



EVALUATING VIRTUAL-TRAINING METHODS IN VIEW OF YOUR BUSINESS NEEDS



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What Types of Automated Training Are There?

Virtual training has significant benefits and potential for most organizations. In essence it uses technology to automate or virtualize some aspect of a training program. It's scalable, cost-effective and easy to implement, making it appealing in today's business world. But even if your business plans include virtual training for your employees, how do you know which type of training to choose? And taking a step back, what sorts of virtual training exist, anyway? To help you make your decisions this paper addresses four of the most common—and successful—types of virtual training.

The Benefits of Virtual Training

What makes virtual training more accessible than any other training method is that it can be offered in a granular way, with modules that come in a short, digestible length. According to TD Magazine (a publication of the Association for Talent Development), "... virtual training will help increase employee productivity by allowing employees to stay at their desks for shorter chunks of learning." So virtual training is easier to consume and gives learners the ability to better retain information by only focusing on one subject at a time. Also asynchronous methods allow a student to fit training into his or her busy schedule when it's most convenient. Grant Cardone in the Huffington Post

reports about surveying, “thousands of individuals [who had used] virtual training to see how this new way of training compared to traditional methods. [Among the five main benefits were] ‘able to train at my computer,’ and ‘able to train in my own time.’”

A virtual-training platform can give learners opportunities to share their accomplishments via social-media tagging or badges that they can add to their personal websites or LinkedIn pages. And another immediate benefit is the positive impression on one’s employer when a course of training is complete. With training-tracking analytics you may be able to see who has completed which lessons or exercises. Thus by making clear the training that’s available, you’re both allowing your employees to take initiative to learn more and relieving some of the stress they may feel in proving themselves. Either way, virtual methods help to reinforce the mutually beneficial aspect of training—that while it helps your employees perform better in their roles at your company, it also gives them a chance for personal development and bragging rights for career advancement.

Virtual training can save your company significant funds. This is true if you’re hiring an expert, who may need to travel for a live presentation, but it’s also true of training that your staff handles internally. Take, for example, a company with different branches. Even if these are located within driving distance, it will cost you more to conduct in-person training; your choices would be either to conduct one session where employees have to travel or conduct several sessions taking place at each location. Either way, it eats up energy, time and money. Even something simple as someone being out sick means that classroom training would have to be repeated or rescheduled.

Virtual training is also the most efficient means of keeping up with accelerating changes in business. *Bloomberg Business* reported in *Virtual Training*

Beats In-Person Training, “with company strategies, products, and technologies changing so fast, it is impossible to keep up if new information can be relayed only in-person.”

Types of Virtual Training

So you’ve considered the benefits and decided to embrace virtual training for your business’s learning initiative. But what types of training are available, and which is the best for your project’s needs?

There are certain indicators to determine before answering this question:

- What are you hoping to teach?
- What is your timeline?
- What sort of availability do your employees have to complete it?
- What format have your employees responded to in the past?

Once you have your answers you can review what’s available to make an educated choice.

Video Training

Video training covers your bases whether your employees are visual, auditory or even experiential learners when videos include animated screenshots that show how to perform a task. Also video training should follow the nature of the information to be learned, resulting in videos of various lengths. This helps to keep learners’ interest and allows them to focus on one topic at a time, minimizing the chance they’ll feel overwhelmed. No matter the length,

a good video-training platform allows you to access training-tracking analytics that represent who has watched a video and completed any follow-up coursework. This transparency can allow administrators to reward those who have finished on-time and check-in with those who haven't to come up with a training solution that keeps them on schedule for completion.

And people watch videos. Sandvine reported in more normal, non-pandemic 2019 that video accounted for 60.6% of world-wide internet traffic, up about 3% over 2018. And Conviva shows that during the pandemic the amount of video streaming increased 57% world-wide over 2019.

But with video training there's no chance to ask an instructor a direct question (sometimes it is possible to set-up an accompanying discussion board). Second, since it has already been developed, a video module may require your staff to start at a place that is already above or below your staff's knowledge. So it can be tricky to find video that fits seamlessly into your staff's collective experience. If you know you want to start at a very specific point in Excel, for example, it may be worthwhile to seek other approaches tailored to your situation.

Live Webinars

Live webinars mirror classroom training for a more traditional experience. They still cater to a distributed staff without the associated travel costs for the employees or the instructor. Unlike a live class, however, webinars are often shorter and easier to fit into a group's schedule. Your options include public webinars—where anyone can sign up—as well as custom, private webinars that are arranged for your learners and designed to address their specific needs.

Instructors play a big role in the success of live webinars. The correct instructors carry a sense of authority, they have the opportunity to convey their years of experience and level of expertise. This format can also keep students on their toes with the chance to ask and answer direct questions. Further, the personal connection made between the instructor and student is very important to some learners and opens an opportunity for follow up.

When it comes to choosing a webinar, especially if you're hiring someone to design one for you, it's imperative to know exactly what you want. For example, some webinars may feel more passive due to the fact they comprise inanimate slides or a lecturer who falls into the "talking head" category. But with a little planning they can be incredibly engaging and interactive, using tools such as video demonstrations or polls. In short, there are good ones and bad ones, and a little research can help you avoid the latter.

Remote Classes

Remote classes are similar to live webinars in that they require a student to be present when the instruction is taking place. You're attending a remote class, using technology to see, hear and communicate in real-time with the rest of the class. Like webinars, they carry the benefits of an in-person experience while not requiring travel costs. And also like live webinars, virtual classes force learners to prioritize in their schedules the learning of essential skills.

Remote classes also solve the issue of student passivity, since remote classes are built to give students hands-on practice and exercises. This provides the experiential learning that some people need.

"No matter the skill, thought or the technology employed, the learning potential of virtual training relies on the possibility for learners to actively and

personally experience the training situation,” according to researchers Fabrizia Mantovani and Gianluca Castelnuovo.

As we’ve all seen in the time of the pandemic virtual classes lack the physical classroom’s rich experience, including the instructor’s facial expressions and body language, the chance for side conversations, etc. Further, the physical classroom is a set-aside, distraction-free, learning space. Remote learners don’t always get this kind of dedicated space. Nonetheless the benefits of remote learning can outweigh these challenges.

Custom Modules

Custom modules are beneficial in that they cater to a specific task, responsibility and group of individuals—all at the same time. They can take the form of any of the aforementioned methods or even a combination or series of several. These are built from the ground up for your specific requirements. In addition, they can take your employees’ current level of expertise into consideration—avoiding being too easy or too hard. These programs can carry your business’ custom branding, whether you make them internally or outsource.

If you’re using an esoteric platform, a custom module can home in on what needs to be done and how your company is using the software. That aspect of personalization can really convey to your employees the importance of learning the use of software or any tech tool. Take the training’s construction seriously, so your team can follow suit.

As with all of these types of virtual training, there are a few things to keep in mind involving custom modules. They’re almost always more costly to produce, and this is the reason that usually stops a company from initializing the process. But weigh the cost against the long-term gains and savings

that come from increased productivity for multiple team members. Remember, given the various ways that custom modules can be recorded, saved and distributed in the future, the investment can be worth it. So if you feel that custom modules would work best for your team, you should embrace their advantages and take the long-view to determine ROI.

Also, unlike video libraries or a webinar series, custom modules have the potential to limit an employee's perspective – where can he dive deeper to learn more about the topic? Where else could the software help him or her in day-to-day assignments? If these questions were not anticipated in the instructional design, they may be answered post-training by creating additional custom modules.

Convenient and Comprehensive

No matter the type you determine is best for your learners, virtual training has strengths and advantages that can benefit both employers and employees. It's convenient, with choices to meet all of your scheduling needs. It's comprehensive; you can cover a lot of material, and provide an environment for continuous learning while ensuring all learning styles are addressed. And it's cost-effective; you can eliminate or severely reduce travel time and expense, and you can typically scale your virtual solution to train more people for modest, incremental costs.

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