

Thinking about eLearning?
It's not just about the Software you know!



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IT Implementations ... How to make the training part cheaper!!

Having worked in the education area for the last 7 years mainly around IT projects I have found over the last few years that customers are asking for the same needs to be fulfilled that they have asked for historically but with a definitive difference they are now coming with a 5th of the budget and half the time.

As often the person that gets brought in to the pre-sales process this has required an out of the box thinking, to be honest the initial question to yourself at that stage is do you say thanks but no thanks and lose customers or do you relish in the opportunity of a creative challenge and take it by the horns and go for it... Well of course the answer is go for it!!

Being of the age of eLearning meant that thinking outside of the box did not require stepping to far outward, especially with the introduction of eLearning products such as Stratus, UPK, Uperform and STT all products designed to streamline the effort needed to capture technical processes.

I am sure right now there maybe people reading this white paper thinking what's the big deal? You capture the processes send it out to people, they attend the training bobs your uncle... You are wrong, well only slightly anyway!!

The creation of the material is not the difficult bit especially when it is technical training seen as a good 80% of the courseware is teaching people where to click on a screen and what to select. However where the complicated bit starts is thinking how do you get what is vital but slightly boring material to really replace the fundamentals of training people and interacting with them face to face?

How do we create a community with support networks without needing to go the old fashioned route of having post go-live support teams that walk the floor for a few months, fairly expensive when you are a global company of several thousand employees?

What we need to be able to achieve with very low resources, short timelines, minimal classroom days and a tiny budget is material that will support the UAT process, people being introduced to support the project implementation, pre-requisite training, classroom training, post go-live referencing, new starters and job transfers all using one piece of software.

So this quite clearly poses the question of how can this be done? Well let me tell you about Company A.

Case Study

Company A came to iTrain looking for a training company that would support UAT and Training in both the material development and delivery. The Company A project was implementing Oracle R12 for the following areas:

- Finance
- Order Management
- Warehouse Management
- Supply Planning and Execution
- Procurement

The complication with this project was that only 1/5 of the usual budget to tackle this number of courses was available as apposed to a project we had delivered the year before using a conventional method as well as the budget constraints there was a need to develop material that was to fulfil multiple disciplines as demonstrated in the below list.

- UAT Scripts
- Pre-requisite training
- Classroom material
- Post Go-live support material
- Refresher Training

Company A chose Stratus as the tool to do the job, driven by the fact that it is an iTrain tool and iTrain were carrying out the project and its is a good tool (Slightly biased seen as I am the CPO for that product and company).

The above also needed to be achieved without developing material outside of stratus because of resource and time constraints

So how is this done and how can one medium be sufficient?

Below is a simple summary of the project stages.

1. In the first month of the project the consultants worked all of the documentation that had been developed as part of the project to date, this enabled a rough storyboarding to be developed and for course objectives to be agreed.
2. The 'Watch it' and 'Try it' modes were developed using 4 consultants over a period of 3 and a half months the captures also had supporting slides developed outlining objectives, process flows summaries, business scenarios and any other business contextualisation that would help support the understanding for the overall process as well as marry up information that was being shared with the business as part of user adoption.

It is probably important to describe to you the difference between a 'watch it' and 'try it' to help build a clear picture of what it is they are achieving as part of the learning processes.

The 'watch it' is a simulation made up of bubbles, the bubbles talk about what is happening on the screen and what the steps will consist of, some business context may exist in the bubbles enabling a better level of bite size information delivery, the user then clicks on the bubble watches the step happen in front of them and are then moved on to the next step in the process.

The 'Try it' mode simulates you being inside the live environment, with an information box that gives you some guidance on what you should be doing on the screen and the rest is down to the user, if the user gets stuck they should return to the 'Watch it' to re-establish the knowledge before retuning to the 'Try it'.

3. The first set of slides and the 'Watch it', 'Try it' modes were used as UAT scripts, the slides talked about the scenario and what the output of that processes should be.
4. Post UAT and post the updates made to move the material on from UAT changes the eLearning was released to the wider business. The material was released using a number of support mechanisms. Firstly Webinars were held with each of the relevant areas of the business to get people familiar with what was available to them and what the learning cycle would be made up of and finally to share and promote the support mechanisms in place to help build a community learners that could support the learning process as well as business as usual,
5. Deadlines were set for the completion of the eLearning courses ensuring that the users had attended all sessions and reached an adequate competency before coming to the classroom.

6. During the period of the eLearning being conducted the users were supported by super users that had been trained up in train the trainer sessions and had played a strong role in the project enabling an understanding of the technology, the reasoning for the change, the effect of the change and the business context. Change and training is always more effective when being delivered by people that are deemed to be 'one of their own'
7. The super users play a fundamental role during the period of which the eLearning is being attended by the delegates. They act as an additional support and advice mechanism for any questions, concerns or low understanding in any area's, questions are then gathered up and used to draw attention to those key areas where the classroom would bridge the gap between what the eLearning provided and the day in a life of the person taking the course.

The super users would also monitor the management reports inside stratus to see what progress users were making; the super users would then be able to contact the users that had not logged in for a while, users that were showing a low % or progress and users that did not meet the required competency in the assessment.

1. In summary by the close of this period the users would have learnt all about the reasoning behind the change, the business context that supported the technical process, learnt how to do the steps in oracle through interacting with the 'Watch it' and the 'Try it' and validated the knowledge by attending an assessment.

So if the users have already done the course in eLearning what is the point in classroom training?

When you have worked in training for a long time you come to recognise the benefit of refresher training, there are limitations to what knowledge can be retained within the classroom and that some application to real life is required and then a period of refresher training to iron out any habits that are forming or any miss conceptions about certain procedures. This is not always achievable when reaching out to a geographically spread organisation, within the limitations of such a small budget and not wanting to eat in to peoples work time, especially straight after an implementation.

By working with the method of releasing the training early as eLearning it can be done by only taking 15 to 30 minutes out of people's working day. The learning is delivered in more bite size manageable chunks enabling a higher retention of knowledge. The learning is also being carried out in the workplace enabling the user to question the relationship between what is being learnt and the reality of what they do in the workplace. When the users finally make it to the classroom they are coming well informed and with a certain level of pre-requisite knowledge. The instructor lead training can then be focused on achieving two main goals supporting the areas that were flagged as weakness by the super users during the eLearning phase and getting the users to carry out what they learnt from the eLearning inside a training environment bringing more reality to their knowledge.

So what does the classroom training look like?

During the classroom training we train a level of independence, where the 'Watch it' section of the eLearning is used as a manual (reduction in the cost of printing, no additional effort needed to create a manual from scratch and even if you use products like UPK and Uperform where one capture can be published as a manual as well as learning there is usually still a need to introduce further information and context) when a user is not able work a process on their own they can use the 'Watch it' to help walk them through the process in the training environment. The method of the trainer teaching the delegates to use the material in conjunction with the environment rather than the trainer teaching them how to conduct the process enables them to be more self sufficient post go-live.

At the beginning of the session any questions or outputs from the eLearning are worked to be sure as mentioned above that the classroom comfortably fills in the gap between eLearning and the day in the life of a delegate.

The delegates are issued with an exercise book of which they work through at their own pace within the allocated time for the subject training. The workbook requires them to validate the process that they have taken to be sure that the trainer can sign the user off. The workbook will be recapping on the eLearning courses as well as validating what was taught at the beginning of the session based on the output from the eLearning.

The trainer will then walk the room to watch and oversee that everyone is fine and working to the process, as mentioned above the 'Watch it' is the main supporting tool with the trainer referring the user back to the correct section of the 'Watch it' when they get lost.

Post the classroom training the post go-live support is needed and to support the post go-live knowledge gaps the "Watch it" section will be used alongside the production environment, this is backed up with knowledgeable super users and the general community that would have developed during the eLearning phase.

Out of all of the above there is one area that is not apparent as an objective or achievement and that is a sense of community, this is naturally formed during the eLearning period pre classroom training where the super users help users to communicate and discuss problems and knowledge gaps, where users can come to together and discuss their experiences. An online forum can be used to aid this further where user can collaborate together and share information no matter where they are placed in the world.

So in summary...

Selecting the right product and the right methodology has been proven that it can support multiple mediums and do as good a job if not better than the conventional routes...

From this white paper you can see that company A achieved the following:

- The UAT training and testing material.
- Pre-classroom training by getting your users to attend the eLearning sessions for a short period every day prior to the classroom training
- The classroom delivery which is now considerably shorter in duration. We found with company A had we taken a traditional training approach as we did with a different company the year before we would have needed just over 50 days of delivery but by using the above approach we have achieved the same goal, hit the same if not better level of knowledge retention and only used 20 days of delivery
- Post go-live support, new starters, job transfers and refresher training

And you know what its only 1/5 of the cost in comparison to doing it the conventional way.

Nina Marie-Cannon is Chief Productions Officer for the iTrain Stratus Virtual Learning Environment. She has been on both sides of eLearning implementations and has worked in the industry for over 7 years.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues further or require help with eLearning integration then please: Call: +44 (0)207 608 1835 or mail: stratuselearning@itrain.co.uk