Going Virtual - Moving Classrooms Online (Mar 15)
By: Amy Happ and Abby McKenna, Mar 31, 2015

The latest research and statistics show that today's learners are distracted and overworked. They're asked to do more with less time, money and resources. On the training front, there's a similar evolution. Taking employees away from busy schedules for a week of instructor-led training (ILT) is rapidly becoming impossible. Learning needs to be delivered in small and quick soundbites. The solution seems pretty clear: take training virtual.

While virtual training may seem like the Holy Grail for organizations who are constrained by time and budget pressures, recent research shows that little training is actually moving in that direction. ATD's 2014 State of the Industry report puts instructor-led online and remote training at 14.25 percent of formal learning hours, with instructor-led classroom still at 54.62 percent.

Many learning and development professionals are still struggling to redesign classroom training for world-class virtual delivery. It's no wonder that learners aren't engaged when the majority of the virtual ILT (VILT) is a talking head in a video box in the corner of a screen. A virtual talking head is no more or less engaging than a live one.

So what does it involve to take classroom training and deliver it virtually through facilitated webinars without losing any skill development or content engagement?

Keys to Redesigning Classroom Training for Virtual Delivery

Depending on the topic, audience and amount of time, the approach needs to be different. There isn't an easy formula that can be applied to every ILT program to make it VILT.

The real challenge begins when you've accepted that there's no easy answer and the solution is to get creative. Today's learners want short bursts of learning in a social and collaborative environment. You don't have the luxury of time and lecture, so distill the learning down to the most essential points. A general rule of thumb is to keep VILT sessions to an hour or less. When comparing your ILT to VILT, for every two hours of ILT you have one hour of VILT. Going virtual relies heavily on the learner applying learning and completing assignments offline. Don't waste time keeping a group online for anything they can do on their own.

Lastly, make it about learning from others and get your audience applying the concepts.

VILT requires you to be a facilitator of learning, not a trainer that lectures. Use the technology available to infuse social learning and collaboration. So many of the VILT platforms have breakout spaces, whiteboards, chat functions and polling. Use polling to allow the audience to decide where to spend your time together and what they want to talk about. Instead of an animated slide, have the audience write on a whiteboard and create the list. Have them chat with each other during the session. Provide a format for learners to share their experiences and knowledge with each other.

The truth of VILT is that for every second you ask the learner to listen to you, you're going to lose someone to IM or email, and you aren't likely to get them back. So keep it simple and dynamic, then push some of the responsibility of learning back to them!

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