

# Making the Business Case for E-learning

BY TOM FLOYD



**Y**ou've heard the traditional benefits of how organizations are harnessing the power of e-learning to scale to global audiences, reduce travel costs and deliver just-in-time training. But as e-learning itself has evolved, so have the ways in which it is used. From driving organizational change to addressing the needs of the multigenerational workforce, here are some additional ways that corporate America is making the case for e-learning as a valuable tool.

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

A December 2006 survey by BlessingWhite focusing on career development reported that 41 percent of respondents felt their employer's approach to career development failed to meet their personal needs. What employees really want to know is where to go, what to take, and how to squeeze it in without taking too much time away from the office.

As a result, job-role-specific learning roadmaps are now a hot topic in talent management. What you'll find within many of these corporate roadmaps is e-learning. Including custom e-courses developed internally and off-the-shelf products, e-learning is being used to conduct employee orientations, develop soft skills and provide the foundation for technical certification programs. From a management perspective, e-learning demonstrates a commitment to employee growth, is a critical component in an overall human capital strategy, and is a solid retention tool to keep employees loyal in an economy where the Society for Human Resource Management estimates turnover costs at \$5 trillion annually.

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT

In many cases, the development of new training offerings is the result of a change impacting an organization or its employees. Whether it's training designed to increase awareness about a new initiative, a new technology or a new process, ensuring that the company's target audience receives the information needed to support the change is critical.

The goal of any change management initiative is adoption. Many organizations are using e-learning as a change management vehicle to minimize resistance and ensure employees have the information needed to rapidly move up the adoption curve.

## COMPLIANCE

According to a 2005 National Business Ethics survey, the most common types of unethical employee misconduct range from abuse or intimidating behavior to discrimination and sexual harassment. The Conference Board/Ethics and Compliance Officers (ECO) survey shows company anti-corruption practices becoming significantly widespread. So many corporations are under pressure to demonstrate compliance with legal statutes and minimize risk.

E-learning can be used to set expectations from the beginning as a means to communicate the parameters, requirements and consequences of not following company policy. Whether it's a Sarbanes-Oxley course or an interactive simulation on sexual harassment, e-learning has become an effective means for many corporations to demonstrate compliance through mandated training.

## MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

With 75 million "Millennials" entering the U.S. workforce in the years to come, the pressure to understand, retain and cater to their needs is immense. Millennials — with an extreme amount of technical savvy and comfort with Web 2.0 tools — have shorter attention spans than their generational peers and prefer bite-sized education they can access whenever they want it.

Whether e-courses are delivered on a PC or an iPod, the modular nature of e-learning not only helps to fulfill the needs of these knowledge-hungry workers with an appetite for technology, it also helps their "Gen-X" and "Baby-Boomer" peers as well. Whether taken in an office or commuting on a bullet train, e-learning can be an educational compromise to meet the conflicting needs of all members of the multigenerational workforce.

With the expansion of e-learning into so many facets of their businesses, it's clearly evident why more C-level executives and higher are leveraging e-learning to enable their strategic initiatives.

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