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The eLearning Guild's
LEARNING SOLUTIONSSM

Practical Applications of Technology for Learning e-Magazine

THIS WEEK: Management Strategies

Video, Pinnacle, and Articulate Team Up for Dealership Training

By Marisa Dodson

When a company has been in business for a long time, it can collectively become stubborn about training practices and procedures, and hesitant to change. Such a company may see technology as a dirty word, or as a scary and mysterious world, instead of as something positive to embrace wholeheartedly. It makes more sense to greet technology and technological advancements with openness and eagerness.

Adding up yearly sales numbers with a pencil and paper would be inefficient, and might well cause your business to incur hours of lost time (and possibly profits plummeting into the negative numbers). In the same way, training methods can quickly become out of date and costly to maintain. Because technology grows and changes every day, the need to adopt new and engaging training methods quickly becomes a priority. But finding solutions to this problem is not always easy.

Auto dealership training challenges

When you work at an automotive dealership with a superior, longstanding reputation in the community, you should have a certain level of expectation about training. A business this well respected, which has been in the same location for over three decades, does not survive on luck, and is serious about training its employees. Training in the dealership where I work takes

Few environments are tougher to do training in than auto dealerships. Every minute sitting in class is lost sales opportunity, another minute added to turnaround time for repairs, a lost chance to serve customers. This week's article shows how one dealership combined video with e-Learning to solve these problems and make measurable improvements to results. Even if you are in a different industry, you will be able to use what you learn here.

A publication of



place on a weekly basis for each employee in every department, no matter how long the employee has worked for the company. We believe that the more you train, the better equipped and prepared your employees will be.

However, with the non-stop growth of technology, there is now a need for more advanced and convenient training methods. Often we would hear our employees say they missed a training course because they were attending to a customer call, or because they were out on a test drive. More often than not, the missed trainings were not just important, they were mandatory. The bottom line: We needed to change our training method. Instead of forcing our employees to adapt to training constraints, we needed training to adapt to our employees' constraints.

The need for speed

Although we recognized that a change needed to take place, we also understood that the change needed to come in a form that would be both user-friendly and rapidly deployable. It became very apparent that whatever new method we adopted would have to allow us to push our training out to our employees quickly, and it would have to be as powerful as possible. We were also looking for something that would

bring our training up-to-date with new technologies, that would be cost-effective, and that would benefit each employee who used it. In order for it to be advantageous, this new training method would have to exceed the success of our current training methods. Because many people are still very new to computers, many just getting a PC in their home for the first time, we were aware that we needed to be careful when choosing a new training method. Computers in general can be daunting, and even discouraging, to some, so choosing a training option that felt welcoming and interesting was important.

Enter e-Learning.

Our training methods before the implementation of e-Learning were effective, but had some obvious flaws. Training took place in a meeting room for a thirty-minute period, which meant that employees had to be away from their workstations, often leaving clients on the floor, or piling up a long list of unreturned phone calls. Employees often appeared anxious in live training sessions, constantly looking at their watches, and shifting in their seats in anticipation of the session's end.

With the e-Learning tools we are now beginning to put in place, it will be unnecessary to leave the workstation to learn. Employees will be able to train when

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they have free time, or to leave training to attend to a customer, and then come back to the training again. This will allow full concentration, and focus on the lesson instead of the clock. With e-Learning, training new employees will also be easier and more effective, because online training courses will be available for them from their first day, allowing them to learn and practice everything they need to know *before* getting out on the sales floor, getting under the hood of a car, or selling parts to a customer.

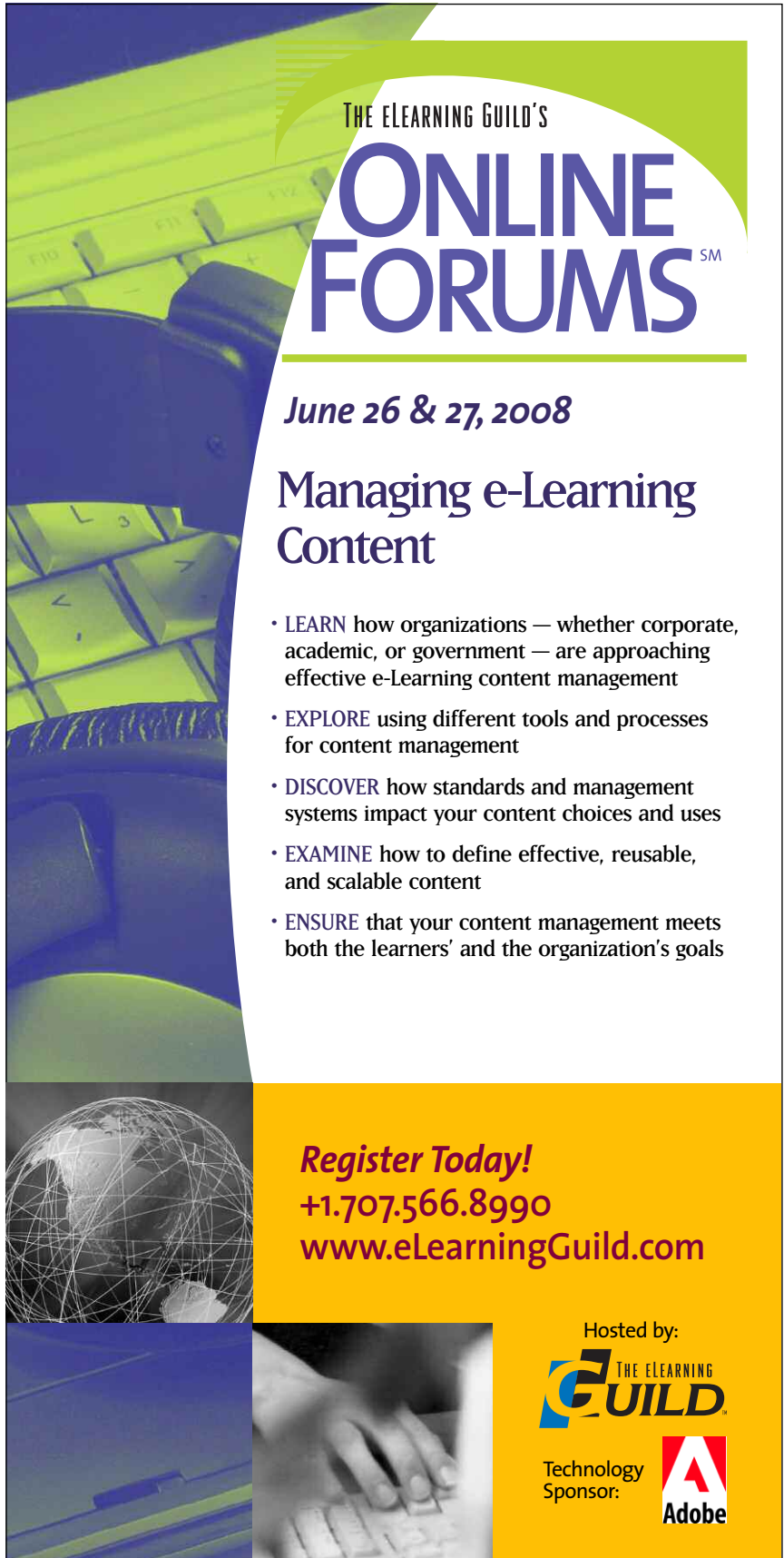
Jumping over hurdles

There are several obvious benefits to training live in a classroom setting. Our instructors are able to feed off the questions and comments made by employees in the class. The employees, in turn, can listen to comments made by peers, and so gain a better understanding of the material. This dynamic simply does not exist when one is sitting alone behind a computer screen watching an online course. The classroom also provides the necessary environment for using handouts, a beneficial part of training for any department. We believe that supplemental materials are a great teaching tool, as many people learn and retain information much better when they can “see it in print” right in front of them. We had to figure out how to overcome the challenge of getting vital supplementary information to our employees. Because the back-and-forth of live training provides a great flow for learning, as opposed to just staring at a PowerPoint presentation, another obstacle presented itself: How are we going to avoid boring our employees to death when they are watching training online, if we derived it directly from the PowerPoint presentations used in live training? Getting supplements into the hands of employees, and preventing the possibility of sheer boredom, became two very important factors when we began looking at e-Learning as a solution.

Making it happen

Ultimately, we decided on an e-Learning process that we thought would best suit the needs of our employees, and help us overcome the aforementioned obstacles.

To better illustrate the effectiveness of the e-Learning tools we chose for our dealership, and the process we use to apply these tools, I offer an example. Perhaps there is a Sales training taking place in the training room. We want this to be the last live training for this course, and we want it instead to be available online from here on out. The tools we use simplify the process, and we are able to rapidly deliver the information to our employees.



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Video + Pinnacle for course capture

As the Instructional Designer, I go into the training room and videotape the course as an instructor presents it in front of a live audience. One benefit of live training is the ability to interact with others via question-and-answer sessions and open forums. By videotaping the live course, I am able to include this often-vital information in the online course, thus eliminating the obstacle of trying to get the benefits of live training to resonate in an online format. The discussion-session quality of live training is preserved, once a course is transformed into an e-Learning module. By videotaping the live training, and recording questions, answers, and examples, this aspect of the course no longer ends up getting lost in translation.

Once I have taped the course, I use Pinnacle Studio Plus to upload and edit the video. It is likely that not all of the video will be useful, and Pinnacle makes it easy to edit it so it contains only the clips I require to illustrate specific points of training, and I can discard the rest. You no longer need to be an expert at editing, and you can learn to utilize Pinnacle quickly, with minimal practice. I can then quickly import the clips to Sorenson Squeeze, which will reformat them so that I can insert them as Flash videos into the presentation. This fast editing and transformation process is essential for deploying training to our employees quickly enough to be considered worthwhile.

Sometimes the clips may be inaudible, or perhaps there is an interruption, so I overlook these clips. We also find it necessary to shorten the length of online training to about fifteen, rather than thirty, minutes. With the video clips, we can still include important information into the training, but it is often much faster to go through an online course alone, than to sit in a live training session. Pinnacle automatically separates the clips into segments as it uploads (the editor can set the segment lengths), making the selecting and editing of clips even faster and easier. This also ensures that I include only pertinent information in the online version of the course, while not losing anything that may prove beneficial for learners.

Articulate Presenter tailors slide presentations

The original PowerPoint presentation used in the live training does not always work as is for an online audience. It is usually imperative to do some editing, so that the PowerPoint slides are aiding the learner, rather than just serving as a placeholder. In general, just clicking through a generic PowerPoint presentation, no matter how much it has been dressed up with clip art or custom animation, is enough to make anyone's eyes glaze over and induce a nap.

Using Articulate Presenter, I can easily fix this prob-

lem. Because you should use PowerPoint as a visual aid, and not as a stand-alone teaching method, Articulate Presenter becomes a useful tool in taking a course from the classroom to the computer. Presenter is a plug-in for PowerPoint, which further simplifies the process because there is no need for transferring the PowerPoint presentation to another program. I can do all my work in PowerPoint, and use the Presenter plug-in when I need it.

First, I ensure that there are no spelling, grammar, or format errors in the presentation. Then I use Presenter to upload the video clips that I squeezed in Sorenson. This process takes no more effort than selecting "Insert Flash Video" from a drop-down menu, choosing the clip you want to include, and clicking "OK." The clips serve as further explanations of the points touched on in the PowerPoint slides, and break up the monotony of the presentation.

Articulate also makes it extremely easy to record narration: Click on a button, and speak into a microphone. At this point, what was once a simple set of PowerPoint slides has now become a dynamic teaching tool with video and audio accompaniment. The learner will not miss any vital information that is not on the slides, because the video clips and narration will serve the same purpose as the instructor in the live training.

Because I usually need to ensure that the learners receive supplemental information that the instructor hands out at the live training, Presenter also allows me to add attachments to the presentation. With narration, I can direct the learner to the attachments section, and they can print out all necessary supplements for the course. The handouts for our courses range from diagrams and flow charts, to worksheets and outlines. Presenter has made it easy to provide this hands-on information to our employees during training.

A learner is now able to follow along with an on-screen diagram, making his or her own notes or filling in a worksheet as the course goes along, thus making sure they are putting what they are learning into practice. The supplements also act as a great reference tool for the employee to come back to later if they have questions, or just need a refresher.

Articulate Engage adds interactions

To further enhance the learners' comprehension, and to keep them actively involved in the process, Articulate offers another great tool: Engage. Using Engage, I can select from a myriad of different "Interactions." For instance, if I need to make sure the learners thoroughly understand the process the Sales course is explaining, I can insert an Interaction that allows the learner to click through the steps in order, with aid provided visually with pictures, and phonically with narra-

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tion. Options in Engage allow me to set the Interaction so that the learner must go through it completely before proceeding in the presentation. This ensures not only that the learners are paying attention, but that they really understand the information they are presented with. Inserting the Interaction into the Presentation once it is finished takes less than thirty seconds, further reducing the time I need to get a course ready for online delivery.

Finishing up: Articulate Quizmaker

Using yet another simple tool from Articulate, Quizmaker, I am then able to create a quiz and insert it at the end of each course. Quizmaker allows for simple test creation, and offers a wide variety of question-types to keep the learners on their toes. As with Engage, Quizmaker has several useful settings so that I can tailor each quiz to suit the course and department that it is meant for; I can choose whether or not the quiz gives feedback, whether or not the quiz is timed, what the passing score is, etc. Quizmaker also gives me the ability to add media, which can serve as visual accompaniment to quiz questions, or simply as fun illustrations of a point. Publishing the quiz to the presentation is as simple as pushing a button.

The result is an online course that is full of useful information – supplements, narration, video, interactions, and quizzes – that satisfies and surpasses the needs of the learner, despite the absence of live training with an instructor. Articulate packages this information in a module that looks professional and organized, while also being aesthetically simple and concise. There is no superfluous use of flashy graphics to grab one's interest, but the course is still able to capture, and hold, the learner's attention.

Putting it into practice, and keeping track

By design, all of our training courses get practical information into the hands of our employees. If an employee takes a course on the proper way to follow up with a customer, the course does not just force-feed the information. With the use of supplemental learning material, such as a worksheet, employees are able to apply what they have learned to real-world examples. With an Engage interaction, they are able to review all of the steps they have learned, to make sure the knowledge sinks in. Moreover, with a quiz created in Quizmaker, they demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension.

Being able to put knowledge into practice is great, but we also want to make sure the courses we are delivering are effective. After all, if online training does not exceed the success of live training, then we have wasted time, money, and energy trying to put it into

practice. We are able to track this using our LMS. The system records quiz grades on each individual's transcript. Of course, if everyone passes each quiz, we are happy, but it could imply that the courses are too simple. We must have other ways of gauging the effectiveness of our training that do not necessarily relate directly to how employees perform on graded quizzes. It is, after all, possible to get all the right answers, but still not know how to put that knowledge to any sort of practical use. Our company does this in several ways. We have three numbers, not including employee grades in the LMS, which we can look at: employee retention, sales figures, and the Customer Satisfaction Index, or CSI.

If we are consistently retaining employees, and have a low turnover rate, we know that training is working. Employees must live up to a high standard in each department. Not living up to company standards often happens when employee training is ineffective or improper. This can result in naïve and skittish employees who are sent out to sell without the proper knowledge to do so, which then leads to high rates of turnover. Because our company consistently retains a high percentage of its employees, we can assume that training is effective. Nevertheless, just as with quiz scores, this factor alone does little to tell us exactly how effective the training is, and thus, we must look at other numbers as well.

We also watch our sales figures, as this is the heartbeat of our business. Sales figures are not dropping, not leveling out, but continuing to rise. Our employees are taking the training, and putting its lessons into practice, pushing themselves to go above and beyond the call of duty, and thus, our sales figures increase each quarter. This is a result of training designed not just to teach, but also to motivate and inspire.

Finally, we gauge the effectiveness on another number, which is also constantly rising, the Customer Satisfaction Index. All of our employees are familiar with the acronym CSI, and it is something that we mention in every single one of our training courses. Our company strives to put our customers first, no matter what, and high CSI scores are the result of doing just that. By reminding our employees of the importance of CSI in every training course they take, regardless of the subject or department, we guarantee exemplary CSI at all times.

We know we are doing something right, when our employees have high quiz grades for online training, are with the company for a substantial amount of time, have constantly improving sales figures, and maintain a high CSI score. Sure, some people could be having a lucky quarter, but generally, if someone is not being properly trained, it will eventually show. Training works when all of these figures are steady and unwavering.

One benefit of live training is the ability to interact with others via question-and-answer sessions and open forums. By videotaping the live course, I have the ability to include this often-vital information in the online course, thus eliminating the obstacle of trying to get the benefits of live training to resonate in an online format. The discussion-session quality of live training is preserved, once a course is transformed into an e-Learning module.

The moment any of these numbers begin to plateau or drop, we know it is time to update and improve our training. Our company focuses on exceeding excellence and expectations at every opportunity, and we strive to keep our training at that level as well, so that all of our employees have the greatest opportunity to succeed, whether they are walking in the door for their first day, or are a veteran who has been in the business for decades.

New frontiers


The Articulate products – Presenter, Engage, and Quizmaker – have greatly decreased the turn-around time for these courses. Not only are the programs simple to learn, but also they are a snap to use. Often, those of us in the IT department forget that not everyone is computer savvy or technologically inclined. But because of the simplicity of the Articulate products, I am able to discuss the process in plain English with the instructors, rather than having to explain a lot of technical jargon, and learners can utilize online courses with little or no prior instruction.

This absolutely makes the process, and e-Learning as a whole, much less intimidating, and much more appealing. Besides being user-friendly, the quality of the courses that you can make with these products is amazing. With a few clicks of your mouse, you can take an ordinary, dull PowerPoint presentation, and turn it into a fun, engaging, and helpful course with video clips, narration, activities, and quizzes.

By using these products, our dealership will be able to eliminate the need for live classroom training completely, unless it is absolutely necessary to use that mode, and we can deliver training to our employees when it is convenient for them right at their own workstations. Material published for LMS delivery is available in a flash, and is accessible at any time, instead of having to wait for those weekly half-hours when you may be too busy to attend a live training. By giving our employees more options, and by using simple, yet effective e-Learning tools, we can be confident that our training will help us maintain, and exceed, our company's reputation in the community. Because we save so much time, we are able to research new products and methods of e-Learning – such as Podcasting, wikis, and blogs – so that we can enhance our training even further in the future.

Articulate has provided us with a stable and promising look at our training future, and has opened the door for exciting new training ideas for our dealership. The obstacles of training online, instead of in a classroom, are easily overcome when implementing e-Learning, and any challenge that this change presents is met with many more benefits that e-Learning has to offer. Instead of focusing so much time on getting employees to physical locations for trainings, and organ-

izing training dates and times, we can now easily track training history online, and focus our attention more on the content of our training, improving it every day.

We cannot stop the growth of technology, and would be daft to try; so instead, we embrace it, and take full advantage of it at every given opportunity. Training our employees the e-Learning way will allow us to take our dealership even further, making a name for ourselves in this modern age and leaving a lasting mark on the community. 

Author Contact



Marisa Dodson is the Instructional Designer for Reeves Import Motorcars, and a college senior in her last semester. Although she is new to Instructional Design, she does not let her youth serve as a hindrance, and instead, she uses her experience with college courses as inspiration to create dynamic and engaging content with a fresh perspective. She is the sole creator of course content for e-Learning, and strives to make courses fun and informative. Her love of technology, and knack for creativity, has allowed her to take training to a whole new level. Always on the lookout for new ideas, Marisa hopes to totally change the face of training for the company. You can contact Marisa by email at mdodson@drivereeves.com.

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Additional information on the topics covered in these articles is also listed in the Guild Resource Directory.

In the Archives

This is the first article by Marisa Dodson for The eLearning Guild. The eLearning Guild has previously published articles whose topics relate to this week's. These are available to Guild members in the Learning Solutions Archive online. Members must log in to download them. Here are the authors, the article topics, and the publication dates. (Not a Guild Member? Join today for immediate access to these articles and over two hundred and fifty others!)

Articles on related topics

Heather Brooks, "Improve Your Bottom Line! Careful Consideration of Learning Technologies Pays" (June 9, 2008)

Tim Martin, "Visual Design for e-Learning Video Production: An Introduction" (May 12, 2008)

Kathleen Iverson, "Engaging the E-Learner: Interaction is Not Education" (February 25, 2008)

Best of the Blogs

"Mobile learning makes the stage at WWDC": <http://elearmdev.blogspot.com/2008/06/mobile-learning-makes-stage-at-wwdc.html> (June 9, 2008)

"Free open-source storyboard software": <http://ignatiawebs.blogspot.com/2008/06/celtx-free-and-open-source-software-for.html> (June 9, 2008)

"Net-Gen Nonsense" (debate): <http://www.chrislott.org/2008/06/07/the-only-net-gen-nonsense/> (June 7, 2008) and <http://netgennonsense.blogspot.com/2008/06/netgen-nonsense-presentation.html> (June 9, 2008)

"LearnHub: Web 2.0 social learning network with courses, tutoring, content sharing": <http://elearnqueen.blogspot.com/2008/06/learnhub-web-20-social-learning-network.html> (June 5, 2008)

"Immerse yourself in another language": <http://karlkapp.blogspot.com/2008/06/immerse-yourself-in-another-language.html> (June 3, 2008)

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