

Chapter XVII

Instructional Design and E-Training

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ABSTRACT

Online training or, e-training, can be less expensive, more efficient, and more productive than traditional face-to-face instruction. This chapter reviews why businesses are adopting Web-based instruction, characteristics of exemplary e-trainers and skills online instructors must attain. The primary focus of the chapter is on the importance of instructional design in analyzing the online audience and context; developing instructional strategies and online materials; implementing a Web-based course; and evaluating an online training program. Future trends and a conclusion complete the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

The general perspective of this chapter is that e-training can provide high quality, efficient instruction at a cost savings, if it is well designed and implemented. Like traditional classroom training, Web-based instruction is dependent on the design of the course, the expertise of the trainer, and the support of the administration. Online learning does not work for all businesses, and not all trainers are well-suited for instructing at a distance. The main objectives of the chapter are that the reader will:

1. Recognize that quality training, efficiency, and cost are three reasons that businesses are implementing Web-based instruction
2. Recognize the characteristics of an exemplary online trainer
3. Identify the skills online instructors need to master
4. Identify the difference between synchronous, asynchronous, and blended Web-based instruction
5. Appreciate the importance of sound instructional design to the success of a Web-based course
6. Identify key steps to effectively design an online course
7. Understand that the future of e-learning is unclear

BACKGROUND

Introduction

“A Vision of E-learning for America’s Workforce” (2001) is a report by the Commission on Technology and Adult Learning, a committee created by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) and the National Governors Association (NGA). The charge for the commission was: “to define and encourage a technology-enabled learning environment that will result in an engaged citizenry and a skilled workforce for the digital economy” (p. 2). The commission found that employees in the 21st Century are faced with challenges of navigating an environment of innovation, customization, contemporary business models, and the latest workplace organizational methods. To thrive on the job, employees have to be trained in new skills and innovative ways of managing knowledge. Businesses, however, are finding that traditional, classroom-based, face-to-face instruction is unwieldy, unproductive, and expensive in providing employees with essential training (p. 11). Therefore, they are turning to well- designed online instruction to train their workforce.

Definitions of Asynchronous and Synchronous Online Instruction

The two primary modes of online instruction are defined according to accessibility. In general, asynchronous instruction can be accessed on the Web at any time and from any place with an Internet connection. Synchronous instruction can also be accessed from any place with the proper connectivity, but participants need to be “logged on” at a pre-arranged time. This mode of communication is synchronous because it occurs at the same time.

Asynchronous instruction can be offered through at least two modes. The first mode is programmed, self-paced asynchronous tutorials or courses offered via the Internet with no inter-

vention from an instructor. The learner is asked to perhaps read on or off-line content, perform content-centered activities, and then complete an online assessment. If the assessment results are adequate, a new set of material is presented, and the learner continues through the course. The second type of asynchronous delivery is instructor-led courses offered via the Internet which can be accessed at any time from any place. Instructors in these courses interact with the learner through technologies such as e-mail or discussion boards. The learner can obtain the content on or off-line but performs activities and exercises with the guidance of an instructor, who is sometimes referred to as a facilitator. These activities can also be conducted on or off-line.

Factors Contributing to the Adoption of Online Training

This section examines three key reasons that businesses and corporations are adopting online training: efficient presentation of instruction, quality training, and cost benefits. The chapter first discusses how training online can be more efficient than face-to-face classroom instruction. Quality of online instruction will be discussed second, followed by an examination of the cost benefits of Web-based learning.

Efficient Instruction

Writing for the “Retail Technology” column in the trade journal *Chain Store Age*, Gentry (2005) states that 90% of e-learning in most chain stores is done in-house, so the employees do not have to travel (pp. 2-3). In addition, a report on e-learning was commissioned by W. R. Hambrecht, a financial services company, and written by Urden and Weggen (2000) for the business research firm, SRI Consulting. This report states that e-learning is more efficient since employees can access training on the jobsite: “Workers can also improve productivity and use their own time more efficiently,

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