

How to Convert Classroom Training Into e-Learning

WHITE PAPER



BizLibrary
ONLINE TRAINING FOR
SMALL & MID-SIZED COMPANIES

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In today's economic environment, many organizations are finding their training budgets are getting tighter and tighter. Online training is a proven cost-effective way to deliver training. Many small and mid-sized organizations have already made use of e-learning in their training efforts and realize the benefits of utilizing e-learning courses; however the on-going challenge and pressure to deliver more training with fewer resources still exists. With challenge comes evolution, and for many organizations it has led them to critically evaluate their business needs and process effectiveness. Training, for a variety of reasons, is regularly targeted for budget cutting, because for many organizations, training is both a need and a costly process. Recent trends and developments are leading to new thinking about how organizations can help their employees grow and develop while maintaining a sharp eye on budgetary pressures.

BizLibrary White Paper: How to Convert Classroom Training into e-Learning

Converting Classroom Training into e-Learning

The training media has been full of stories indicating that training budgets will remain under stress and cost cutting pressure – even in the face of some modest improvement in the overall economy. Adding to the problems many training departments face, are the emergence of new training ideas, technologies and theories like social learning.ⁱ The end result of the collision of the new economic realities for training professionals and the emergence of new training and development tools is an on-going need to find new ways to deliver more training with fewer resources. That's where a serious examination of converting some classroom training into e-learning enters the picture. Training professionals can find cost savings and improved efficiencies in e-learning, but they can also find ways to meet other important business needs such as getting on-demand training to employees, or delivering training to widely scattered workforces. In the end, it does not matter what is behind the decision to convert current instructor-led training (ILT) into e-learning. What is important is that organizations fully understand the forces driving them to consider the conversion process in the first place, and the factors will likely be different from organization to organization.

Why Convert Existing Classroom Training into e-Learning?

The business-based reasons for converting an ILT course into an e-learning course generally fall into five broad categories.

1. **Costs** – usually a blend of payroll, travel, facilities and materials.
2. **Time** – including the need for rapid development, shorter deployment cycles and shorter training sessions.
3. **Geographically Dispersed Workforce** – with so many organizations – even small and mid-sized – operating in multiple locations and in multiple states, e-learning works well to ensure all employees have access to critical training materials and resources.
4. **Limited Training Resources** – we hear this justification for e-learning quite a bit from organizations big enough to need training, but too small to have a training department.
5. **Consistent Message** – some types of training (*i.e.* product training, new employee on boarding, compliance, etc.) are especially appropriate for e-learning and require each participant to get the same message and reach the same level of understanding.

Your organization might have different factors driving your initiative to consider converting classroom training materials into e-learning. While the factors may be different, e-learning has many advantages when compared to traditional ILT.ⁱⁱ

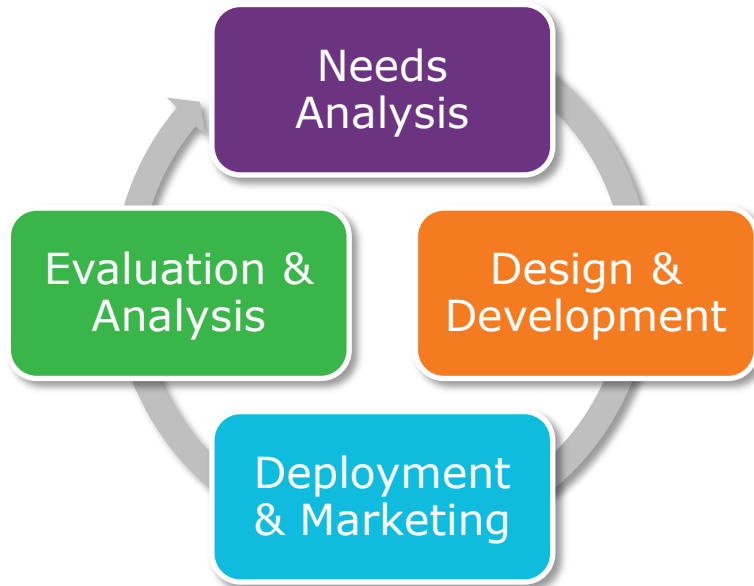
There is very strong evidence that online and computer-based training requires less time for students to complete compared to instructor-led training. Various studies over the past 15 years or so show the amount of reduction ranges from 20-80%, with 40-60% being the most common.

Zenger & Uehlein, *Why Blended Will Win*, T+D, ASTD, August 2001



Process for Successfully Converting Classroom Training into e-Learning

It's important for organizations to understand that the initial conversion of a classroom session into e-learning is only the first step in a successful project. In fact, the effective development of e-learning is an ongoing cyclical process illustrated below:



We start with an in-depth needs analysis, move to designing and developing the e-learning course, then we launch or deploy the content and market to our targeted participants. The cycle concludes when we evaluate the success and effectiveness of the course, and start the cycle again.

Needs Analysis

An effective and informative needs analysis requires you to identify several very important pieces of information starting with the primary business reason to move this specific training content from an instructor-led class to an e-learning course. For instance, you may be offering leadership development sessions that last three days. Your organization is finding the disruption to operations to be significant. A very good business reason for converting two days of the training into an e-learning course, or courses, could be to minimize the operational disruption by reducing the out-of-office time for the training from three days to one day.

Once you've identified the business reason, you'll be in a much better position to state the learning objectives for the e-learning course. In the example above, one possible learning objective might be to prepare the participants in your leadership development program for the full-day session by having them cover various leadership theories and styles in an e-learning course. Understanding the various theories and styles will help you during the ILT session get the participants to identify their most effective personal leadership style.



Is online learning as effective as classroom instruction?

Yes. In fact, there is a solid body of research suggesting that online training not only takes less time, but actually improves student retention and increases student satisfaction. See an excellent case study of Home Depot's results at Horton, W., *Designing Web-Based Training*, Wiley Computer Publishing, p. 26



Here are some additional questions to carefully consider during your needs analysis:

- What effect do you want the e-learning course to have on the participants?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of offering the content in an e-learning environment?
- What can you do to overcome the disadvantages?
- How will you get your intended audience to participate in the e-learning course?
- What will your “marketing” message about the e-learning look like to the organization?
- How will you use the e-learning course? For instance, will the course be a stand-alone course? Or, will the e-learning course be a part of a blended learning solution?
- Can you measure the success of the e-learning, and if so, how will you do that?

It’s very important as you conduct your needs analysis to carefully consider your intended participants. For instance, you might want to select participants who readily embrace technology-based communications. Many organizations will find excellent e-learning programs are not effective, because the employees who should be participating in the program were not ready for e-learning, did not understand why they should participate and could not see the relevance of the program to their own job.

Design & Develop

You’ve outlined your business case and understand the driving forces, you’ve completed the needs analysis which helped you set your learning objectives and focus on the content you will convert. Now you’re ready to start building your e-learning course. It’s very important to understand the crucial differences between designing an e-learning course and developing an e-learning course. To effectively convert your classroom training into an e-learning course, you will need three distinct types of expertise: subject matter, instructional design and content development (technical skills).

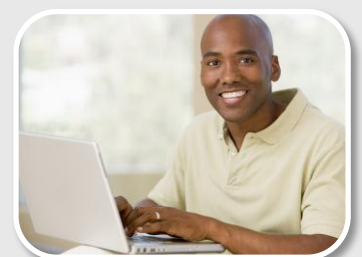
Traditionally, subject matter experts (SME) prepared most training materials based upon their knowledge and expertise. As you plan to convert an existing course into an e-learning experience, it’s going to be critical to ensure you have access to your SME. However, remember many SME’s are not knowledgeable about adult learning or training techniques and methodologies. Even fewer traditional SME’s understand e-learning. So, the same delivery of excellent content might not work well in an e-learning environment, and that’s where instructional design comes into play.

To begin understanding the importance of instructional design, think about a great book that was turned into a movie. Both the book and movie come from the same core source material. However, the book represents one form for delivering the content to an audience and the movie represents a completely different way of delivering the same content. Each chosen



Determine How Long the Session Ought to Be

E-Learning courses generally take less time than classroom sessions. You can find solid, well-established data that suggested e-learning can take 50% less time than traditional classroom sessions.



form has its own challenges and advantages, and each form requires a very different set of skills and experts to make the audience experience meaningful. Similarly, classroom training and e-learning represent very different forms for delivering the same core content, and just like books and movies, each form requires a different set of skills to make delivery effective.

Instructional design (ID) is a discipline that many organizations do not own internally. ID is generally defined as the practice of “maximizing the effectiveness, efficiency and appeal of instruction and other learning experiences.”ⁱⁱⁱ We like to think of instructional design as the process of building effective learning experiences for the intended audience of the training content. For e-learning courses, it’s important that the ID expert have a solid grounding in e-learning.^{iv} Many organizations make significant mistakes when they buy some conversion software, apply the software to their slide shows, and publish the outcome as “e-learning.” However, these types of shortcuts which omit ID as a part of the conversion process usually result in poor learning experiences for your targeted audience.

The rapid deployment software tools that are all over the market can be terrific resources for organizations. Tools like Lectora help non-technical HR and training professionals build and publish content quickly and distribute this content like any other e-learning course. We certainly endorse and encourage the use of these types of tools. We also encourage and strongly endorse the application of sound instructional design principles to any content developed like this. Sound ID will make a substantial difference in the effectiveness of e-learning, whether the e-learning course is converted from classroom material or built from scratch because your organization needs training content right away.

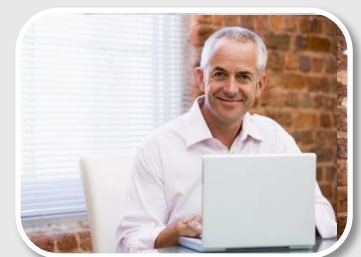
Which Content?

An important element related to selecting content is to look for content that has very broad utilization in your organization and has narrowly targeted learning objectives. For instance, new employee on-boarding can make great e-learning content, but training sessions around building effective teams might be best delivered with a blended solution combining some basic e-learning courses with in-person sessions with the entire targeted team attending. The learning objectives from sessions such as team building, do not always lend themselves to e-learning, but some team work basics such as understanding personality types or communications basics work well in e-learning courses. Team-building is frequently about interpersonal relationships and interactions with specific people, and these types of learning experiences are very complex and hard to effectively reproduce in their entirety in an e-learning course.

Here are four examples of classroom training materials that can usually be converted into effective e-learning courses. In most of these examples, you can make excellent use of the new e-learning content in a blended learning solution to maximize the overall effectiveness of the training, and still capture the costs savings and other advantages of e-learning.

The field of adult learning was pioneered by Malcolm Knowles. He identified the following characteristics of adult learners and these are now commonly referred to as “Adult Learning Theory”:

- Adults are autonomous and *self-directed*.
- Adults have accumulated a foundation of *life experiences and knowledge* that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education.
- Adults are *goal-oriented*
- Adults are *relevancy-oriented*.
- Adults are *practical*, focusing on aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work.
- As do all learners, adults to be shown *respect*.



On-boarding. New employee on-boarding can be great content to convert into e-learning, because some of the learning is purely cognitive in nature. In other words, you want to know whether the training participant comprehends basic information such as the location of employee manuals on your system, or how to find their remaining vacation or personal days on their pay stub. This sort of pure cognitive learning objective is ideally suited to e-learning.

You can continue with the ILT delivery of important messages about your organization's mission, vision and values or other important pieces of information and education where some real-time give-and-take with other participants and the instructor might be valuable and important. It's also likely much of the information you communicate to new hires can be completed effectively with a range of handouts, links, and other job aids. By carefully considering the information you develop during your needs analysis, you'll be able to identify which piece or pieces of new employee on-boarding can be moved to e-learning and build an effective blended

Safety training. For most safety training sessions, employees need to leave the classroom with knowledge of some specific equipment or procedures. These types of purely cognitive learning objectives work very well in an e-learning course. You can deliver content, provide on-going access to the materials and allow participants to print any job aids or written materials they might need or want to reinforce the learning. You can also use tests, assessments or quizzes to ensure comprehension of the safety rule or equipment.

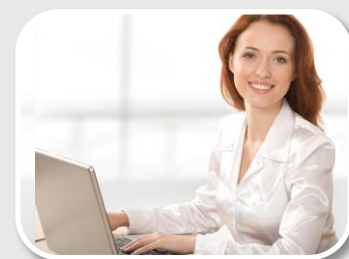
Compliance. Training on many compliance subjects can be great blended learning opportunities. For instance, if you have to provide ethics training on a new set of rules and regulations, an e-learning course might be a perfect vehicle for teaching large numbers of employees the basics of the rules and regulations. e-Learning will work very well to deliver this content and allow you an opportunity to test for basic comprehension. You can use an ILT session to provide opportunities for in-depth group conversations around the complicated changes sometimes associated with new rules and regulations.

New product. New product releases create a range of challenges for employee training. Frequently, new product launches require many employees – especially those interacting with clients and prospects – to have immediate access to accurate information on the product or service. Obviously, waiting for everyone to have the free time to attend a classroom session might not be realistic. So – e-learning can be an excellent solution for the rapid development and deployment of new training content to large numbers of employees on a short time line. The learning objectives for most new product releases are generally along the lines of knowledge of enhancements, features and functions. Additionally, you'll most likely want everyone talking to clients and prospects to be using the same or largely similar value statements. The many advantages of e-learning really can work in your favor when you use e-learning for new product training.

"Learning no longer is about courses & programs. Learning needs to be continuous, and it needs to be everywhere."

Karen O'Leonard

Special Report on Training:
More to Learn," Workforce
Management, Jan. '11



There are many other types of classroom training that can be converted into excellent e-learning courses as stand-alone courses or for use in a blended learning solution. Each organization will be different. This is why understanding the business drivers for the decision to convert is important, and you need a solid need analysis to help focus your efforts. These important foundational steps will ensure that your conversion project meets your business or organizational needs and is an appropriate solution for your organization.

Deployment and Marketing

You can build excellent an e-learning course, but if none of your employees access and complete the course, your great work won't have the impact you intend. Adults are generally very receptive to learning on the job, but you have to be able to explain to your employees some fundamental things about the e-learning you are asking them to complete. For instance, adults will gravitate to training when they see and appreciate the relevance of the training to the performance of their jobs. Adults also learn best when they exercise autonomy over the pace of their training. So as you develop a deployment and marketing plan, here are some factors you want to ensure are included:

- Explain the business reason the training is important.
- Inform employees how successfully completing the training can help them with their jobs.
- Provide clear expectations for completion of the training while providing employees control and substantial choices about how they will manage their schedules to complete the course.
- Articulate the goals of the training.
- Demonstrate respect for your employees in your messaging and expectations.

Generally, you're going to need to start your internal marketing efforts before you give employees access to the e-learning course. A big part of your challenge is to effectively lead the change from classroom delivery to e-learning. People react to change in a variety of ways, and your marketing plans need to take into account the different ways and amount of time people need to embrace something new. Identify your employees who are most likely to be early adopters of e-learning. Develop messages for these employees designed to get them into the course quickly and find ways to capture their feedback (positive, of course!) and share that information. But whatever communications tools you use, make sure you take advantage of the ways employees regularly learn about new things on the job. It might be a newsletter, intranet site, bulletin boards, etc. It's equally important (and perhaps more so) to facilitate the informal sharing of information about your e-learning project that dominates the way most employees learn new things. So make sure you identify ways to provide good information that people can find quickly and readily share that supports your efforts to introduce e-learning to your organization.

Directory of e-Learning

Tools:

[\(click to view the entire list\)](#)

Lectora Inspire:

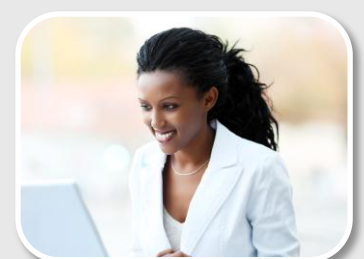
- authoring software available for interactive multimedia content
- includes Camtasia, Snagit, and Flypaper
- 2011 Learning Leader Award Winner, Bersin & Associates

Adobe Captivate:

- Rapidly create simulations, software demonstrations, and scenario-based training

Articulate:

- Empower rapid e-learning with a set of powerful authoring tools
- includes Presenter, Quizmaker & Engage (or together as Articulate Studio)



Evaluate the Effectiveness of the e-Learning Course

The final stage in the process is to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the e-learning course. One of the great advantages of e-learning is its flexibility and ease of revision. Because the content is stored in one place (almost always a learning management system), you can edit and revise the content, publish your changes, and every person who has access to the course has immediate access to the course updates.

You'll need to close the loop on the entire process by referring to the measures of success for the e-learning course you set during the needs analysis stage. Did the course influence behaviors and have the effect you planned and intended? If so, can the impact be improved? If not, what must you change? You jump right into another round of needs analysis, and start the process again. By engaging in this continuous analysis and improvement cycle, you can ensure the success of your project.



Conclusion

If you build your business case and work through the four stages of the process we outline – needs analysis, design and development, deployment and marketing and assessment and evaluation – you will set the stage for a successful conversion of classroom training into an e-learning course. Success might not come easily. You will need to select content carefully and make sure you access the expertise and skills you will need to build engaging and effective e-learning courses. While the project might be challenging, we remain firmly convinced converting some of your existing classroom training into e-learning will be very beneficial to your organization. You're likely to see training costs go down, training outcomes improve and limited training resources go a little farther.

Key factors for effective evaluation:

Pre training assessments: you can use pre training assessments to set knowledge and skill benchmarks.

Post training assessments: use the same assessments after employees finish the training, and we recommend some interval of at least 30 days after the training to get a sense of what employees are actually retaining.

Surveys: well-crafted surveys can help get information from many employees – even those who haven't gone through the training. It's also important to survey or question – before AND after training the supervisors and managers in departments where the training may be delivered.

ⁱ Learning with and from Others: Restructuring Budgets for Social Learning, by Dan Pontefract, <http://www.danpontefract.com/?p=647>

ⁱⁱ Susan Boyd wrote an excellent article for *e-Learning Magazine* on the business drivers that might influence organizations to convert classroom training into e-learning.

<http://www.trainingmag.com/article/tips-converting-instructor-led-training-e-learning>.

We also recommend her presentation at SlideShare: <http://www.slideshare.net/stricoff/critical-success-factors-to-converting-ilt-into-effective-elearning>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instructional_design

^{iv} http://www.instructionaldesigncentral.com/htm/IDC_instructionaldesigndefinitions.htm