

Considerations For Training On Technology

By David Foo & Tan Cheen Chong
Genii Group

November 2012



Excerpt

Training on technology products has remained a cornerstone of giving partners more confidence in selling the complex solutions, and for their customers, greater familiarity in using such full-featured offerings. Based on our past training projects, we make the case for the effectiveness of instructor-led training (ILT), and if resources permit, to be supported with online training.

So your technology company came up with its latest, shiny new thing. It is filled with features that will benefit everyone in an organization, from the CEO, to Finance and even the operations department.

Or how about this: there are important changes to your business model or how you sell your solutions.

So what is the most effective way to deliver and inform your customers and business partners with these developments?

Clients who have engaged us to deliver training have done it through two approaches: instructor-led and online.

Allow us to present the pros and cons of each approach so that you will be in a better position to determine which fits your products and environment better.

Training on technology

The widespread and convenient availability of the Internet access has changed the rules of business engagement for many companies. One such area is in product training.

Leveraging on the Internet, we see more companies (including our clients) conducting online training which significantly reduces associated costs such as venue rentals. Costs that are usually linked with training such as travel and F&B are fast disappearing when training are conducted online. Attendees get to attend online training (some call it webinars) from the comfort of any location with an Internet connection.

But is online training effective in driving home the key messages of a technology

product? Can the digital audio visual medium ensure retention of key information? What are the benefits of delivering a training event over cyberspace, instead of being presenting in person?

Advantages of online training

Many companies today are set up with business dealings outside its home country (or headquarters). Online training obviously has its perks of being able to significantly reduce cost of not having to travel to the other markets to train customers and partners. However, it has several drawbacks you need to be aware of.

Having an online training will firstly shorten the time needed to organize the session. Logistical matters such as booking a room/venue for training, as well as coordinating travel for trainers and attendees no longer needs to be considered.

We find that 'trainees' are more willing to participate in an online training session, as it does not require them to take time out of their busy schedules to travel to a separate location for an update session.

Thirdly, it is easy to record such online presentations for subsequent sharing and viewing, especially participants who missed the training. This provides a broader reach with every single topic delivered.

Realities of online training

With all these benefits of hosting online training, it may appear to be on its way to replace instructor-led training (ILT as it is known in the training world). However, here are some facts for you to weigh first before you jump head-first into converting your training sessions to online sessions.

Even though online sessions are easy to organise and schedule, it is also easy to skip. The dropout rate for online training averages around **70%**. Compare that indicator to live training sessions with a dropout rate of about 40% (if the training is free). From our experience, we find that many interested attendees will give an online training a miss when something more important crops up. There is no commitment to attend (especially when there will be a recording made available after the session).

You still need to factor a few areas such as Internet speeds. In the Southeast Asia region where Internet speeds and availability may not be sufficient to support online audio and video streaming, the experience of attending an online session may turn out negative. Real-time training slides and audio-visual streams can appear jerky and broken.

Even if participants managed to get on the training webinar, we have discovered that the attention span of such attendees is typically only 30% of that from an in-person event. Putting ourselves in their shoes, we suspect most attendees are multi-tasking on their computers (going through emails, surfing related websites for more information, etc) – thus appearing distracted and disengaged.

With online sessions recorded, you will probably assume that (more) participants will be able review the content and learn better. Contrary to that belief, many attendees tell us that they actually prefer a live instructor conducting the training – with plenty of human interactions and time for questions and clarifications.

Face-to-face interaction

It may seem that your fickle audience want many things from your training, ranging from convenience (access over the Internet) to

interactivity (to clarify any confusing points). At the crux of the matter, the right motivated people want to know about your solutions and offering, so that they can be in a better position to use that information. However, most of us are hard-pressed to juggle how we prioritise our working hours, to get many things done. Therefore, there is a time and place for both online training and instructor-led sessions.

When delivering online, we recommend the following:

- Keep each session short, preferably within 30-45 minutes
- Focus on a handful of key messages only
- Content must be summarised and to the point
- Deliver the content at one-go, taking questions only at the end

On delaying Q&A until the end, this will help you deliver the agenda concisely without interruption. More importantly, it will not hold up other attendees if it is irrelevant to them. You will not be able to effectively facilitate Q&A because of the lack of visual feedback from attendees, so it is best to keep it at the end to allow those with clarifications to continue having a dialogue with you.

Conclusion

We have found that instructor-led training and online training are actually complementary in nature. Some of our clients who engage us for training technology have deployed both approaches and that has proven to be effective.

If resources permit, use live sessions to comprehensively go through key contents. Then supplement it with topical online webinars to enhance and reinforce key points.

David Foo (david@genii-group.com) is a Senior Consultant at Genii Group, a technology marketing services company.

Tan Cheen Chong (cheen.tan@genii-group.com) is the CEO of Genii Group, a technology marketing services company.