KB CommEntary

KB COMM • SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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Greetings!

The Train(ing) Was On Time

One of the keys to effective training is that it be scheduled so that learners can immediately practice and put it to use on the job. In this edition of *KB CommEntary*, we continue with the second in a multi-part series of information and tips for designing, implementing, and measuring the effectiveness of training programs.

What's Up at KB COMM?

At KB COMM, we provide mission-critical communication and learning services to clients in a variety of industries. Thanks to our established and new clients for keeping us busy. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Revising technical documentation for a system software developer
- Creating and revising job descriptions for the Careers website of a high-tech manufacturer
- Writing and editing numerous information products for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer, including communications to employees from the CEO and executive leadership team, customer letters, trade show presentations and materials, and product marketing brochures
- Writing, formatting, and performing quality control reviews of large, complex chemical residue studies intended for regulatory submission on behalf of a federally funded, cooperative research organization
- Writing supplements and formatting modules of electronic submissions to FDA for a pharmaceutical manufacturing company
- Reviewing and editing for consistency and accuracy response documents and associated modules for electronic submission to FDA on behalf of a medical device manufacturing company

KB COMM LLC is a certified Women's Business Enterprise. We are officially qualified to participate in corporations' woman- and minority-owned vendor programs.

Please keep us in mind for your communication or training projects.

Tips and Tales

Training for Success, Pt. 2: Delivery Mechanisms

Back in the good old days, employee training typically consisted of the grizzled veterans telling or showing the newbies what to do and then watching and correcting them as they attempted to follow suit. That's still an appropriate, effective approach for teaching many kinds of tasks, such as milking cows, making widgets, and running too-big-to-fail financial institutions. Just kidding about that last one. Well, maybe not…

Then someone (probably an unemployed teacher) had the inspiration to apply the academic model to employee training—the venerated instructor/class approach (aka instructor-led training or classroom training), which until relatively recently has been the only game in town as a delivery mechanism for employee learning. Instructor-led training is still commonly and appropriately used in corporate settings where the learning objective is to impart knowledge of subject matter rather than skills in performing tasks.

But now that we're in the computer age, training, like everything else, is increasingly delivered via that glowing screen on your desktop. Computer-based training, web-based training, online training, e-learning, asynchronous training, hybrid training, distance learning, blended learning—many options and lots of buzzwords!

So how do you decide which delivery mechanism is appropriate? As always, it depends on a lot of things: subject matter, the number of people to be trained and where they're located, company culture, IT infrastructure, required timeframe, and budget, to name a few.

Let's look at some basic characteristics of and considerations regarding today's most commonly used training delivery mechanisms. To simplify things a bit, we're going to lump all these options into two categories: instructor-led training and e-learning, which includes all types of training that are either wholly or partially delivered via computer.

Instructor-Led (Classroom) Training (ILT)

Just to clarify, ILT is traditional training in which all the learners are in a room with one or more instructors who, ideally, are professional trainers well-versed in the subject matter. The course design (i.e., learning objectives and strategies, content, structure, and flow of the class) and supporting materials (instructor and learner guides, slides, overheads, etc.) are defined and implemented by professional instructional designers who may or may not be the same people as the trainers.

Key Characteristics of ILT

- Less up-front time and lower up-front cost—course design and development for an hour of well-designed and implemented ILT is less expensive and time-consuming than for a comparable hour of equally well-designed and implemented e-learning.
- Higher cost and less efficiency on the back end—course delivery is more expensive, labor-intensive, and inefficient than for e-learning.
- Delivery of ILT is logistically challenging. Sessions must be scheduled, and instructors and learners must be in the same physical facility at the same time.
- ILT permits the human touch that e-learning often lacks.

When to Consider ILT

- You have a relatively small number of people to train (fewer than 100).
- Learners are physically concentrated in one or two locations.
- Learning goals and objectives are focused on developing skills rather than knowledge.
- Your workplace culture is hands-on and high-touch.
- You have a relatively modest training budget.
- You have a basic (or no) IT infrastructure.

e-Learning

For this comparison, e-learning is any type of training that employs personal computers as at least part of the delivery mechanism. Human instructors may or may not be involved; if they are, the learner typically views, listens to, and possibly interacts with them through audio/video links. Course design and content are defined and implemented by a team of professional instructional designers, user interface designers, and technologists who specialize in creating e-learning.

Key Characteristics of e-Learning

- More up-front time and higher up-front cost—course design and development for an hour of well-designed and implemented e-learning is typically several times more expensive and time-consuming than for a comparable hour of equally well-designed and implemented ILT.
- Lower cost and greater efficiency on the back end—course delivery is considerably less expensive and labor-intensive than for traditional ILT.
- Economy of scale is huge for e-learning. The more learners and the more dispersed they are, the more economically and logistically attractive e-learning becomes.
- Some level of IT infrastructure is required for effective delivery.

When to Consider e-Learning

- You have a large number of people to train (more than 100).
- Learners are geographically dispersed.
- Learning goals and objectives are focused on developing knowledge rather than skills.
- Your workplace culture is e-friendly—people are comfortable with and accustomed to using information technology.
- You can't afford to take people away from work for training.
- You have a relatively robust IT infrastructure.

In a Nutshell…

The choice of a delivery mechanism is crucial for a good training outcome. Both ILT and e-learning can produce excellent results when they are properly designed to meet specific learner needs, implemented competently, and delivered to appropriate audiences. Regardless of the delivery mechanism, poorly designed and implemented training directed to the wrong people will not yield the desired return on investment. For best results, we recommend that you engage the services of experienced learning professionals, either in-house or external consultants.

One thing to keep in mind is that you can purchase off-the-shelf ILT and e-learning courses on a wide range of technical and non-technical topics. If you do not require training customized specifically for your learners, purchasing it may be the most economical option.

In our next issue, we will discuss how to measure the effectiveness of training.

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

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KB COMM

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