

# **E-Learning: The Key to Success of Professional Training**

Minghui Wang  
Instructional Designer/Trainer  
Human Resources  
Professional Development and Training Department  
The University of Memphis  
Memphis, TN 38152



## **Abstract**

*Today's world is driven by access, information, and speed. The key to success is moving knowledge from people who have it to people who need it. E-Learning gives us the power to do exactly that. It is flexible, fast, and convenient; it saves time, money, and resources; and, it delivers measurable, tangible results.*

*E-Learning enhances and extends classroom training. It provides training to learners who are unable to attend classroom training and a learning environment that engages the unsupervised learner. This means more participation, more enthusiasm, and ultimately, greater learning success.*

*The Business Soft Skills self-paced curriculum provides help with personal development and just-in-time support for common challenges such as conflict management, leading and motivating and assessing performance. Tools for developing individuals and teams are also included, and it is all offered on-demand at our own desktop, anytime, anywhere. By utilizing these online resources, employees come away with improved skills that translate into confidence and improved on-the-job efficiency and productivity.*

## **Introduction of the Organization**

The University of Memphis is emerging as one of the great metropolitan research universities in the United States, noted for drawing on the strengths and challenges of the urban setting and region in which it is located. Opened in 1912, the University enrolls more than 20,000 students. It offers 15 Bachelor's degrees in more than 50 majors and 70 concentrations, Master's degrees in over 45 subjects, Doctoral degrees in 21 disciplines, the Juris Doctor degree and a specialist degree in education. The University of Memphis is a learner centered metropolitan research university providing high quality educational experiences while pursuing new knowledge through research, artistic expression, and interdisciplinary scholarship.

### **Introduction of Human Resources Professional Development and Training**

Our mission is to empower, train, and motivate University employees for maximum achievement through the design and delivery of high quality, cost-effective and skill enhancement programs. Programs are open to University staff and faculty and serve as important resources in development of the skills and knowledge necessary to one's professional growth -- customer service, communications, leadership, diversity, and teamwork.

Today's world is driven by access, information, and speed. The key to success is moving knowledge from people who have it to people who need it. In order to improve University employees' job efficiency and productivity, enhance, and extend the classroom training with top-quality training, we purchased Business Soft Skills online training library from *Elementk*, a leading provider of e-Learning solutions. It includes 37 self-paced courses in Business Essentials, Communication Skills, Personal Development,

Working With Teams and Working With Individuals. The curriculum is also designed to provide both behavioral development as well as just-in-time support on common challenges that managers face -- conflict management, leading and motivating and assessing performance. Fundamental competencies such as budgeting, problem solving and business writing are also addressed.

### **Statement of the Problem/Initiative**

To market the e-Learning program, introductory classroom training is offered once a month to introduce the program and demonstrate how to access online courses step by step. Campus-wide information through flyers and emails are sent out as well. However, the enrollment was quite low. Some employees were afraid of spending time on it; some didn't even want to touch it.

### **Design and Implementation**

After discussing with my team members, I decided to seek an innovative approach by visiting departments around the campus for the specialized training. The intent was two-fold, increasing campus wide exposure for the e-Learning program and making employees more comfortable with computer based training.

First, I contacted the Management of the department, updated them on the free e-Learning program and explained its effectiveness in term of improving an employee's job productivity. Upon gaining approval from the Management, I conducted the specialized training for the entire department. After the specialized training, I talked to the Management again. My hope was for Management to follow up with employees to encourage participation in online training courses.

The new marketing strategy was wildly successful! The department heads and managers told their employees about the courses, and the employees overwhelmingly complied. Some departments even had 100% participation. After working with several departments, the enrollment for e-Learning went up dramatically.

The second phase of our new marketing strategy occurred through combining some aspects of in-class and online training. After studying each online course, I worked with our Training Specialist to pair specific online courses with classroom training. Based on course content, we determined which courses would logically reinforce one another. In keeping with the new marketing strategy, employees would be further exposed to online training via the classroom. During the classroom training, the instructor explained how the paired online courses would enhance the knowledge they gained in the class and encouraged them to enroll in online courses after the class.

Seeing a need to organize the partial integration of the two training systems, I created three certificate based online training programs -- Business Soft Skills Achievement Certificate, One Minute Manager Certificate, and Show Me Grow Me Certificate. I received the support of the Manager of Professional Development and Training, the Assistant Vice President of Human Resources, and the Vice President of Business and Finance Division.

In order to obtain the Business Soft Skills Achievement Certificate, employees must complete at least four online courses. After completing the courses, they send me the course list. I verify the database, print out the certificates and send it to the Assistant Vice President of Human Resources and the Vice President of Business and Finance Division for their signature approval. In order to achieve the One Minute Manager

Certificate or Show Me Grow Me Certificate, employees must complete in-class training and online training courses as required. For example, the Show Me Grow Me Certificate program is the series that provides help tools for self-improvement in terms of communication, stress management, organization, and personal development. Employees must complete at least two classroom training sessions, two online training courses and one “Brown Bag” class. The manager of Human Resources Employee Relations and Employment has asked the whole department to complete the certificate by the end of 2005. It has proved to be a great way to improve teamwork and customer service.

Considering the employees’ safety knowledge and their legal responsibility, we have decided to purchase two additional libraries – Occupational Safety Library and Employment Law Library. At the University of Memphis, employees at the Physical Plant Department are required to complete 57 credit training hours at the end of each year. The Physical Plant Department provides its own in-house training, however the programs can not cover their training credit hour requirement. Therefore, employees have to find other resources on and off campus. Our e-Learning program acts as a supplemental tool helping these employees complete the credit hour requirement.

Beyond the basic communication channels at the University, such as flyers and emails, I also discovered other advertising channels such as the University newspaper, Faculty and Staff Newsletter, Business and Finance Division Newsletter, and other departmental newsletters. Those channels not only increase visibility of the e-Learning program, but also raise the value of the program. Increasingly, faculty and staff are paying attention and familiarizing themselves with our e-Learning program.

### **Benefits**

After another year's implementation of the new approaches, e-Learning's enrollment went up 52% at the end of this fiscal year compared to the first year. Eighty-eight employees have completed different certificates to show what they have been achieving and make their personnel file look much better for the yearly performance appraisal. They feel that the online training courses are very informative and can be applied to their daily work. The online training also shortened their time usage. It is very convenient and flexible. Employees can take the training anytime, anywhere as long as they have computers hooked up to the internet.

E-Learning provides a cost effective and efficient way to help deliver training to the entire organization. It is a great addition to classroom training, and reduces the training costs by 30 to 75%. Online courses are consistent and appropriate to all employees with varying degrees of formal education. The tracking and reporting features of online learning are easy and reliable. The system monitors who has been trained, when they were trained, what courses they took, and percentages for enrollment on a multi-year basis.

The training function serves the professional needs of University of Memphis employees by providing progressive learning tools that steadily improve job performance. Over the past year, we have witnessed our online training program grow by substantial leaps and bounds. We proudly partner with our in-class training function to give employees top quality professional development programs. However, we are distinctly unique in that we give employees the opportunity to train on their time, at their pace. Online training brings learning to them, as opposed to always coming to the classroom for training. With e-Learning, employees still have the opportunity to grow professionally,

while remaining flexible. It is our duty and professional pleasure to provide a new comfort level in online training for University of Memphis employees.