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

By Nina-Marie Cannon

Chief Productions Office, iTrain Stratus

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

When organisations are thinking about eLearning one of the most common questions asked by customers is 'How will eLearning effectively make a difference in our organisation?'

The response to such a question is always the same; eLearning as a standalone element will make no difference to your organisation and the competency of your staff, unless you implement it correctly, nor will it act as a direct substitute for Instructor Lead Training (ILT).

The success of eLearning is driven by the implementation, it doesn't matter whether you have some of the most expensive, dynamic and animated content that money can buy, this means nothing without a disciplined and supported methodology for releasing the software and principles into your organisation.

So what needs to happen for your project to be successful and where do you start?

Stage1: The Beginning
Before you consider rolling out eLearning have you thought about the competency levels of the staff you are rolling it out to?

It is not uncommon even in the modern day work environment to find blue collar workers that are still far from comfortable with technology, imagine then that the piece of eLearning you are looking to implement is instruction on how to use the latest piece of corporate technology, you have just delivered twice the fear factor in one hit.

In these scenarios you can not yet make the bold leap away from human contact. These individuals will need mentoring and nurturing through the change. The upfront investments on staff can be costly when you are making this transition but there will be a natural return on investment in the future when your staff are knowledgeable, confident, independent and technically capable of working with eLearning.

So in summary make sure that:
- A detailed Training Needs Analysis has been conducted
- That you truly understand the technical competency of your staff
- Understand how your eLearning should be pitched to those individuals
- You have gained the foundation knowledge that will define the implementation methodology for rolling out eLearning.

Only when you are happy that you have addressed these issues should you move on to Stage 2.

Stage 2: Implementation
Stage 2 of the implementation is the plan, in an ideal situation you will be thinking about rolling out your eLearning when you have a comfortable period of time allowing you too have a less rushed approach towards the staff you are targeting.

As part of the plan you will be looking at the when the eLearning will be ready to go live and what adoption activities will need to take place. It is worth mentioning at this stage, that most of what is being advised in this white paper makes the assumption that this is either the first time you have presented eLearning to your business or that there is a particular project that eLearning is supporting. In cases where the organisation is eLearning savvy and the subject does not require you to induct your staff then a more simplistic approach can be taken.

Once you have a go live date you are then able to establish what pre adoption activities can take place whilst at the same time developing your eLearning material.

The adoption activities can consist of a number of webinars, classroom training, the training and mentoring of champions who can support staff from within the relevant units and road shows.

These adoption activities may not be required in all cases; once you have an organisation that is comfortable with eLearning you can just gradually release courses to fit your staff development timescales.

Stage 3: Adoption
When the initial scope was conducted you would have identified what courses needed to be delivered and to whom and over what time scale these courses need to completed.

Using this information you can create a time matrix enabling you to define how much time per day people need to allocate to concentrate on the course. This enables you to ensure that the eLearning is completed within a defined timeline, such as a project go-live and that you can give managers a good indication of what is required.

The time matrix is also a good method of being able to measure the progress that individuals are making with the support of management reporting from a learning management system.

In order for eLearning to be successful a good learning management system (LMS) within a product like Stratus that tracks the 'learning' is needed. You have to have an understanding of how your staff are progressing and indicator where your champions are required to provide guidance and assistance. Many eLearning tools offer this kind of reporting, or if you already have an LMS make sure your eLearning software of choice can report through it.

Stage 4: Training Practice
So you have now done all your pre-assessment of the delegate needs, carried out your pre-adoption activities, trained up your champions, rolled out your eLearning, monitored and supported the users during this process and finally you have gone live, so what about the training itself:

- It is not uncommon for delegates to have completed training having only retained a certain percentage of what has been shared with them. After a period of putting what they did learn into practice (3 – 6 months) it will add value for refresher workshops to be run.

- Once you are happy that all your employees attending a particular course have met the appropriate competency then it will be time to plan for refresher and up grade training.

The benefit of the workshops is that they will reinforce the key important areas of knowledge that may have been lost during the first run of training, training is much more meaningful after a period of embedment and the delegates can relate it better to their daily work environment.

From here it is all down to the champions to keep the standards going.

You should now be on your way to a well trained, happy supported team of staff and will now be starting to see a solid return on investment from reduced training costs and a more independent and competent workforce.

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 10 years.

The next white paper will be 'Mentoring and Change – Techniques for Adoption', released next month.