



### [eLearning Strategies for Success](#)

Efficient use of human capital is a priority for organisations large and small. It means knowing that key personnel have the required knowledge and skills to make decisions and succeed in their jobs. Knowledge management becomes a challenge to organisational leaders as personnel take on a greater and more varied burden of responsibilities than ever before. How they manage these responsibilities will translate to the bottom line and, ultimately, the long-term success of the organisation.

E-learning programs today provide many organisations with an additional management tool to effectively achieve these ends, and with the flexibility and cost-effectiveness they require. This paper explores how you can balance departmental needs, vendor relationships and budgetary constraints to ensure successful e-learning initiatives. Also, it includes five steps you can put to use today to make the most out of your e-learning investment.

#### [Today's Training Market Climate](#)

Even as the market swings back to better health, scarcity of capital has caused a fundamental change in the training market. This can be both good and bad for training buyers. On one hand, the training market has contracted; only the best providers have managed to weather the storm. This ensures that buyers receive better service and can more quickly identify high-quality options. On the other hand, training executives are under increasing pressure to train employees in less time, delivering only training that can demonstrate a clear return for line management, using fewer company resources.

#### [The Buyer-Seller Dilemma](#)

These new market conditions have caused increasing amounts of friction in the buyer-seller relationship. Buyers want a relevant solution that helps solve a highly specific problem—typically identified by discussions with senior and line management. Sellers are under pressure to sell by making their technology or product “fit” with the buyer’s requirements, no matter how well it actually might. These problems are exacerbated as the product selection and integration process lengthens. Buyers are only willing to pay for the aspects of a solution that they value. Sellers are frustrated because their solutions aren’t commanding the pricing that is justified, assuming a buyer would find value in the entirety of their offering. And on and on.

At the end of the day, both parties are unsatisfied. The buyer buys a hammer when a different tool is needed. The seller may have closed a deal, but given that the margin was thin and the buyer isn’t happy, at what price?

#### [Strategy for Success](#)

Well-executed e-learning initiatives have proven time and again to lower costs, boost

productivity and reduce corporate risks. Nucleus Research reports that some organisations have achieved returns on their investment that are as high as 2,284 percent using e-learning solutions. Granted, that might be a bit out of reach for most (and may even sound ludicrous to some), but demonstrated returns of even 100 percent or more abound. With such stellar success stories, why is it that so many e-learning projects fall flat?

To have the best chances for e-learning success, a number of things have to happen.

### *Step 1: Tie Training to a Specific Business Need*

Training is always one of the first things to go during troublesome economic times—and one of the last to return as markets recover. Training, in many organisations, is considered beneficial—but not mission-critical—as perception dictates that training does not solve a pressing business problem (e.g., lack of sales, troublesome delivery system, poor information technology system). Businesses regularly invest resources in projects that contribute to the organisation's success. As such, it is imperative that training initiatives are tightly linked with business needs and viewed as pivotal stepping-stones to achieve business goals.

Let's look at an example. A bank is facing significant fines from regulating authorities for non-compliance. The retail arm complains that it can't afford to lose front-line staff for even a day for necessary training. The problems, therefore, are the costs of regulatory understanding (or the lack thereof) and the associated risks, as well as the costs of having to take employees out of the field for training. A solution to this business need may be an e-learning program that educates field staff on regulatory policies while allowing them to remain in the branches, thereby reducing regulatory risk and time away from the job.

By not defining your business needs up front, you run the risk of “scope creep” (the ever-widening chasm of project requirements) in finding and implementing a solution to the problem. Also, you are less likely to achieve and maintain funding for a project not deemed of strategic importance. Worse yet, you may end up investing in an e-learning solution that doesn't answer your needs and is never fully adopted by the organisation.

Clearly defining and communicating your training requirements up front and tying them to a critical business need early in the process can save you headaches later on.

### *Step 2: Define Success Metrics*

Now that you've defined your business need, you need to ensure that there is a way to measure success. Success metrics are a necessary component of any training solution, as they both indicate the progress (organisational and employee-specific) of learning endeavours and are proof to the management team of a program's success. This evidence can be especially helpful during budgeting.

Success can be measured in a number of ways. It may be as simple as keeping an accurate record of who took the course and when they took it. For our compliance example above, this e-learning solution alone could save hundreds of thousands of pounds. However, perhaps you need a more complicated measurement technique—one that gauges proficiency, adoption rate of new business policies or impact on operational metrics. Many of today's e-learning solutions can generate highly targeted metrics—both training and operational. With e-learning, you can quickly gauge the effectiveness of the training and tweak it accordingly.

Clearly articulate how you would measure your successes and your progress; and yes, it is critical to have accountability.

### *Step 3: Treat Departments as Clients*

As we all know, more than ever before, training managers are in the service business. They must satisfy the needs of numerous “clients”—executives, department heads and employees (end users). Even if a learning solution is perfectly executed, it will be deemed wasteful or

irrelevant if the solution is not easy to use and manage or does not solve a specific departmental problem.

Before embarking on an e-learning initiative, it is important to assess your clients' pain points. Pain points typically have at least three key criteria in common. They are:

- **Immediate:** If they can't get fixed soon, then don't bother to fix them.
- **Specific:** They require some degree of customisation to meet a unique need of a department or company.
- **Costly:** Not fixing them right can cost significant money in the form of lost revenue opportunities, expenses or customer dissatisfaction.

Let's look at an example using the sales organisation of a large pharmaceuticals corporation.

A new drug is about to go to market, and the sales team has to understand its benefits to the market as well as the competitive positioning. In order to stay ahead of the competition and meet revenue targets, the team needs to know this information immediately, and how this knowledge specifically applies to their company. Furthermore, not disseminating this information to the team can prove costly for the company, as the sales group is likely to miss projected sales targets.

By identifying pain points and building a solution that meets these needs, the clients will be more likely to embrace the training. In addition, you will be focusing on what matters most.

#### *Step 4: Put Your Money Where Your Needs Are*

These days, when an e-learning solution is proposed, the suggestion is typically greeted with a "healthy" blend of enthusiasm and scepticism—and the enthusiasm only exists when the solution meets a specific business need. Historically speaking, training initiatives were funded from the corporate budget. Today, training initiatives, more and more, are funded by departmental budgets.

The onus is squarely on the training department to determine the best way to utilise its budget for maximum effectiveness, but the influence on the way that money is spent is shifting. The best way to determine the right priorities is by focusing your investment funds directly on your clients' pain points.

Although more general initiatives will have to be reduced in scope or eliminated depending on how constrained your budget is, the upside of delivering flawlessly against the most pressing business needs first cannot be underestimated. In addition, by proving time and again that training spending is clearly benefiting specific business needs, the training budget may not be hit as hard during the annual budget-cutting process (or, better yet, might even be expanded).

#### *Step 5: Go to Market with Business Requirements in Hand*

Now that you have a good idea of your business needs, success metrics and level of department commitment, it's time to go to market and find the right e-learning partner.

Some buyers are initially uncomfortable about discussing project details during the vendor selection process. Instead, they focus on system requirements. Sharing business needs is sometimes perceived as airing "dirty laundry." Some like to wait to share this information until the second phase of vendor selection. This can be a bad idea. By airing your business requirements up front and in detail, you significantly cut down the time needed for your vendor selection process by making it clear that you will only advance discussions with vendors that have your desired capabilities and can visibly demonstrate that fact. The more ambiguous your needs are, the easier it is for vendors to say, "Sure, we can do that," when ultimately, they cannot.

Also, do not be afraid to eliminate a potential vendor early in the process. If a vendor is obviously unqualified based on your specific and detailed requirements, it will likely accept your decision graciously. In fact, you both benefit. You are saved from spending time with an ill-qualified vendor; the vendor won't invest time on an opportunity that it has no chance of winning.

Whether or not a vendor can address your specific business needs should be your primary screening mechanism—only after you have your shortlist should you introduce the other factors that would influence your decision (e.g., customer support, relevant experience, costs).

#### Conclusion: The Power Is in Your Hands

Buyers no longer have to be held hostage to the buzzword du jour (e.g., LMS, LCMS, asynchronous learning, analytics). Focus on solving business problems and supporting your organisation's business objectives; make what is being "pushed" by vendors on any given day a much lower priority. The more clarity you bring to the table when selecting vendors, the more their products and services will ultimately change to better meet your needs.

E-learning is an important and valuable tool to achieve your overall business goals. Now you can manage organisational knowledge without disrupting the flow of business, while yielding powerful and documented improvements. Deliver real value to your constituents, based on their definitions of value. By designing your initiatives to address the needs of your clients from day one, your chances of managing an e-learning success story will increase by orders of magnitude.

With careful planning, you and your organisation can yield excellent results with focused e-learning solutions.

To assist you in this process Learn HQ Limited also provide services in the areas listed below:

- Vendor and Content Analysis
- Communication Planning
- Competency Frameworks
- ROI Planning
- eLearning Strategy
- eLearning Content
- eLearning Development
- Learning Management Systems
- eLearning Development Tools

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