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E-Learning IN A Wired World

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E-Learning in a Wired World

BY ALAN HUPP & GARY LINDBERG

Enter “e-learning” or “online learning” into your favorite search engine and prepare for a deluge. You’ll find information about everything from how to baste a turkey to maintaining your car to using “distance learning” to earn a degree from a respected university.

So what does all of this have to do with you and your business?

Cisco Systems CEO John Chambers made the following predictions about learning on the Internet, or e-learning, at the 1999 Comdex show, including:

- ▶ During the next two years, education will evolve into more of a lifelong process as companies turn to the Internet to train employees.
- ▶ Education over the Internet is going to be so big it is going to make e-mail look like a

“rounding error” in terms of the Internet capacity it will consume.

He attributes this expected e-learning revolution to the same intensely competitive global economy that is forcing companies to keep improving productivity. Chambers, whose Internet routing company obviously stands to benefit from such a “killer app,” is hardly alone in his predictions.

Why E-Learning?

You may know many companies, both startups and established companies, happily using traditional instructor-led instruction—such as seminars and company-sponsored training programs and even CD-ROM instruction to train employees. Those companies are quickly becoming the exception. With training budgets virtually flat even as the need for training is increasing, it’s no wonder that the marketing research firm IDC projects that the e-learning industry will reach \$6 billion by 2002.

Other business consultants are making similar forecasts. Piper-Jaffray, for example, recently predicted that “sooner rather than later, all training applications will have an Internet/Intranet component.” Leary Gates, president of Lumina Marketing, which counsels technology clients in the areas of sales and marketing, has noted that online training offers an economical and effective way to train new employees and help existing employees develop and hone skills.

“In the fast-paced technology environment, sales training often is viewed as a luxury. Ironically, engineers and other technical professionals whose emphasis frequently is on product development can receive the greatest benefit from solid sales training,” Leary recently commented.

Competitive pressures, corporate restructuring and new technology are making it tough for companies to keep their sales people up-to-speed using traditional approaches to learning. E-learning—using “challenge-based” learning techniques and quality, proven content—provides a vastly superior training experience. Quality e-learning is faster, cheaper, and more efficient than any other training method. Most impressive, though, are the potentially higher



retention rates that are possible with e-learning.

Not All E-Learning Is Created Equally

Pretty big claims, we know. But we have the experience and research to back them up, which we'll do in a minute. In the meantime, what do we mean by "challenge-based" learning? In essence, it's the traditional problem-solving mode of learning, known as the Socratic method, but at Net speed using today's Web-based technology.

If you ever took a course in which the instructor used the Socratic method of asking students questions and helping them find the answers—versus presenting the facts in a lecture format—you have some experience with challenge-based learning. We've taken that concept and updated it for the next millennium.

A 1998 study by respected researchers Shoffner & Dalton found that challenge-based learning results in higher retention and in learning that is more efficient. Specifically, the study found that learners who use constructivist, problem-based programs consistently retain more in long-term memory and showed a higher level of instructional efficiency than learners using objectivist, criterion-referenced programs.

Don't believe us? Think about two college courses you took, in which one was based on the Socratic method and the other a simple lecture format. Which do you remember the most? If you're like most people, you still have fairly vivid memories of the ideas and concepts you discovered through an ongoing dialogue with your professor but quickly forgot most of what you "crammed" in order to pass a test.

KnowHowZone has staked its business on this concept. We've developed "HyperLearning™," a challenge-based, multimedia approach to online learning. In HyperLearning, learners are challenged to solve real-life problems using relevant information, advice and tools—called Resources—presented using multimedia.

It's like having a professor who not only asks the right questions, but gives you plenty of useful resources to help you find the answers yourself. Which is the key to understanding why online, or e-learning, offers such advantages over traditional instructor-led training or even training presented on CD-ROM. The wired nature of the Web puts everything you need to learn right at your fingertips.

But don't just take our word for it. The Shoffner & Dalton study firmly concluded that

hypermedia-based instruction, that is World Wide Web-based instruction, is better than local computer-based instruction. It found that learners using networked hypermedia-based instruction consistently retain more in long-term memory than learners using local computer-based instruction.

Quality content is the other important ingredient to getting your money's worth out of online training. At KnowHowZone, we've taken the expertise and proven content of the top names in sales training today. Their insight and unique delivery has been finely honed before hundreds of live audiences. We've taken that wisdom and experience, compressed it, and created a collection of high-impact courses delivered conveniently over the Web.

Training at a Fraction of the Cost

You may be starting to get comfortable with the idea of online training, but what about cost? Once again, online training offers the most attractive value proposition.

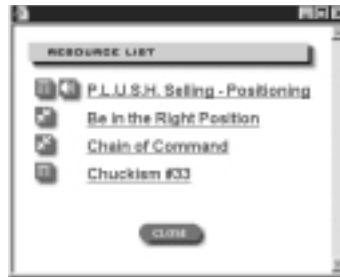
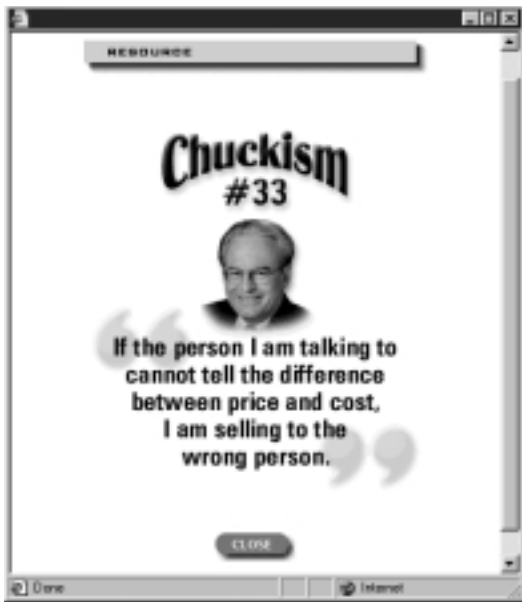
According to Lakewood Research's 1998 Industry Report, the typical company spends about \$60 per hour to provide their sales reps with an average of 33 hours of instructor-led training per year. By using online sales training instead, the amount of instructional time can be compressed by two-thirds. With a base training subscription fee of \$79, this translates into a savings of more than \$1,000 per year per sales rep when KnowHowZone or comparable training is used instead.

How can we and other online training programs offer quality training at such a reduced price? It's all in the bits. Because we have very few actual hard costs, apart from the initial site design and the royalty fees we pay our content experts, we can pass the savings along to learners.

And keep in mind that our hypothetical calculation above does not include the enormous cost-savings possible on travel and hospitality expenses incurred when a company sends employees to traditional instructor-led training programs or seminars in other locations. With



The screen grabs shown throughout are from Chuck Reaves' course entitled "Differentiating from the Competition."



Chuck Reaves, author of *Differentiating From the Competition*, is pictured at left in one of his many “Resources” for his course.

The Challenge and Solution presented at right engages learners, asking them to consult the resources before selecting the most appropriate solution.



online training, learning can happen anywhere—from a sales person’s office to their home to the airport between business flights.

Perhaps most significant, however, is the opportunity cost savings offered by online training versus traditional training methods that take people out of the field several days at a time. Because online learning is compressed and focused, training can be taken in shorter bursts at times convenient for the learner—not when they should be out selling.

Still Not Convinced?

You’re not alone. Research shows that many are reluctant to forsake traditional instructor-led instruction, even though it is expensive, time-consuming and provides more anecdotes and less actual learning than its compressed online counterpart. Large companies, in particular, cling to traditional training methods in the mistaken belief that it’s the only way to tailor content to match their company’s culture and industry language. Others believe the motivational aspect of “rah rah” sales training seminars can’t be matched in a virtual format.

To be fair, it’s understandable that some businesses have taken a “wait and see” attitude, at least in the area of online sales training. Until recently, there has been an absolute void in Internet-based sales training offerings focusing on the needs of small and mid-sized companies interested in a turnkey, “off-the-shelf” solution.

But some companies, such as KnowHowZone client PurchaseSoft, are acknowledging that online sales training is an

idea whose day has come. Other companies, including Endurant Business Solutions, a leading provider of management consulting services to Minnesota companies, views KnowHowZone online training as a good way for sales people to stay ahead of an increasingly fast-paced learning curve.

“In the ‘80s and ‘90s we talked about ‘just in time’ inventory. In future years, companies will talk about ‘just in time to the customer’ and nowhere is this more applicable than training and development. The KnowHowZone provides 24-hour ability to keep sales skills current,” Endurant Business Solutions Vice President Wayne Latterell recently told us.

“The administrative functions of taking orders and processing customer supporting issues are being replaced by technology enablers. Keeping ‘intellectually current’ will become a key differentiator to success. This site provides the ability to learn from others that have been there and done it,” he said.

Wayne also noted that KnowHowZone online training is useful for both sales managers and sales executives: “From a sales manager perspective, the ability to ‘target’ lessons to specific sales situations allows me to support the needs of individual sales people. As a sales executive, the KnowHowZone approach allows me to develop or refresh skills prior to individual sales events.”

Conclusion

High quality, challenge-based training on the Net is a fast, cost-effective and highly efficient way to keep employees on the cutting-edge of changing technology and business trends. With shrinking training budgets and competitive selling pressures, online sales training means less time is invested in training and more time is spent in the field closing deals. The result: companies save money, sales professionals are more confident and knowledgeable, and customers more satisfied. The only real question today is what type of online sales training is best for your company. ❖❖

By Alan Hupp, KnowHowZone President and CEO & Gary Lindberg, KnowHowZone Co-founder. Hupp and Lindberg have a combined 40 years of experience in the learning technology business. Hupp most recently was part of the management team that grew Drake Prometric to a \$50 million company before being acquired by Sylvan Learning Systems. Lindberg is the architect of KnowHowZone's technology. He previously produced a major motion picture before focusing his attention on communication and training programs for Fortune 500 companies. For more information on the KnowHowZone visit www.knowhowzone.com.

Online Sales Training: What to Look for

Not all online sales training is created equally. It takes a lot more than cool graphics to effectively train people. By finding an online training program that truly addresses the challenges and opportunities facing employees you'll increase your odds of long-term success. The following criteria should be considered when choosing an online training program:

- Track record—It's important to find a training program that features proven informational content and has the track record to prove it.
- True Web Training—Traditional training, in which learners read lectures and take tests, is sometimes called online training. In reality, it's instructor-led instruction without the benefit of an instructor. Don't settle for lifeless training just because it's available over the Internet.
- Insist upon challenge-based instruction.
- Results matter—Company-endorsed training programs should offer accountability and solid evidence of content mastery. Employees who take KnowHowZone courses, for example, receive a grade evaluating their performance. Supervisors also receive this information.
- Online training programs should offer opportunities to ask questions, such as through e-mail or chats with instructors.

OUR FIRM'S PRACTICE IS LIMITED TO IMMIGRATION AND VISA RELATED MATTERS

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