



# IMPLEMENTING E-LEARNING FOR **BUSINESS SUCCESS**

Care Management Group has successfully implemented e-learning in its care-focused business. Here, Dr Owen Rose shares some practical steps on how to move away from a classroom training model, striving to keep up with an expanding business.

**T**he enthusiastic and widespread adoption of e-learning at Care Management Group (CMG) has transformed training provision and is delivering value across the entire business. The extent to which learning technologies have been adopted by this organisation is all the more remarkable when you consider the working environment. CMG cares for adults and children with learning disabilities through a network of over 100 care homes. The staff are carers - people people - who don't use technology as a regular part of their work.

Lead support worker Shernette Graham: "I found e-learning very effective in updating my skills in the working place. I loved every moment and thank you all very much!" Wouldn't we all love our learning

technologies to be this well received? This comment was echoed by hundreds of her colleagues in an evaluation that followed the introduction of a new corporate e-learning programme.

So how did CMG achieve the transition from technology-free environment to an enthusiastically adopted corporate e-learning platform? Firstly, by partnering with e-learning company Information Transfer, experts in helping clients embed learning technology within their businesses. Secondly, by developing 'Fulfilling Potential' CMG's e-learning solution that captured the needs of the business and the needs of the stakeholders. And thirdly, by engaging those stakeholders with the potential benefits.

## **ALIGNMENT WITH BUSINESS NEED**

Stakeholder engagement began with an extensive consultation of staff at all levels across a selection of CMG's care homes. Undertaken by CMG project leader Alison Innes-Farquhar (now an independent consultant with Mainstay Solutions), the consultation produced an audit of current training provision and emerging needs. The picture was one of an existing classroom training model straining to keep up with an expanding business, greater specialist training needs and increasing regulation.

"Existing training was good quality, but we needed to increase efficiency and consistency across the homes," says Innes-Farquhar. "E-learning offered huge potential, if we could make it work at CMG. A key



outcome of the initial consultation was a programme for e-learning content development and delivery. This was designed to address immediate business needs in mandatory training areas, before expanding the platform to specialist training.”

A critical function of the initial consultation was to align the learning technology with the technical infrastructure available to care homes. Twelve months ago, this infrastructure was very limited and the homes had no access to a network, internet or e-mail – not the most promising platform on which to launch corporate e-learning.

Fortunately, this issue was rapidly being addressed by CMG, with the rollout of a new network across the business. During the preliminary consultation, specifications for e-learning management and delivery were aligned with the capabilities of the new network.

**TOP-LEVEL SUPPORT**

The close alliance of e-learning with core business needs was exemplified by the level of support given to the project by the senior stakeholders. Board members were significant contributors and played an important role in shaping the e-learning and communicating its value to staff.

“There is a virtuous circle via which a competent and passionate staff member delivers higher quality work, which in turn promotes greater satisfaction for our

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service users and greater fulfilment for our staff,” says managing director Peter Kinsey. “We strongly believed that e-learning could play a crucial role in supporting this circle, if we could only embed it into our culture.”

**ALIGNING WITH LEARNER NEED**

A stakeholder workshop was used to investigate the specific needs of learners – CMG’s front-line care staff. This day-long workshop, attended by care staff from across the business, gave them the opportunity to contribute to the project design and development.

Staff shared their views on what would make e-learning effective for them. Which formats would work best? What multi-media would be most valuable? What learning styles would be encountered? How did the different care homes differ in their learning needs? How to build trust in e-learning among staff? How to communicate with staff most effectively?

The engagement with learning technologies was identified as a key barrier to successful adoption. So the feedback on these questions was critical in shaping the style, appearance and functionality of the

e-learning interface. The emphasis was on three areas: firstly, to create super-intuitive interfaces, secondly, to build trust in the learning content, and thirdly, to address both generic and local learning requirements.

Post-launch evaluation of the e-learning shows that this attention to learner needs paid off. This response from Home Manager Faye Gallagher is typical: “Some of my staff didn’t like using computers and they were a bit worried about it. Funnily enough, the ones who were most scared absolutely love it – it’s really brought them to life! Their IT skills are improving, and it’s making them more confident in their work.”

**ALIGNING WITH WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

Understanding how learning technologies will be deployed in the learner’s workplace is obvious but often overlooked. The history of e-learning implementations is littered with stories of wonderful learning content withering unused. Either because learners weren’t given time to complete it, or because sound wasn’t enabled on their PC, or because they didn’t have access to a networked computer, and so on.

The care-focussed working environment at CMG certainly presented challenges in terms of access to networked computers. This was being addressed through the technology upgrade that saw a new network and new computers installed in every care home.

This same environment also provided one of the greatest opportunities for e-learning. By far the single greatest cost of CMG's existing classroom training model was the 'backfill' cost of covering for staff attending training sessions when on shift. By reducing the time taken for staff to complete their training, and by allowing them to do it in the care home during quiet periods, e-learning has eliminated backfill costs.

"'Fulfilling Potential' has really reduced staff costs, because I'm not paying for another member staff to cover when somebody else is out for a day on training," says home manager Christine Charlton. "Now staff can complete training in quiet times on shift – like when service users are out at day-care, or in the evening on a sleep-in."

#### COMMUNICATING CHANGE AND BENEFIT

Based on the consultation findings and involvement of stakeholders throughout the organisation, CMG's e-learning solution was taking shape. Structured e-learning modules addressing key mandatory learning needs would be delivered from a bespoke learning management system. Both the content and learning management functionality were extensively informed by business goals, learner needs and the working environment.

It was now time to prepare the ground for the effective launch and embedding of

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e-learning. Information Transfer worked closely with CMG to create a formal plan to guide communication and change management activity across the organisation.

The purpose of the plan was to define the key audiences with the business, the messages that each audience needed to hear and the communication channels that would be used to deliver them. This meant more than just 'selling' e-learning to learners. It meant helping line managers understand the benefits for them, and how they would support their staff in using learning technologies. It meant demonstrating to regional directors the benefits of championing e-learning to local managers and so on, for all relevant audiences both inside and outside the organisation.

For CMG, the outcome of the plan was a timetable of practical communication activity leading up to and beyond launch of the programme. Specific activity included cascade briefings, a poster campaign, a staff competition, e-learning road-shows, site visits and a promotional movie.

#### A SENSE OF IDENTITY

Creating a strong identity is a staple of effective communication and marketing, and there's no reason for the 'selling' of an e-learning solution to be any different. E-learning was intended to transform the experience of training for all staff and to embed a revived corporate culture. These bold aspirations were captured in a strong and memorable brand identity for the e-learning: 'Fulfilling Potential'.

This name, and its accompanying set of visuals were at the heart of all the communications messages and materials. The brand also defines the appearance of the e-learning content and management interfaces. It is more than just a coherent link between the many aspects of the project, the name 'Fulfilling Potential' links into the key values of CMG. "We are committed to our staff; to their personal development and fulfilment," says Kinsey. "We want them to be proud to work for the company because they understand what we do and what this means to the lives of service users."

#### POTENTIAL FULFILED

The programme launched in February 2009, after a whirlwind four-month development period. Staff enthusiastically engaged with

a range of e-learning content and linked offline activities through a bespoke learning management system. And all this via a computer and network infrastructure that had only been in place for a few weeks.

Learning technologies have well and truly arrived at CMG. Post-launch evaluations reveal outstanding levels of adoption by staff. Over seven and a half thousand modules have been completed in the first six months, representing more than ten thousand training hours delivered.

An online evaluation of the user experience showed sky-high approval ratings and generated an avalanche of positive feedback, exemplified by the comments like this from lead support worker Olufunke Dare. "The modules brought my work to life, with the real people, case studies, and solutions offered. Such a brilliant way to learn!"

This adoption has provided the platform for e-learning to deliver real business impact and outstanding return on investment. The direct cost of training has been drastically reduced. Staff rostering has been simplified. Corporate risk has been reduced through rigorous monitoring of mandatory training delivery.

This approach can apply to any learning technology in any business. It allows e-learning to become embedded, and when it does, the benefits are great.

"'Fulfilling Potential' has had a huge impact for CMG. And beyond learning and development, that impact goes right to the core of our values," says Commercial Director David Spruzen.

All of this practical activity has driven the successful adoption of e-learning at CMG. At the heart was the recognition of the uniqueness of the company and an understanding of the barriers to the effective use of learning technologies.

By taking a bespoke approach to content, to technology, to usability and to communication, these barriers became opportunities.

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