

## ***Start Small, Finish Big (Apr 07)***

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*Ensuring your success in implementing an enterprise-wide learning management system through a partitioned rollout*

When it comes to optimizing your learning management system, and your resulting corporate-wide training initiatives, it's easy to lose sight of the ultimate business goal by focusing too closely on doing too much, too fast. Oftentimes people don't know where to start: Should I roll out a new course for new hires only? How do I engage my subject matter experts to develop specific training for their business lines? The purchase of an LMS doesn't have to prompt more questions than answers. When you identify your objectives up front and work with your LMS vendor to help you achieve these objectives, you can begin to see results. Let's run through some techniques that can help you get the most out of your investment with a pleasant side effect - a dynamic learning culture that helps you look like a hero in your organization. For those of you that have yet to purchase and implement an LMS these tips may help to shine some light on the whole process; it really is manageable and the returns are numerous.

1. **Develop a plan** What would learning look like in your organization if all factors were aligned? Write out your goals, and the strategies and tactics to support these goals. It is best to keep it short so that you can revisit your plan quarterly and chart your progress. Don't get too hung up on getting your plan ready for prime time, just make sure you have thought about your desired objectives and how they align with your organization's business goals.
2. **Understand your tools.** A modern LMS is much more than the installed, database driven application of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century came web-based software as a service that combines the features of a traditional LMS with anytime, anywhere, collaborative development tools. These tools can transform how you work but you need to know if you have the right tool to achieve your goals.
3. **Plot your strengths** by focusing on strategies that have worked well for you in the past. One of the most common ways to stall your start is by subscribing to the misconception that you must develop and load new content into your LMS right away. A better plan may be to design a learning strategy that plays to what you are already doing successfully with the goal of streamlining the process. Perhaps converting existing PowerPoint® presentations into an online learning course or loading existing video-based training is a good initial step. If the content is relevant and your company has successfully delivered training through these delivery methods, use what you have and begin to build quizzes and tests around the content to measure retention and track learner information through the LMS. Taking content that is already in existence makes starting up much easier.
4. **Kick development into high gear** Supplementing your online university with new content can be more involved yet once the initial deployment is complete you can take a partitioned rollout approach. Organize a meeting with product line managers, customer support managers and other senior staff who may be interested in how your training initiative can become best practices for a corporate-wide learning initiative. Product line managers and call center/customer support managers will have an interest in training their employees on new products and processes quickly and efficiently. Share with them some of the benefits of delivering learning online. Your learning solutions provider should be able to share some statistics with you. Schedule training sessions for your subject matter expert's so that they too can begin to develop dynamic learning content to share and deliver. If you do not currently have an intranet to house important information by business line, they may find the research and reference component or university-wide glossary of the learning platform helpful for just-in-time information.

5. **Use multimedia to drive learning not unnecessary cost** The use of multimedia such as video, Flash<sup>®</sup> animation, or even virtual reality can add significant cost to eLearning development. Keep in mind that there are primarily two reasons for spending money on media: 1) to make your course look good and 2) to improve a learner's understanding of the content being taught. Both can be important. In the first case you are tickling the emotional side of the brain of your learners to arouse and maintain interest, and/or to create a sense of quality. Or perhaps it doesn't have anything to do with your learners; you may just want to express yourself artistically. In the second case you are delivering information to the logical side of the brain. It's easier to understand how to change a sparkplug in a car if one has some visual media to support the text instructions. The important thing is to know what you are spend your money on and why.
6. **Share your results** Organize the data you collect on your learners. It's easier to spread the word about your initiative once people see the results.
7. **Promote your university** Engage your marketing department to help you promote corporate learning. Develop posters announcing your online university and post them in central locations around the office. Blast emails at period intervals prior to launch that let everyone know what's coming and why it is important to them. Your training will most likely be a combination of mandatory and optional training. Tie in your training requirements to employee performance review systems; don't rely totally on marketing initiatives.

Take a look at how your organization can thrive in a changing landscape by leveraging the power of the new learning management technology available today. An online learning platform delivered as a monthly, subscription-based service accessed anytime, anywhere offers you a way to do more with less effort. This shift in the learning landscape means employees are more likely to engage with a tool that meets their learning objectives for requisite training, performance management and just-in-time information. As the champion for this new way of doing business in your organization you don't have to take giant steps to get there. But you do need to start down the path that others will follow.

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