

How to Use Blended Learning in a Training Program

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Introduction

Most organizations are looking for ways to increase the effectiveness of training while keeping costs down. For most, one part of the solution lies in adopting online tools and techniques. Finding the right combination of face time and online time is vital to a successful training program.

Blended learning is a term describing a trend in education in which educators interact with students in person but also online. The proportion of each can vary widely, depending on the need and situation. Blended learning expert Curtis Bonk, a consultant, speaker and professor at Indiana University, has published a handbook of blended learning techniques, of which there are many. “There are 39 chapters in my handbook,” he says, “and there are 39 models for how to do blended learning.”

Every day organizations are developing new models that apply emerging technologies to their unique needs. Despite the breadth of the field, here are a few general tips that any organization can use to make blended learning a bigger part of their training effort.

Consider shrinking the units of instruction



Bonk has watched educators and trainers gradually shrink the size of individual pieces contained in a unit of training or learning. Instead of a classroom sitting through a 50 minute lecture, instructors are breaking learning materials into constituent pieces that are “more bite-sized,” to use Bonk’s words. An article may only take 15 minutes to read, a video 10 minutes to watch, and an interactive exercise 15 minutes to complete, but these 40 minutes of activity may have taken 50 minutes in the previous model. Breaking it up allows each learner to apply their own best learning method to maximize the use of their time.

Consider video



“Podcasting was a big thing five to seven years ago, and it still remains popular,” Bonk says. “But because the price of storage has come down I see more short trainings in video format, maybe even interactive video.” With smartphones and tablet PCs becoming more common, an increasing number of employees are capable of receiving and viewing training materials anywhere. A short video might fill the time waiting in line or commuting on public transit.

Use multiple technologies

There are myriad technologies available that allow people to share information and collaborate with others, and many social media companies are now household names. Social media can provide the discussion element similar to what may have taken place in a classroom, “so that people taking a course can discuss the ramifications of that training to their jobs,” Bonk offers as an example. “Even use of Twitter might be a means to share how one is using particular aspects of training.” There are several guides available that can help you discover many useful social media apps.

Manage training as a knowledge base

One social media innovation in particular can help organizations better connect training programs to the saving and updating of institutional knowledge. Bonk points out that wikis are an effective way for employees to collect knowledge and collaborate on updating it over time. Since much of that historical knowledge is exactly what training programs are trying to get across, a new generation of online trainers is looking for ways to connect wikis with training.

Give learners a little control

Bonk stays current on emerging research regarding blended learning techniques, which can be a great source of new ideas. A recent U.S Department of Education Study took a look at emerging research on the effectiveness of online learning techniques, and one of the study's conclusions can prove useful to those looking to blended learning. Online learning was enhanced, the study found, when learners were given occasional opportunities to control their interactions with media, materials and trainers. Activities like reflection and self-monitored learning, hardly staples of old-school training, were found to be quite effective in the online environment.

Companies and non-for-profit organizations both stand to gain a great deal by pursuing blended learning techniques. Both IBM and Microsoft have seen massive returns on investment by taking existing leadership training programs and moving three-fourths of the material online – a return on investment as high as 35-to-1, according to Bonk. Those are big companies spending big money, but the principle holds true for smaller companies as well. A company has the potential to save more money by investing in blended learning.

Case Study: Yammer

About the Organization

Yammer is the leading provider of enterprise social networks. The company builds software that makes it easy for organizations to stay connected and share knowledge, and empowers employees to collaborate across departments, geographies, and business applications. Companies and organizations from across the globe, including more than 85 percent of the Fortune 500, use Yammer to improve employee productivity and engagement.

Situation

Yammer is a rapidly growing company with offices across the United States, in London, and in Melbourne. New employees go through orientation training called Yammervarsity, which is lead by training program manager Misha McPherson. Misha is currently the sole training manager at Yammer, and needs to be able to rapidly deploy training to a large group of people across departments, offices, and time zones. With a distributed group of trainees, Misha needed a tool that would allow her to standardize training across offices for everything from new hire onboarding to sales training to developer orientation.

Solution

Misha uses a combination of Mindflash, the Yammer tool itself and in-person classroom training to accomplish her training needs. Employees take courses in Mindflash that prompt them to link out to do specific tasks in Yammer, such as introduce themselves to the company, create polls, ask questions or search for information.

Misha chose Mindflash because it:

- Allows her to roll out new courses incredibly fast;
- Gives her the ability to link out to external sources – in this case, to be able to link to Yammer itself so that employees can test the skills they've just learned;
- Lets her create a blended approach to training with in-person, asynchronous and social learning components.

Results

In less than 4 months on Mindflash, over 30 courses have been created with over 1,000 total completions. Employees across the globe have been trained on skills vital to their job performance, with a unified message and training across offices.

“I don’t want a tool I need to be trained on – I just want to log-in and go. I think of using Mindflash and Yammer together as a facilitated conversation I would have in a classroom.”

Misha McPherson
Training Program Manager
Yammer, Inc.



Want to learn more?

Start your own online training program today with a free trial of Mindflash!
Visit <http://www.mindflash.com/sign-up> to get started.

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