may have. The drawback on these types of courses tends to be that the courses run on a very rigid schedule. Attendees might have to wait until a new course starts, which can mean that they have to wait for a new semester to begin.

Teleseminars

Teleseminars are another method for offering online training. With this method, attendees use their computers and Internet access to attend the training. Attendees dial in to a number, and typically enter a passcode, to enter the training at a scheduled time. Attendees can hear the audio of the training from their computer.

Attendees can submit questions to the trainer during these sessions. Questions are sent via email or social media networks, such as Twitter or Facebook. When the trainer receives the questions, they tend to read the question and then provide the answer on the call.

In some circumstances, once the live training call takes place, the audio is no longer available. In other circumstances, however, teleseminar training calls are recorded. The trainer can make the audio file available to those interested in the training that are not able to attend the live session.

Webinars

Webinars are another method of online training that combines audio and visual components of training. Training participants use a special phone number and passcode provided by the trainer to dial in to the live phone training. Trainings are scheduled for a specific date and time.

While on the phone, attendees also pull up a presentation on the computer screen. Webinars are similar to PowerPoint presentations or training using a CD, which limits the amount of interactivity between the trainer and attendees. Question and answer sessions tend to be available via webchat, email, social media or on the phone.

With several different online training methods available, it is easy to find one that meets almost any employer needs.

Conclusion

As the survey results reveal, CEOs of companies place heavy importance on training and development for its management and employees. These same CEOs make it clear that while training is important, the swiftness and ease of the training is more important to them. Several different methods of online training exist to fulfill the needs and wants of the employees and organizations which are interested in exploring a different method of creating and delivering training and development. Of course the CEOs who have to sign off on the training programs and initiatives have to be convinced on their efficacy and cost effectiveness.

In the end, executives, human resource professionals and training professionals can focus on training solutions that deliver high-quality content as fast and easy as possible with online learning solutions.

After weighing the advantages and disadvantages each option offers, executives, human resources and training professionals can choose the online training method that is the most beneficial for their particular organization. They can also check out this ready-made online training course which lays out the road map for adapting this type of learning and development effort. Access **Learning Managers and the Bottomline: 5 Ways to Make a Strategic Impact** at <http://www.eleapsoftware.com/learning-managers-bottom-line.php>

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About eLeaP

The eLeaP LMS system empowers you to rapidly and easily create intuitive online learning courses from your own existing files. No more dependence on inadequate and off-topic pre-existing training courses; with eLeaP you can create the precise training materials that fit your needs.

With eLeaP online learning software, you can incorporate PowerPoint, PDF, pictures, audio, video, Microsoft Office, SCORM and many more file types into your own personalized courses. Or if you find that your busy schedule leaves you unable to find the time to create your courses, you can even send us the files, and we'll use our vast course creation experience to build courses for you to your specifications.

The eLeaP learning management system can save you a vast amount of both time and money, while enabling you to create sophisticated training packages custom-built for the precise needs of your organization.

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