



Getting a Return on Your E-learning Investment

Until recently, “knowledge sharing” was called education – or training – and it was generally structured in a fairly rigid way. Teachers gathered students in rooms with blackboards (or whiteboards, in the corporate environment) and lectured. They assigned homework, and some students did well and some didn't. You remember how it worked.

Today, technology can assist with the learning process, allowing people to learn from remote locations, to learn at their own pace, and to learn in a more interactive way. It can also help organizations save significant sums through reduced travel costs and increased productivity. And ideally, if people are learning at their own pace and interacting with their teachers and fellow students, they may absorb more information, making the entire process more productive.

Measurable benefits of e-learning include:

- Higher student completion rates
- Faster sales ramp-up times for new products
- Simultaneous course roll-outs across multiple geographies
- Reduced time away from the office or sales territory
- Speed of course deployments and updates
- Real-time monitoring of course performance

Who Benefits from an E-learning Program?

Yes, it sounds interesting, the introduction of technology into the learning process, but is it really necessary? That depends, of course, on your business, and on the importance of your people to the success of the business. To understand whether or not e-learning will benefit your business, you've got to understand your business and where it adds value for customers.

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We put knowledge to work



NetDimensions

e-learning

If knowledge is an important resource for your organization, then knowledge sharing is a critical function. If an e-learning program can increase your employees' knowledge base, then it benefits the organization as a whole by helping staff members better serve customers, and by increasing productivity to improve the bottom line.

Technology as a Facilitator

Technology has allowed organizations to extend learning programs globally, without bundling thousands of employees onto airplanes to fly to learning centers, or sending tutors on world tours to train groups of employees in their home countries. However, technology won't help unless you've got a good knowledge management strategy, and technology won't help unless you've got well-designed learning materials.

In designing a course that will benefit your employees and your organization, you need to consider a number of factors. Some of these include:

- Does the user have an opportunity to interact with the course?
- Will student performance data be recorded in a way that can be useful to the organization?
- Are evaluation tools in place to confirm that students are actually learning before they click to the next screen?
- Is the content appropriate to the audience?
- Is the course attractively and compellingly designed, and at the same time culturally sensitive to all possible audiences?

Technology is a facilitator, and it can add functionality to a knowledge management system, enabling managers to streamline the message delivery process as well as monitor employees' absorption of the messages. Perhaps most importantly, technology can facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge sharing.

Technology has extended the limits of what learning systems can do, making them faster, more interactive and extensible. Technology is a tool, the servant of man. It won't rewrite boring training systems to make them more exciting, and it won't decide for you that you really ought to be allowing your Japan marketing team access to sales procedures

developed by your German marketing team. The hard work – the thinking – you still have to do yourself.

Is the Investment Worth Making?

Transforming classroom-based training systems into e-learning systems takes time and costs money. Is that investment worth making? As with all important business decisions, you'll have to decide for yourself after doing enough research to convince yourself that you're making the right call.

The return on investment from an e-learning system can come in one of two ways – or both. The first returns can be realized by improving knowledge sharing, by improving access to information across the entire organization, and by implementing systems that allow employees to work together to add value for customers, maximizing the effectiveness of every member of the organization.

The second group of returns can be realized in terms of reducing your annual expenditures on training – on travel, on materials, on instructors. Yes, you will have to invest in the e-learning system and in the content that will run on it, but you'll significantly reduce your expenditures on air tickets, hotels and lost employee productivity. For large organizations, these expenditures can run into the tens of millions of dollars.

Time Is Money, Knowledge Is Power

Technology has created tremendous opportunities for organizations to leverage the knowledge resident in employees, to allow employees to share knowledge not only at the water cooler or at annual sales conferences, but everyday via intranets and Internet chat rooms.

E-learning gives organizations the opportunity to make training and knowledge sharing part of a continuous process that grows with and adapts to business objectives and day-to-day operations. It gives organizations a chance to make learning and knowledge sharing more interactive, with knowledge flowing in two or more directions, rather than just top-down.

But e-learning, like regular old learning, depends on people. Successful e-learning systems are no different from successful training programs that don't utilize Internet technologies. They require thought, and planning, and careful implementation.

NetDimensions™ creates knowledge management solutions that distribute, document and administer corporate training programs over the Internet and through intranets and extranets. NetDimensions' main product is the Enterprise Knowledge Platform™ (EKP™), an open-architecture solution designed specifically to meet the needs of global companies. For more information, please visit www.netdimensions.com or call Sales at (852) 2122 4500.