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Objective: Persuade busy executives on the benefits of online training programs.

Portfolio

The Advantages Of Converting An On-Site Training Program To An Online Webcast Format

Executive Summary

In today's business climate, organizations must continue to find new ways to increase productivity while minimizing costs. When it comes to providing training programs this can be a difficult task. Since many companies have employees spread out all over various geographic locations, getting everyone together to attend an on-site training program often proves to be a difficult challenge.

Today, advancements in remote collaboration technologies make it easier to get everyone together at the same time. Organizations can now bring all of their employees together for training sessions. This eliminates the cost of travel, hotel accommodations, and venue rental. Computer technology helps organizations plan and organize the event more efficiently because data collection and reporting is automated with easy-to-use online tools.

This white paper will discuss the advantages of converting from an on-site training program format to an online webcast training format and examines the best practices for conducting an online training program including:

- Event planning and setup
- Conducting the live event
- Post event follow-up

What Is Impacting The Need For Online Training Programs?

Budget, geographic, poor operational efficiency and time limitations are a few major factors encouraging companies to reexamine how they conduct their training programs.
Companies in the financial services, high-tech, education, manufacturing, pharmaceutical and healthcare industries as well as other businesses have an ongoing need to conduct training programs. For example, when new products are launched, many businesses must update their global sales force with proper training.

Budget Limitations

Due to the recent economic downturn, many organizations have reduced or canceled their training programs. According to an article in Business Week magazine, Cisco Systems

canceled its sales training in 2009. A Global 500 high tech firm, known for its extravagant physical events went from holding eight in 2008 to one in 2009.[1]

The cost of running an on-site training program is often very expensive. Organizations have to pay a variety of expenses related to the event. Most often they have to pay for the travel and accommodation costs for all employees who plan on attending. Travel for internal meetings and training average $1200 to $1500 per trip (for domestic North American Travel).[2] They also have to pay rental fees to the place that will host the event.

If the organization is going to bring someone from outside the company to conduct a training session the costs will even be higher. The organization will most likely have to pay for their air fare, taxi to and from the airport, meals, and hotel lodging. This can boost training costs well in to thousands of dollars.

Geographic Limitations

Because of geographic limitations, potential attendees may decide not to register for or attend an event because they don't have time to travel. This is a problem for many organizations because it is difficult for people to get out of the office to devote a half-day or more for training. If the training takes place out of town, employees may not be able to leave their day-to-day responsibilities in order to travel to an out-of-town venue.

Scheduling conflicts also arise.

For example, say there is a training program that takes three separate one or two hour sessions, sometimes the employees that need to attend can only participate for one or two days but not all three and sometimes not at all.

That means some employees will not get the full benefits of the training that is provided to them. They will have to attend a make-up training session which would also increase costs.

Because of today's global business environment many corporations have employees based out of many remote locations throughout the world. Often, employees do not spend their entire workweek at the office. For example, company executives and sales reps often have to engage in business travel and are therefore frequently unavailable for an on-site training session.

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[1] Business Week, November 4th 2009, "Virtual Meetings Will Erase Face To Face."
[2] Forrester Research, 2007

Poor Operational Efficiency

Because of poor operational efficiency, many of the processes involved in conducting on-site events can be cumbersome. Delivery of presentation materials (usually involving AV equipment), manually distributing and collecting forms and documents, taking polls and surveys, and administrating and scoring exams can often take up too much time and break up the flow of the presentation.

The quality and quantity of data collected and reported can also be affected. On-site events do not provide a simplified process for collecting valuable information and insights from attendees. There is also no simple procedure for reviewing and analyzing information provided by the attendees during an on-site training session.

Time Limitations

Attendees may also have questions during the presentation. Because of time constraints, there are only a limited number of questions that can be asked during an on-site event. Many times the moderators will not be able to answer all of the questions. Questions can't be easily submitted and documented without the individual being called upon to articulate their question in front of the audience.

Some attendees may also be nervous about asking questions during a live on-site event. They may be uncomfortable asking questions in front of an audience and might not get a chance to ask the moderator privately when it's finished.

Organizations have also discovered that there is too much time associated with managing an on-site event. When conducting an on-site training session, organizations are involved in more than just the planning, brand building, marketing strategy and execution of the event. They are also involved the creative, technical, and logistical elements that help an event to succeed. This includes event design, audio visual production, scriptwriting, and logistics. The organization usually has to hire many different companies to handle each of these functions or do it all in-house.

Because of these limitations, it can be difficult putting together an effective on-site training session. Many companies are looking for a more efficient and cost effective way to conduct training programs. The challenge for organizations is to provide a training program that is easy to manage, doesn't take up too much time, and reaches as many people as possible.

This is why many organizations are considering moving their training programs to an online format.

Why Online Training?

In a survey conducted for Citrix Online by 1080 Group, survey respondents were asked to rank a long list of potential benefits for using online training.

The top three benefits they chose were:

- Reaching more trainees with the same headcount.
- Presenting themselves as thought leaders in their industry
- Being more effective with their budget

As this study shows, it is important to utilize new training technology, and use online training programs as a more cost effective solution.[3]

Moving Training Programs To An Online Webcast Training Format

To overcome the budget, geographic, time, and operational issues associated with on-site training programs many businesses are moving to an online training solution.

Online training programs can save organizations a lot of money because they reduce costs and are less expensive to produce than on-site training programs. By moving training programs online companies no longer have to pay expenses such as travel, accommodations and venue rental.

Geographic limitations are eliminated because a computer and a high speed internet connection is all that is required to attend a training session. This will also help increase event attendance because more people will register and attend since they don't have to travel.

The quality and quantity of data collected and reported improves using an online training format. Polls and surveys can be administered during the presentation without interrupting the flow of the event. The results can be tabulated instantly so the attendees can see them right away.

Online training programs also provide enough time for participants to ask questions. The attendees' questions will only be seen by the moderators. Questions will usually be answered during the event. If the moderators can't get to all of the questions during the live event they will answer them during a follow up email.

Organizations will also not spend as much time managing an online event. Some of the technical and logistical elements used in on-site training are not needed for an online training event. An online training vendor will handle event design and audio visual production. Logistic concerns are eliminated because the event is online.

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[3] How To Move Your Training Program Online. Citrix Online Pg.1

Finally, online events are also easier to manage. Managing the attendees, collecting data, and collateral distribution are easier using an online training program. The organization only has to prepare the content for the training session. Employees will receive everything they need for the event on their computer screens such as invitations, registration forms, and reminder emails.

The Benefits Of Online Training Programs

Key benefits of converting on-site training programs to an online format often include:

Access Via A Personal Computer: Online training programs are convenient for all participants. No matter where anyone is in the world they can get on their computer to attend an event. There's no traveling involved, no hotels to book and no planes to catch. Everyone can participate.

The Cost: Online training expenses are significantly less than those of on-site training. Sending employees to an on-site event can cost a company hundreds and sometimes thousands of dollars. An online training program is more cost effective because there is no travel, accommodations, or venue rental costs to pay.

Information Collection: Online training programs often simplify the process of collecting valuable information from the attendees because all interactions are typically documented and provided for review and analysis using an online reporting site.

Environmentally Friendly: Online training programs provide a much more environmentally-friendly alternative than does travel.

What To Look For In An Online Training Solution Provider

When seeking a company to provide an online training solution, many factors should be considered, including:

Offers Guided Event Planning: Seek a provider that offers an event planner that will walk you through the process of conducting an online event. The event planner should show you how to plan the event, help you set up a branded registration page, provide live event management assistance, and offer post event support.

Provides Custom Invitations And Registration Page That Collects Critical Information About Attendees: Look for a program that provides customized email invitation capabilities that will allow you to track key data points (i.e. opens, click-throughs, etc.). The online program should also provide registration page fields that collect required enrollment details and other important information. The vendor must also provide post registration event reminder emails that will help maximize attendance.

Live Event Management: A good online training program provider will carefully oversee the organizations online event to ensure success. Look for a program that provides rich media presentations (live streaming audio and video, and animated slide presentations) that will help communicate complex lessons comprehensively and with great precision. They must also provide robust interactivity and data capture tools to engage attendees and facilitate an open dialog with attendees. It is recommended that there also be a tool for conducting survey's and polls during the event to allow the organization to interact with their participants.

Post Event Support: Seek an online training program that offers support after the event. It is highly recommended that the program also offers an in-depth event reporting site that updates attendance details in real time. The online training program must also be able to digitally distribute and score examinations live or post event.

Best Practices For Planning And Conducting An Online Training Event

Planning A Virtual Event

Creating a successful online training program starts with planning the event. The first thing the event manager must do is bring everyone involved with conducting the training session together for a kickoff meeting.

The purpose of the kickoff meeting is for all parties involved to discuss event objectives, time frame, insight regarding their brand, and metrics important to their ROI. During the kickoff meeting, creating the format of the online event must be decided. This includes console design and layout, branding, and which format to use. For example, the organization must decide whether they want to conduct their training session with just audio only, slides and audio, video only, or a combination of video, slides and audio.

In addition, the kickoff meeting provides a forum for discussing practices associated with previous conducted on-site events, and how such practices might be effectively migrated from an on-site to an online format. Ideas to consider include:

- How to best "digitize" design, layout and branding schemes that were successfully implemented during previous live events.
- Identifying manual on-site processes such as collateral distribution that could be more efficiently addressed using automated online tools.

The next step is to develop a timetable of deliverables for building your online event. This process involves clearly identifying specific deliverables selecting individuals responsible for addressing each deliverable, and developing a formal timeframe that outlines the required order and dates of completion for each deliverable.

The Registration Page

The registration page should include a set of standard questions listed for attendees to fill out. Standard registration questions often include Email Address, First Name, Last Name, Company Name, Job Title, Business Phone, Address Line 1, Address Line 2, City, State, Postal Code and Country. However, registration pages also provide an opportunity to collect information to support lead generation, market research and other data driven campaigns.

The registration page should also include important information about the event including an event description, date and time, event duration, and speakers' names.

When the participant enters their information on the registration page and clicks the submit button they should be taken to a registration confirmation landing page which provides the details of the event.

Participants should also receive an automated confirmation email with event details.

The Event Console

Next, an event console page needs to be created for the day of the training session. The event console is what the attendees will see on their computer screens during the presentation. The following deliverables are recommended for an event console page.

Speaker Bios: Must include formal job title and company name.

Speaker Headshot: There should be high resolution pictures of the speakers.

Company Logo And Linking URL: A link to the organization's website should be prominently displayed.

Company Boilerplate: The organization's corporate overview or description.

Links to online resources such as white papers, websites, product reviews, etc. can also be made available for attendees during the live event.

Conducting An Online Training Session

When conducting an online event, It is recommended that that the online trainer engage audience members throughout the presentation. The trainer can do this by beginning each session by making a provocative statement, providing compelling statistics, or describe what the attendees will learn during the program.

Throughout the session the trainer can easily take polls and ask participants to type in a response from a question. The answers can be tabulated instantly so that the moderator can quickly share the results with the audience.

Customized Reporting Site

A component essential to an online training program is a customized reporting site. A customized reporting site should be used to ensure that the organization has achieved their event objectives. This site should contain the information that the attendees filled out to register for the event. The customized reporting site displays the name of the attendees, the company they work for, the time that they registered for the event, their job function, the industry they work in and other questions that might be asked.

The reporting site can also show the total number of people who registered for the event and how many of them did not show up.

Post Event Follow-Up Campaign

It is recommended that organizations conduct a post event follow-up campaign using email, and survey's to gauge their attendee's thoughts and opinions about the training session.

Arkadin's Virtual Training Program

Designed to create an easy way to conduct an online event, Arkadin's virtual training solution offers businesses a cost effective way to provide online training programs.

Arkadin's virtual training solution is designed to help organizations cut costs, limit travel expenses, and cut time constraints by moving their training program to an online webcast format.

Arkadin's virtual training solution includes:

A Virtual Venue That Brings Your Event To Life: Arkadin's virtual training solution has a custom designed virtual venue that can stream audio, video and animated slide presentations. They also provide polling, Q & A sessions, and post event surveys that engage attendees while collecting valuable data.

Branded And Customized Registration Pages: Arkadin provides customized registration pages designed to be compelling, actionable and consistent with branding requirements. They also include event reminder emails which help increase event attendance.

Powerful Reporting Tools: Arkadin offers user-friendly reporting tools that detail, analyze, and export critical data about individual attendees and the overall event.

Experienced Online Production Team: Arkadin's experienced online event producers and design team guides event planners through each step of the process, provides production services and helps manage live events.

About Arkadin's Virtual Training Solution

To find out more about Arkadin's virtual training solution visit www.arkadin.com or call 646-495-7674.