

RR Donnelley's Jim Graham: Pull versus Push at the Press

Daniel Margolis

RR Donnelley is a large commercial printer that was founded more than 140 years ago. This long history has seen the company continually expand its capabilities to where it now provides myriad solutions including commercial and financial printing, direct mail, forms and labels, call centers, online services, digital photography, and content and database management. Its customer base consists of companies in health care, advertising, retail, technology, financial services and a range of other industries.

Jim Graham, vice president of training and development, has seen the company through various changes in its recent history. He's been involved with RR Donnelley on and off since 1982, when he joined as a manager of sales training development. Twelve years later, in 1994, he left RR Donnelley as a director, moving on to serve successively on the management team of two companies, one in software development and the other in insurance.

Graham then joined Huthwaite, a performance and change management firm, before joining Moore Corp. as director of training and development in 2002.

The following year, Moore merged with Wallace Computer Services Inc., and Moore Wallace Inc.

was acquired by RR Donnelley in 2004. Graham thus found himself back at RR Donnelley via the mergers. This presented him with one of the more significant challenges he's seen in his 14 years with the company.

"When those three companies — Moore, Wallace and RR Donnelley — came together, the challenge was centralizing the training function," Graham said.

Learning had been fractionalized to a degree at the individual companies before the mergers, and it was even more so following the convergence of the three, he said.

So Graham centralized learning at RR Donnelley's corporate headquarters in Chicago.





Photographs by Matthew Taplinger

His central plan, in the wake of the merger, was to make RR Donnelley's training as consistent and consolidated as possible.

"One of the things I started to preach early on was consistency in standardization across a platform," he said. "In any company, you've got mergers, you've got a number of different business units, and everybody wants to go out and do their own thing, which is OK in some ways but in other ways, it's not."

From there, Graham's next task was to begin thinking globally — RR Donnelley has locations and interests around the world.

"Our goal was to supply global training resources under a single direction, focus and strategy, regardless of whether they were needed in the U.S., North America, Asia or Europe," Graham said. "We've made some great strides in doing that."

RR Donnelley has done so, Graham said, by consolidating its e-learning platforms. Next year, the company will take this one step further.

"We'll go forward with a singular platform base for holding all of our compliance training, all of our skills training and all of our Webinar-based training," Graham said.



NAME: JIM GRAHAM
TITLE: Vice President,
 Training and Development
COMPANY: RR Donnelley

- SUCCESSSES:**
- Managing training of more than 53,000 employees in a manufacturing-based organization where classroom and computer time is not always easy to come by.
 - Centralized training functions after mergers combining three companies.
 - Consolidated the company's e-learning platforms.

LEARNING PHILOSOPHY: "It's a pull versus a push strategy. Previously, here and at other companies, the corporate training function would come up with a great program that they pushed out to the field and told people, 'If you take the

medicine, you'll feel better.' We look at it as the opposite. We have a sales-training advisory counsel and a customer service advisory counsel. These are made up of representatives from each of our businesses, and we meet quarterly. Their job is to tell us what they need and what they want. So I use the word 'pull strategy' and mean it very much. If the business units are not asking for it, then we're not building it."

Training on the Fly

Graham currently oversees the learning needs of about 53,000 RR Donnelley employees, and that number will move past 60,000 this year as the company acquires Banta Corp., another printing company. Handling the training needs of a workforce this size would be a challenge to begin with, and it becomes even more so in a manufacturing-based organization such as RR Donnelley.

"More than 80 percent of our folks are in manufacturing," Graham said. "They're paid hourly and work in our plants, and if they're not a manager or supervisor, they probably don't have a computer at their desk."

Nevertheless, the company has seen 130,000 to 140,000 hits on its e-learning platform and last year, it trained 36,000 to 37,000 people via e-learning, probably due to the adaptability of e-learning to individuals' schedules.

"What that means is that they've either done it from home or from the plant at a kiosk or computer," Graham said.

The company wants to avoid taking its staff away from work to train, but it obviously still needs to do so.

"So, like everybody else, we're looking at how we do that in a shorter time frame, maybe in a

Webinar, maybe in e-learning, even though, as we all know, there is some training where the classroom is required," Graham said. "It's figuring out the best way to provide the training and meet the goals and objectives of the business units in a timely and cost-effective way."

Graham looks at juggling these different options and selecting the best one for a given situation as a blended learning approach.

"We're still using a classroom where it's needed or required and it's the best method," he said. "We're certainly moving toward an e-learning platform, but we are by no means going to replace the classroom with e-learning. We're probably doing more Webinars than we have in the past, and we're also now posting those Webinars for future reference, so it's a combination. It's trying to select the best training methodology based on needs and outcomes."

Dan Wheeler, an HR supervisor at RR Donnelley who focuses on training and development, specifically in manufacturing, said the company uses a multi-tiered approach.

"Through our small, centralized corporate manufacturing training team, we provide plants with guidance, networking, content access and management and processes, as well as the development of plant resources for the delivery of targeted skills training," Wheeler said. "This delivery is mostly via on-the-job training but also supplemented by computer technologies such as simulations, videos, classroom and some self-guided learning opportunities. Our efforts are very focused on data-driven gap analysis and results."

Oversight and Quantification

Just as RR Donnelley's methods of learning vary on a case-by-case basis, so do its methods of competency assessment.

"If it's an e-learning platform, obviously we're testing and making sure people have completed the course and passed the test," Graham said. "In our classroom learning, we certainly don't test everyone, so we employ a learning process that involves applying everything as you're learning it in the class. It's not the old lecture format."

Graham said he feels confident he and his staff can demonstrate their results based on what people learn in training and then apply.

"We ask people, 'Of the results you've gotten, how much would you attribute to what you learned in

training?" he said. "Some of that might be anecdotal, but the rest of it is some hard-line measurement, particularly in our manufacturing plants."

RR Donnelley wants to do more quantification of the benefits of its learning and development by looking at throughput figures for its manufacturing processes.

"On a piece of equipment, an end-user sees throughput, waste, speed, so we're beginning to measure that where we have trained people to improve their skills and knowledge," Graham said. "We don't have any hard-line measurement yet, but we're getting close to it."

Pull versus Push

Graham said his overall training philosophy comes down to the difference between pulling and pushing.

"Previously, here and at other companies, the corporate training function would come up with a great program that they pushed out to the field and told people, 'If you take the medicine, you'll feel better,'" he said, explaining how he and his staff take an opposite route. "We have a sales training advisory council and a customer service advisory council. These are made up of representatives of each of our businesses, and we meet quarterly. Their job is to tell us what they need and what they want. So, I use the word 'pull strategy' and mean it very much. If the business units are not asking for it, then we're not building it."

Wheeler said, as a result, the organization responds to a real-time need.

"It's based on just-in-time need," Wheeler said. "It reverses the funnel. In the past, sometimes corporate tried to force training on plants that maybe wasn't completely relevant to the moment. This way, plants are able to identify specific needs that are relevant to that moment, so what we provide is something that helps them get quick results."

A Tough Business

In planning for the future of RR Donnelley's learning and development organization, Graham keeps in mind the state of the print industry. He said he feels part of surviving, even thriving, in printing — which RR Donnelley certainly has done — is accepting that it's a tough business.

"You've got to keep your costs in line," he said. "You've got to keep your manufacturing efficiencies up, and you need to be as full to capacity as possible."

This means asking hard questions when it comes to training and doing so on a constant basis.

"How do we provide training in an easily delivered manner, just in time, in a palatable format? Do we start podcasting? How do we provide 15 minutes of learning for people?" Graham said. "I think it's my challenge and my team's challenge to figure that out."

This gets more complex as RR Donnelley continues to expand internationally.

"How do we reach all those people and make sure we're providing the same sort of resources everywhere so we're consistent and consolidated in what we do from a training perspective?" Graham said. "For me, that's the challenge of the future for RR Donnelley." ■

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