The World Is Your Classroom

HOW A VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT CAN ENHANCE YOUR GLOBAL TRAINING PROGRAMS
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Abstract

This white paper discusses the impact of virtual learning environments on global companies' training results. Employees, partners, and clients need to be retrained continually to perform wider-ranging job functions, stay current with new technologies and methods, and receive important product information. Virtual learning environments enable organizations to:

- Immediately expand training programs to reach global workforces
- Provide an engaging learning experience while reducing training costs
- Integrate subject matter experts into training programs to facilitate the transfer of institutional knowledge
- Deliver interactive training sessions via webcasts, collaboration tools, and social networking

Case studies are included to illustrate how global companies are using virtual learning environments which enable them to train their worldwide employees, customers, and partners more effectively and at lower cost.

The Importance of Corporate Training

In our increasingly global marketplace, ongoing corporate training is critically important. Companies that succeed will be the ones that make the most effective use of available resources, and the best way to do this is to have well-educated employees, partners, suppliers, and customers. Organizations must train these audiences continually – including the rapidly growing numbers of remote workers – to ensure that they have the most current knowledge, skills, and information.

Why is continuing education so important?

1] Retiring baby boomers are taking their skills and education with them out the door. Transferring institutional knowledge between generations is a critical requirement in today's organizations.

2] Relevant knowledge is changing at a much faster rate. Key specialists need to be retrained as often as every 1-2 years.

3] Organizations need people who are cross-trained in more than one job and are able to perform a much wider variety of tasks.

4] Application updates and new technology platforms require continual employee retraining.
THE VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The rise of virtual learning environments (VLE) reflect the need for companies to deliver engaging training, collect timely feedback, and ensure that learners can access the training materials anytime, anywhere. Companies must also provide varied levels and types of training programs (for example, centralized, functional, and geography-specific). And, given shrinking budgets, the new training programs must be more cost-effective than traditional learning methods.

Virtual learning environments satisfy these requirements. By combining virtual online classrooms, live webcasts, social networking tools, and other Web-based collaboration tools, it creates a highly adaptable and engaging learning experience for wide-ranging training programs and employee needs. Moreover, it does so while allowing employees, partners, and clients to access training courses anytime and from any location. This is an enormous advantage given the need to train busy employees who are often spread out across global locations.

Businesses are using virtual learning environments for a variety of training and communication needs:

- **New Hire Onboarding** – Companies are using virtual learning environments to conduct new employee orientation and training. Virtual learning environments provide an engaging, effective, and consistent on-boarding experience for new hires, as well as offer the opportunity to expand the orientation process globally.

- **Leadership / Management Development** – Virtual learning environments have become increasingly popular for leadership training and management development courses. Flexible online training is much easier to fit into managers’ busy schedules – resulting in higher participation than for traditional classroom training.

- **Continuing Professional Education** – Professional training on new techniques, rules, and procedures is much more convenient when employees can access training on their own schedules and without the need to travel to distant training seminars.

- **Client Training** – Virtual learning environments are ideal for training clients on the use of new products and applications. The convenience and flexibility offered by virtual learning environments dramatically increases client participation in training programs. They also enable clients to regularly discuss common issues and share best practices.

- **Sales Training** – Companies are using virtual learning environments to train their sales teams on new products, services, and promotions, in addition to basic and advanced selling skills. Virtual universities also allow direct access to subject matter experts for technical Q&A and discussion of specific topics.

- **Partner Training** – Firms use virtual learning environments to educate partners on new technologies and partner programs. The virtual university’s social networking tools allow partners to jointly discuss challenges and companies to quickly obtain feedback on product priorities.

**BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

One of the most compelling arguments for using a virtual learning environment is that organizations can reduce their training costs by up to 90 percent. Virtual learning environments can also deliver engaging training programs to a global workforce, including company-wide, geography-specific, and job-specific training.

Virtual learning environments provide employees with a choice of learning methods, enabling them to learn in the ways that work best for them. Employees can access course material 24/7, including listening to lectures and engaging in chat room-style discussions (see example on following page). Moreover, subject matter experts from anywhere in the world can participate as online facilitators, further enhancing the real-world applicability of lessons and quality of learning experiences.

Online courses allow for wide-ranging content, and employees can access course documents from their PCs or tablet devices, including research articles and live webcasts. And all of the training metrics – including attendee activities – are tracked, enabling the assessment of learner participation and completion rates.
Learning management systems (LMS) and virtual learning environments are complementary training platforms, each with their own unique benefits. Learning management systems enable companies to create individualized training schedules, track each employee’s progress, and serve as the delivery platform for e-learning courses. Virtual learning environments differ in that they more effectively:

- Enable collaborative learning by combining online instructor-led training with social networking, expert-led discussions, scheduled chats, blogs, and more.
- Facilitate the development of social training programs that are interactive, collaborative, and engaging. With virtual learning environments, training participation and course completion rates are higher than those for traditional formal training programs.
- Allow interactive training to be delivered to employees, clients, and partners. Learning management systems primarily focus on employee training.
- Support mobile learning, allowing instructors, employees, clients, and partners to access training materials via phone and tablet devices.

Virtual learning environments and learning management systems are frequently integrated. In many cases, the virtual learning environment is designed to only be accessible from learning management systems (via a secure authenticated connection). In other integrations, the virtual learning environment is the primary training environment, which links to e-learning courses residing in the LMS.

**WHY ON24?**

ON24 is a leader in virtual online learning technologies. The ON24 virtual environment solution is being used by leading global companies to provide engaging training programs using virtual classrooms, live webcasts, collaboration tools, and social networking tools. Key competitive features of the ON24 virtual learning environment include:

- Industry-leading webcasting platform that combines instructor-led training with attendee collaboration and social networking
- Comprehensive social learning tools for group discussion, networking, employee feedback, and peer-to-peer collaboration
- Enterprise-class platform designed to be extremely secure, reliable, and scalable (including role-based access and SAML authentication)
- Completely multilingual environment, including the ability to “toggle” between 15 languages in real time
- “Out of the box” support for mobile learning (tablets and phones) for both instructors and participants
- Real-time measurement of training participation

**REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE, REAL BENEFITS**

The ON24 virtual environment has enabled leading firms to provide engaging and interactive online training to their global audiences of employees, customers, and partners.
The following case studies highlight some of the ways companies are leveraging the ON24 virtual learning environment to provide tangible benefits by:

- Providing a global learning experience while reducing overall training costs
- Delivering an effective and consistent on-boarding experience for new hires
- Increasing employee training participation and completion rates
- Boosting social learning via expert-led discussions and Q&A sessions
- Accelerating the transfer of institutional knowledge between employees

GLOBAL LEARNING PRODUCTS

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) is a global learning company. As the world’s largest provider of pre-K through 12 solutions, HMH collaborates with school districts, administrators, teachers, parents, and students to provide interactive, results-driven learning.

HMH organizes a sales kickoff meeting each year to introduce new products to its selling force of educational consultants worldwide. For its December 2011 sales training, HMH created a customized, two-day virtual sales kick-off meeting for its 900 consultants. Powered by ON24, the virtual sales meeting included live sessions, exhibits, chat discussions, and downloadable documents.

The virtual sales meeting resulted in better learning outcomes than their prior physical meetings. Some 87% of attendees said the virtual training was “very good” or “outstanding”. The event was a big success from a financial point of view, too — it was approximately 90% less expensive to execute than a physical event, saving HMH more than $500,000.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

A major professional services firm has used the ON24 virtual environment platform to create a private virtual learning environment for the education and discussion of mobility and incentive taxes. The community helps members stay up-to-date and communicate in real time with other tax and HR professionals on the latest trends and issues.

Members have spent more than 3½ hours, on average, listening to educational forums and engaging in discussions with their peers. The ON24 virtual environment allows the professional services company to demonstrate its wide-ranging expertise, leading to new business opportunities for its global employer services division.

TECHNOLOGY MANUFACTURING

A leading global technology manufacturer uses the ON24 virtual environment platform for training its employees on a variety of collaboration and productivity tools. The company offers weekly live “virtual brown bag” webcasts within the virtual learning environment. It allows the company to deliver professional development training cost-effectively to its employees worldwide. The company also uses the virtual environment to share institutional knowledge via expert-led discussions, moderated forums, and Q&A sessions.
HOTEL MANAGEMENT

A major hotel chain used the ON24 virtual environment platform to launch a global training initiative designed to improve key employees’ understanding of management fundamentals and leadership principles. Using the virtual learning environment, instructor-led training (via live webcasts and moderated discussions) was delivered to the company’s geographically-distributed leadership team. Over 3,000 managers and company leaders were trained, at a cost that was 69 percent lower than the industry average.
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE

In the global marketplace, well-educated employees, partners, suppliers, and customers are a critical success factor. Companies across industries are using virtual learning environments such as the ON24 virtual learning environment to achieve this goal. These organizations are providing highly effective learning experiences to their global workforces at much lower cost compared to traditional learning methods.

For more information on the benefits of the ON24 virtual environment, contact us at 877.202.9599 or visit www.on24.com.