

E-learning in modern business: a quick fix solution?

Stephanie Wilkins, training delivery manager at NorthgateArinso looks at how e-learning is being used and examines why employers need to think beyond cost

In an information society, knowledge has evolved into the most important asset for any employer. Developing and driving a collective corporate skill set for the entire workforce can be crucial in sustaining a competitive advantage, especially when coupled with effective knowledge transfer and efficient learning techniques.

Research has shown that spending on training dropped last year by eleven per cent. More specifically the numbers employed by businesses, to maintain learning and development at work, has dropped five per cent. However despite this decline, 2009 saw an increase in the use of e-learning tools and technologies. Adoption rates rose significantly for virtual classroom tools, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other tools that deliver learning efficiencies. We at NorthgateArinso have found that our demand for e-learning courses has mirrored this increase.

E-learning defined

To define the term correctly, e-learning refers to strategies that deliver training courses online to employees. It's about teaching someone a new skill quickly, and getting them to retain that information over time. It offers the flexibility to choose suitable studying times, the ability to train staff in numerous locations at once and reduced costs on expenses such as travel to classes.

Despite the numerous benefits, we also know there are benefits to classroom based learning. For example, the more contact students have with their teachers, the better they learn. However, equally important is the amount of contact students have with their peers. Learning in groups is not just more enjoyable, it is a proven source of motivation. Working towards a common goal, sharing tips on revision and simply offering encouragement: none of these factors should be overlooked. This is why we recommend that students are offered a varied learning process, which should include online and classroom-based lessons.

The business issue

Businesses should adopt a blended approach to learning for the best results. Learning online is the most suitable option for tight budgets, and the recession has only leant further evidence to this reasoning.

Before stringent cutbacks affected the economy, e-learning was yet to gain widespread popularity. However, today demand for quick real-time learning has led to the adaption of courses and teaching structure specifically to fit with what the market wants. For example, as well as offering courses in longer sessions, modular chunks can now be purchased and completed in 15 to 20 minutes. From a payroll perspective that means that an employee can learn how to complete a task, such as timesheets and expenses, without having to learn the whole course. Furthermore, we encourage course advocates to complete classroom-based learning and relay the training back to other colleagues, this way there are always individuals that have the experience of the classroom and interaction with trainers. These advocates are then able to help others with any questions and gaps in knowledge on the office floor.

Monitored training and exams remain a fail proof way for businesses to ensure their staff have absorbed information. Many of the training courses available online can be set at a certain pass rate, meaning employers can rest safe in the knowledge that their money is being well spent and a certain level of knowledge is being retained.

Payroll as a training function

Perhaps most worrying for businesses is the potential threat posed by inadequate, outdated or absent skills. You only have to read the headlines in the HR press to appreciate the value of having staff that are up to speed with relevant legislation and HR requirements.

HR departments have vast amounts of e-learning courses available to them. Data collection, analysis, design, development and delivery mean HR professionals can quickly become aware of what legal requirements exist and how businesses should be handling their HR data. Preparation for an ERP implementation, SAP navigation, HR modules and e-Services are some of the others that are most commonly requested. This type of training equips employees with the skills to use HR and payroll solutions effectively to maximise return on investment.

What is clear, is that HR training is now reaching out beyond the HR department. With time and costs a critical expense, e-learning courses are now being dispatched around the business so employees can learn how to complete tasks themselves, utilising the self service capabilities of technology. This provides managers using online training the ability to manage, up-skill, motivate and develop their teams. It also allows the HR department time to be able to complete more strategic tasks, outside the requirements of basic training.

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Still a lot to learn

We all know e-learning is not the easy way to train staff. It's a method that requires commitment, but it will work because employees are able to get the information they need quickly and efficiently - making course material available at their fingertips. Combine with this the inclusion of classroom learning, and the blended approach we have talked about, and this will lead to the attainment of levels of knowledge needed within the business. E-learning works because tutors and employees are dedicated to the methods being implemented, not because it's a short-term fix to get employees qualified quickly.

For an initial discussion about your requirements call us on 0800 035 0545.
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