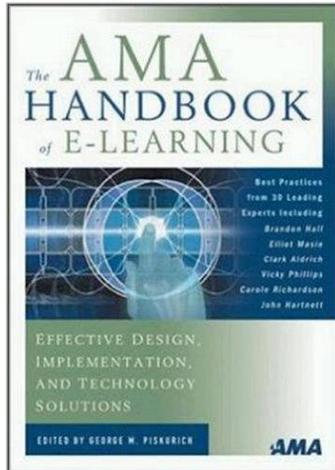**Keeping E-Learning Going:**
Motivating and Retaining E-Learners

by

Vicky Phillips, CEO
GetEducated.com

SOURCE: American Management Association – Handbook E-Learning

"Telecommunications bandwidth is not a problem. Human bandwidth is.""
Thomas Davenport, *E-learning and the Attention Economy*

Web-based courses are available 24-7-365; the mind of a working adult remains considerably less accessible. The information locked inside a course will not morph into practical knowledge without considerable human effort. E-learning often fails where education has historically stumbled: at the human level.

I. Why Does E-Learning Fail?

Learning takes time. It takes mental effort. It takes motivation. It takes attention. During the average workday, with calls to return, clients to please, and budgets to meet, the anytime/anyplace promise of e-learning easily turns into a no time/nowhere reality. While most of the buzz to date has focused on e-learning technology – knowledge management systems and how they efficiently deliver large-scale educational events – the most formidable e-learning challenges of the future lie decidedly on the softer side. Whether or not e-learning "takes" is a question that the learners, not the technologists, will ultimately answer.

Failure in e-learning can occur at three interlocking levels: the product level (poor course design; inadequate technology infrastructure); the learner level (poorly prepared learners, lack of motivation, no time); or the organizational level (low managerial

support, lack of reward structure). The chart below summarizes the success/failure matrix that impinges on all e-learning endeavors.

Notice that the product level has two possible evaluative pathways: content or conduit. Conduit refers to the technology itself, for example a learning delivery system like Centra Symposium or HorizonLive. Content refers to the actual educational meat that makes up any instructional event, such as a single piece of courseware or series of pre-designed learning modules from a vendor like Primelearning.com or SmartForce.com. It is possible to develop or license excellent content yet suffer e-learning failure due to the coupling of that content with a poorly-designed conduit of platform. (Conduits are not covered in this chapter, see related chapters in the handbook on technology issues and e-learning.)

The organizational level includes factors that constitute what might also be termed the external context. The external context refers to the macro environment where the e-learning takes place; this includes the greater organizational culture in regards to training and how it is valued and supported within the sponsoring corporation. In making assessments and e-learning evaluations we often refer to the learner level as "internal context." We use this term to signify that what happens inside the hearts and minds of learners. Internal context includes things such as learner motivation levels and poorly developed technical skills that are necessary for e-learning, such as knowing how to use a Web browser or download a lesson file.

Product Level (Content or Conduit)

Poor course design (chunks of theory and facts with very little real-life application/extension)
Poor e-classroom design (non-intuitive navigation, chat rooms that crash, ugly interfaces)
Ill-performing technology (poor audio, jerky video, interrupted data downloads, message boards that crash)
Poorly managed course social interactions (untrained or untried online moderators)
Slow instructor/mentor response times

Learner Level (Internal Context)

Lack of time
Low interest in subject matter
Low motivation for learning
Poor self-study skills
Poor time management skills
Disrupting life interruptions (divorce, shift change, parental duties)
Lack of necessary e-skills (downloading files, subscribing to e-mail lists)
Psychological resistance to losing face-to-face learning perks (social networking, travel, snacks)

Organizational Level (External Context)

Poor internal marketing of courses and events
Lack of clear reward structure
Failure to provide quality learning environment
Failure to provide quality learning equipment
Failure to provide managerial feedback and support of learning
Failure to provide time on-the-job to train
Corporate-wide lack of dedication to a learning culture
Blanket mandate of e-learning as the new-new thing; removal of all other methods
Failure to match Internet training to its most appropriate purposes

Challenges at the Learner Level

"In the training industry, if you build it – nobody cares."
Tom Kelly, VP Internet Solutions Group, Cisco Systems

Learning is hard work. Even if we create the perfect piece of e-learning software (content) we still, as trainers, must go eye-to-eye with a generation of imperfect adult learners (internal context). We are not a nation of independent learners. Most of us learned how to learn within a coercive, expert-dependent educational system. Many of us were motivated to learn not to achieve rewards but to avoid punishments -- such as F grades, or the embarrassment of being called on and found wanting in class. Remove the evaluative teacher and grade book from the electronic classroom and many adults learners, not surprisingly, lapse into recess mode. You can make several interventions at the learner level to increase e-learning participation and completion rates.

Intervention: Select for Success

Learners who have historically been successful at learning independently, using CD-ROMS, printed books, videodiscs, or other correspondence methods, are the best first candidates for e-learning. These people have already learned how to learn independently, a crucial skill set for distance learning success regardless of the delivery conduit.

People who are comfortable trying out new things remain the best early adopters within any organization. Surprisingly, these people are not always tech employees. Every team, whether in sales or customer service, includes people who are innovators. Identify these people and showcase them as peer e-learning leaders. Peer influence is almost always more persuasive in getting people to change their behavior than executive mandates.

One company we worked with identified three employees, each of them from different work teams -- one from security, one from production, and one from sales -- to serve as peer e-learning leaders. After receiving training in e-learning – the technology, what would be expected of them as learners, and the reward options – our peer leaders were off and running.

Three months later our client highlighted the three peer leaders in company e-mails, bulletin board displays, and their monthly newsletter, tagging them official "E-Learning Gurus." The three gave presentations at brown bag lunch gatherings, and

weekly department meetings, encouraging co-workers to come to them with their questions about e-learning. When the company launched their open e-learning program, available to all employees, a record number of curious trainees participated.

People are suspicious of new things. That includes e-learning. The best way to break down mistrust is to use real-life testimonials. In our client's case, they posted the photos and success stories of their e-learning leaders on the training Intranet splash page. Aspect Communications, of San Jose, employs a similar tactic. They pull favorable quotes from e-course evaluations written by employees and post them in banner ad style on the company intranet. They enlist the experiences of their own employees to internally promote the e-learning experience.

Intervention: Prepare Learners for E-Learning

Computers are like cars. Everyone drives a car, yet few of us know how to perform common automotive tasks like changing a tire. Similarly, while everyone uses computers, surprisingly few of us are competent at the tasks commonly required to access an e-learning library. Can everyone in your company download a file? Highly unlikely.

If your e-learning program doesn't include a mini-course, handbook, or orientation program on how to e-learn, create such a resource ASAP. Create your orientation so it covers two major areas. Make sure your learners can perform the technology tasks required of them, such as signing onto and off e-mail list-servs for class discussions or downloading files. Go over your e-learning program with an eye toward idiot-proofing the technology access process. Never assume that your learners will know how to use any technology platform whether that be an asynchronous message board system of a real-time audio wrap-around. Make every step explicit. In addition, include an e-mail or a phone number that links your learners to tech support in the most expedient way possible.

Make sure your learners are prepared psychologically for the e-learning experience. For example, if your program uses asynchronous communication, where learners can log on anytime, suggest to them that they establish and commit to a regular weekly learning schedule before they begin their studies. Most adult learners grew up and are comfortable with a weekly study schedule. Suggesting they establish one up front works well because it creates a familiar structure for progressing through what otherwise might be a completely unstructured course experience.

One client we worked with created a simple calendar program that popped up during course registration. The program explained to learners that while they could access their course anytime they would increase the impact of the educational experience if they committed to working on their course at least once a week, on the same day, at the same time. The pop-up calendar allowed learners to pencil in the day and time they would work on their course each week in half hour blocks. Once the calendar was filled in, an automatic e-mail would arrive in the learner's e-mail box 24 hours in advance of the booked learning time to remind the learner it was time to log-on and crack the books.

Many large library course providers, such as PrimeLearning.com and SmartForce.com, have built-in e-mail agents that automatically send out messages to any learner who begins a course but then fails to return to work on that course for some pre-set length of time, such as 72-hours or a week. Such e-mail reminders are highly

effective. They serve as an electronic tap on the shoulder, motivating learners to come back and complete their course of study.

Intervention: Lay-Out a Smorgasbord of Rewards

Learning is onerous work. People naturally play station WIIFM: What's In It For Me. Make explicit the pay-offs for each course taken. Don't try to get all your employees to accept one type of reward structure. People are diverse; they hold correspondingly diverse views of what they consider a reward to be. What motivates Adam to complete a course in C programming (a $10 gift certificate at Sportsman.com) may do nothing to motivate Eve to attend her customer service training online. (Eve craves managerial recognition. Kudos at the weekly staff meeting will go a long way toward keeping her nose to the educational grindstone.) Create a smorgasbord of rewards. Encourage employees to select what motivates them most from the menu.

Material Rewards

Paper Certificates
Tie courses together and issue company certificates upon completion of three or more courses in a sequence.
Gift Certificates
Issue in small denominations from popular vendors like Eddie Bauer or Sears upon course completion.
Pay Raises
Tie to the completion of educational and other performance milestones as part of an overall career plan.
Snacks
When employees start e-courses send over a congratulatory box of doughnuts with a note saying these replace the doughnuts you would have gotten at the classroom seminar.

Psychic Rewards

Grant time on-the-job to learn
Give employees Do Not Disturb signs to post when taking e-courses at work.
Grant time off for star learners who complete long training sequences.
Publicly mention employee educational achievements
In team meetings.
In the company newsletter.
On the company training Intranet splash-page.
Hold competitions between work teams
The team that completes more courses gets lunch on the company.

Intervention: Provide a Social Surround

Practitioners are discovering that while self-contained, asynchronous e-learning is extremely cost effective, participation rates often suffer from the absence of a social surround. The benefits of cost effectiveness become less meaningful if employees refuse to use e-learning because of its lack of a social surround. For many, blended e-learning is becoming a wise compromise solution. Training events are being technology-enabled, helping to reduce travel and direct instructional costs, while social features, such as real time group chat or live peer audio conferencing are being integrated to help make technology-enabled learning more psychologically and socially attractive.

New York University Online specializes in making and marketing courses for the corporate marketplace. NYU Online is also one of the few vendors that actively researches what flies and what flops in the corporate e-learning marketplace. Karen Frankola, E-Learning Solutions Manager at NYU Online has found that the following human factors can significantly impact course completion rates in the corporate environment. Our collective client assessments echo and expand upon the research undertaken to date at NYU Online. Audit your program for these social factors.

1. Blend – Let learners do some of the course self-paced, but require live, synchronous sessions with peers and instructors at key points such as the beginning, middle and end of educational events.

2. Equip -- Provide access to learning labs at work or fast-speed, home dial-in connections. Taking people away from their work desks to engage in e-learning will help them avoid disorienting interruptions like phone calls.

3. Hold Accountable -- Hold front line managers responsible for e-learning completion in their units. Publish the results in a comparative format for the whole company to review.

4. Observe and Measure -- Maintain a central training tracking and reporting system where employees can see their progress as measured against their peers.

5. Intervene -- Assign managers to send e-mails, make phone calls or have face-to-face meetings with e-learners who fall behind in their coursework.

The American Society for Training & Development rates managerial and peer support as lead factors that set apart successful e-learning from less successful roll-outs. One of our clients, Management Vitality, assigns new e-learners to a buddy system. Students can choose to communicate with any classmate they like but the buddy system ensures that everyone has a peer to turn to if they encounter uncertainty those first few crucial days of learning online. In addition, Management Vitality, which offers a 7-week sequence of management training courses under the rubric of Teamwork Plus! advises students in an 8-page downloadable "E-Learner's Handbook," that the most important thing to remember is to "involve your peers and your boss in your learning program."

Management Vitality, Inc.

Template for Letter From New E-Learner to Boss and Peers
TeamWork Plus!

Management Vitality, www.managementvitality.com, a Canadian vendor, which provides training online following the Adizes management method, issues the following letter template to each person who enrolls in their 7-week online course TeamWork Plus! The course is delivered in an asynchronous Web-based format to managers around the world. This letter is provided in Management Vitality's "E-Learning Handbook," an 8-page printable manual that helps corporate learners prepare for the psychological challenges of online learning. The handbook also addresses issues such as how to get technical support. Notice that the letter also makes apparent for the learner and company management the take-away benefits or rewards of completing the course TeamWork Plus! online.

Dear_____**:**

From (date) until (date) I, along with several of our colleagues, will be participating in an online course called Teamwork Plus! The online course is offered by ManagementVitality.com, Inc. of Ottawa, Canada, and expounds upon the Adizes management principles.

They tell us that the course material, and learning how to navigate on the Web, are not nearly as difficult as the challenge of sticking to the course until the end. The self-discipline for me to do this will have continual competition from other on-the-job pressures. This is where you come in.

My goal is to take and complete this course in the allotted time in order to gain the immediate benefits of:

• Getting a certificate for successfully learning Adizes management techniques
• Trying out and becoming experienced in this new phenomenon of online learning
• Making online contact with managers from around the world

You can help by getting involved with me.

(To the boss) My first suggestion is that we meet together before the course and discuss the objectives of the course that will benefit our organization, so that I can make sure that I am focused on them. Then let's meet weekly to ensure that you are aware of, and approve of, my weekly progress.

(To my peers) My first suggestion is that we meet together before the course so that I can share with you the nature of it and how I think it will impact our workplace. Then we can meet casually, each week if you like, for me to give you a summary of what has transpired so far, during the course.

(To my peers and the boss) My second suggestion is that you allow me "course time" which I will post at my desk, during which you will avoid contacting me over the

approximately one hour per day, treating me for that hour, as if I were out of the office. I'll post an "On Course" sign on my desk, as a reminder.

My third suggestion is that we have a post-course meeting so I can summarize its contents and its benefits to this organization as I see them.

Your cooperation in any of these ways will be of a very big help to me.

Thank you very much,
The E-Learner

Challenges at the Product Level

Poorly designed e-courses will cause learners to click shut their browsers and their minds. L-Guide, a Washington State firm that reviews corporate e-learning, refers to the bulk of what's on the market for business skills training today as "the mediocre majority." Education demands attention, yet most corporate training has not been designed to compete for the attentive eye.

Many vendors that sell e-courses or create e-curriculum have operated for less that five years. Systems for rating the quality of e-learning courses are just emerging. To make matters more complex, a vendor that crafts great courses in one subject area may produce titles in another subject area that pale in comparison. Vast differences between information technology training and soft skills training have led to an uneven marketplace where pioneering companies which excelled at developing information intense courses, such as computer programming, may not possess the best approach for developing socially complex courses on warm topics such as leadership.

Intervention: Consult Independent Evaluators

For all its size and convenience the Internet remains a dimly lit educational supermarket. Last we counted more than 126 vendors offered some type of e-training in project management. Don't shop in the dark. Independent authorities are striving to establish guidelines for both individual consumers and institutional buyers. Check with the sources below for the best training courses and e-learning degree programs.

L-Guide – www.lguide.com
Rates and ranks e-learning course titles from small and large vendors according to ease of use, appropriateness of subject matter, and other quality factors. Reviews are available by annual subscription. Sample reviews and report summaries are available free at the Web site.

American Society for Training and Development
E-Learning Courseware Certification – www.astd.org/ecertification/
For a fee, e-training publishers can submit their asynchronous Web-based courses to this new certification program. The program reviews and rate courses along the dimensions of

usability and instructional design. Courses in IT, desktop applications, and business skills are eligible.

GetEducated.com – www.geteducated.com

Issues free, online, in PDF book format, *Best Distance Learning Graduate Schools*, a series of targeted guides that profile the emerging "Internet Ivy" and "Consumer Best Buys" among accredited graduate schools that offer degrees or professional certificates through distance learning.

Intervention: Leverage Peer Networks Online

E-learning is a rapidly evolving industry. It may reasonably take a decade for standards and category leaders to emerge. In the meantime, tap peer-managed training grapevines on the Internet. Vendors rarely reveal the shortcomings of their wares. Trainers themselves are more likely to be forthcoming. Below are the best online discussions lists to participate in for honest feedback from peer adopters. More than one hundred specialized discussion lists dedicated to e-learning – e-learning in Asia and the legal issues related to e-learning, for example -- operate online at http://groups.yahoo.com.

TRDEV

The Training & Development list-serv. To subscribe and participate in the open discussion, send an e-mail to trdev-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

E-Learning Leaders

The E-Learning Leaders list-serv. To subscribe and participate in the discussions, send an e-mail to elearningleaders-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Intervention: Take a Team Test Drive

The best way to determine the appropriateness of any e-learning library for your personnel is to assemble a test team from among your actual future e-learners. Assign the team to test drive courses at random from potential vendor libraries. Use pull-out checklists like those provided in the do-it-yourself assessment kit from Lynette Gillis, *Quality Standards for Evaluating Multimedia and Online Courseware*. Gillis's standardized check lists will help ensure that team members compare e-courses along consistent data points.

Gillis' kit, which we've successfully used with corporate e-learning assessment teams of various sizes, provides pull-out lists that make it easy for geographically dispersed team members to compare courses across four sectors: usability, content quality, organizational appropriateness, and instructional design. (Gillis's off-the-shelf, e-learning quality assessment kit, is incidentally, central to the independent e-learning certification rubric under development by the American Society for Training and Development. The ASTD has partnered with Gillis to spearhead their own e-certification course rating program.)

Important: don't rely only on official demo courses to make your final decisions. Demo courses are often better developed than regular vendor libraries. Most vendors will open selected courses for a test drive if you ask. Ask. Remember to test drive titles that relate to subjects of the highest interest to your employees. A vendor who manufactures a good series on Java programming may not produce courseware of comparable quality in another subject area, such as project management.

Challenges at the Organizational Level

Quality content is crucial. Robust flexible conduits are mandatory. Equipping learners to learn independently is equally essential. Yet creating a quality external context may prove the most crucial and difficult factor for building agency-wide e-learning campaigns that last. You can't buy context off the shelf. The context of e-learning is something that each organization must cultivate in congruence with their overall corporate culture. Before implementing e-learning ask yourself if your company supports a learning culture. If e-learning is being adopted primarily to cut costs with little thought to the "softer side" of the success/failure matrix it is likely to be met with immense psychological assistance.

For many employees, e-learning translates into psychological loss, not gain. Loss of a chance to network with colleagues. Loss of the annual training trip -- re: working vacation -- to Hawaii. For e-learning to succeed at an institutional level, corporations must create a culture that makes apparent and appealing the rewards of e-learning. Even a masterfully designed e-course will suffer from poor learner completion rates if the sponsoring company has failed to provide a motivational structure that adequately encourages employees to complete the training. Local management may build a grade-A, million-dollar, e-course library; yet completely neglect to engage in active internal marketing. Few employees access the e-campus because few know it is there. In all these cases, context is king. If e-learning adoption occurs willy-nilly it is likely to be utilized by employees in an equally haphazard manner.

Intervention: Adopt a Best Use Policy

One client recently called us with the introductory statement that a mandate had come down from headquarters to eliminate all face-to-face internal trainings, replacing them instead with e-learning. The goal: cut $1 million from the human resources budget in the current fiscal year. Headquarters had decided the best way to make this drastic reduction was to replace warm-body trainers with education online. E-learning can save money, but if it is implemented for this reason, and this reason alone, success, in terms of employee participation rates, is likely to remain elusive. Any company that eliminates all face-to-face training, replacing it instead with e-learning simply to cut cost is not utilizing e-learning at its best. E-learning is best utilized selectively in the following broad venues:

1. Repetitive uniform information transfer: E-learning is great for any large scale, repetitive training that focuses on factual material: New employee orientations and new product roll-outs are excellent candidates for corporate-wide conversion from face-to-face to Web-based means.

2. Just-in-time product update trainings: Mobile sales forces must understand and present numerous products while in the field. Updates for products such as software can come as frequently as every three months. One of our clients, a drug company, uses e-learning to keep their globally dispersed sales force up-to-date on product approvals, drug recalls, and new studies that tout the effectiveness of their brand over the competitors.
3. Just-in-time training for mobile workers: Field technicians have to diagnose and troubleshoot a variety of equipment and appliances while on the road. E-learning lets them access Web-based fact-files, product diagrams and Q & A expert advice databases from mobile handheld devices.

Enlist e-learning for what it accomplishes best: cost savings and better data collection, management and assessment with large audiences. Blend e-learning with face-to-face events or real-time, synchronous features such as chat, electronic white boards, or phone conferencing the rest of the time to help shave time and travel expense. Adopting a blended, best use policy will help ensure that your employees receive e-learning at its best.

II. Helping Learners Complete E-Learning

Think Outside the Course - Leverage Less Formal Methods

Knowledge has a shorter shelf life today than a century ago. The packages we wrap it in should come in a corresponding array of new shapes and sizes. The historically familiar course represents only one kind of formal e-learning event. Moreover, the traditional text-based course probably ranks high among the adult learners *least* favorite educational events. (Putting a twenty-pound textbook online does little, it seems, to enhance its attractiveness.)

In 1977 the Education Development Center of Massachusetts quantified the amount of career knowledge that the average adult learns not in formal courses but from co-workers: a shocking 70%. Don't limit your e-learning program to store-bought courses or knowledge databases. If you do, you'll be ignoring a great opportunity to leverage the informal knowledge networks that your employees spontaneously create and utilize every working day.

Diversify your approach to e-training. Even large e-course library vendors such as Skillsoft and Smartforce offer knowledge outside the course. Skillsoft, for example, offers a library of just-in-time, online job aids. These aids allow employees to extract advice on common tasks like how to write a budget. Employees could take a course in managerial accounting, but a whole course would take a few weeks. Truth be known most employees looking for information on how to write a budget are looking because they need to include a budget with a report, both of which are due ASAP. A job aid is a great just-in-time tutor.

Daniel Tobin, author of *All Learning is Self-Directed*, writes little about e-courses in his excellent book. He sees the Internet and its connectivity as prized infrastructure for managing connections rather than content. "If you don't know a solution to your problem exists, for all practical purposes it doesn't exist. If you don't know that Joe in the next

cubicle or Diana over in the company's Singapore office faced this same problem and solved it last week or last year, it is a new problem and a new solution," explains Tobin. The Internet Age solution is to build a company knowledge database. Make that database stop one for any team assigned to research pressing issues. Large companies such as Bechtel have implemented report databases in an effort to manage peer knowledge connections across divisions and geographically disperse locations. No team at Bechtel can begin a new project without consulting the database to see who/where/when a similar problem may have been encountered and solved by the collective brain trust of Bechtel. As Internet/Intranet search tools become more deeply embedded inside corporations the concept of managing knowledge connections is likely to ascend to prominence. Proctor & Gamble has built a knowledge portal that uses AskMe Enterprise software to manage the knowledge base of their 110,000 global employees. The AskMe technology allows employees to search for and connect with other P&G employees around the globe who are experts in thousands of areas.

Any educational broadcast or event can be archived in this day and age. Institutions can store and re-play electronically archived presentations, speeches, team meetings, and report briefs at levels of granular specificity only dreamed of a decade ago. Cisco Systems provides employees with structured courses on hard and soft topics but they also provide employees access to peer knowledge communities and video-on-demand libraries that use visual broadcasts to better illustrate new products and teach physical processes. Cisco broadcasts its live product road shows around the globe using an internal IP/TV network. Post-broadcast, Cisco creates a video-on-demand archive of the training. They also capture and archive the questions asked during the live broadcasts to create a Q & A text database that Cisco researchers and sales people can access anytime to better understand client concerns.

III. Bringing Learners Back

To escalate your rate of e-learning participation you'll need to build a learning culture that actively encourages people to turn to e-learning to move their careers and the company forward.

Integrate E-Learning Into Career Plans

Make a course mandatory for pay raises or promotions and the number of people who take and complete that course will skyrocket. (Our studies show that making a course mandatory will likely double the number of attendees in any organization.) The bad thing about e-learning is that people can do it anytime-anywhere. People need more structure than this. If employees know that real consequences are attached to attending a course or not attending a course they will attend to the course.

Orchestrate Internal Marketing

Kara Underwood, Senior Director of Education Services at Aspect Communications, realized that by implementing e-learning she was asking employees to change their behavior. She wanted employees to go the Net rather than then seminar

room (where many of them had been going for decades) to learn how to sell the company's portal system. "We treat all our training offerings, online or not, like they're product launches," reveals Underwood. E-learning can work. It can save time, and lower training costs, while simultaneously producing more knowledgeable employees – but only if companies take the time, like they do at Aspect, to "sell" employees on Web-based training and their new role as more independent learners.

In a survey of 700 learners at 30 companies the American Society for Training & Development and the Masie Center discovered that e-courses with the greatest start rates (not completion rates) should include at least four out of five of the following features:

1. Use peer testimonials
2. Use formal means of internal promotion (targeted e-mail and print being popular)
3. Use direct managers/supervisors to inform learners about courses
4. Inform people more than once about courses
5. Locate and utilize internal champions (managers excited about and willing to promote e-learning)

To enhance your return rates implement the factor list above.

Focus on Competency, Not Completion

Low rates of course completion, sometimes as high as 80%, worry some in the field of technology-enabled teaching. Low course completion rates may signify several things. They may mean that your vendor offers a low quality product, but they also may mean that your people came, learned what they needed to learn, and left. Adults are notoriously impatient. They take a pluck and play, practical approach to knowledge. Even in face-to-face seminars adult learners often prefer to skip the introductory material, focusing instead on the middle meat of an educational event. (Note: If we measured the number of people in any educational auditorium who remained physically present for a course while letting their minds drift elsewhere we'd most likely have "mental" drop out rates as high as 80% for good old-fashioned lecture events.)

John Cone, Dell Computer's Vice President of Learning at Round Roc k, Texas, recommends trainers de-emphasize attrition rates. Dell sees drop out rates as high as 30% but drop in rates (for people not pre-registered) just as high. Cone sees performance change as the metric to measure rather than course attrition. "We operate on the assumption that people drop in to get what they want and they drop out if they don't get it. All we care about is performance at the end."

Why bother to learn? People ask this question continually. Organizations can provide psychic and concrete rewards to help motivate people to begin and succeed at e-learning. One of the greatest motivators for corporations to adopt e-learning, as well as for people to return to it time and again, is to build your e-learning endeavor so that practical results are observable. The more immediate the results the better. If your marketing team knows that trainees who complete power marketing courses sell, on average, 20% more, their learning motivation levels will rise faster and remain stronger

than if the top brass puts out an e-memo requiring everyone to take e-training with no visible performance metrics attached.

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