

Blended Learning: Harness the Power to Transfer Knowledge and Transform Performance



Blended Learning

Globalization, the current economic climate, downsizing, offshore outsourcing, and technological advancements are but a few of the forces that have caused dramatic, rapid changes to the corporate landscape in recent years. These forces have altered the way businesses operate, their available resources, and the needs and locations of their employees. It makes the need to adapt and improve work processes and stay abreast of new trends never ending.

One constant amid all this change is the need to educate, train and invest in workers in order to remain competitive and profitable. That need has led to an interest in and demand for blended learning. In 2003, the American Society for Training and Development¹ identified blended learning as one of the top ten trends to emerge in knowledge delivery, whether the setting was corporate, higher education, the military or government. That trend doesn't look like it will change in 2010 and beyond.

What is Blended Learning?

Blended learning, also known as hybrid or mixed learning, is a way of conveying knowledge that offers different learning styles and environments to enable students to learn more effectively. Although a relatively recent development, its roots can be traced back to the 1920s.² In the late 1990s, businesses jumped on the e-learning bandwagon as the Internet, listservs and e-mail made alternatives to traditional classroom training possible. Companies quickly realized e-learning alone didn't fit every situation or solve every problem, and they shifted to a blended-learning approach.³ Now, with today's advances in technology, blended learning frequently combines online and off-line ways of learning, allowing companies to harness the power of e-learning and still use face-to-face interactions when needed. The significance is that organizations can pick and choose, and combine, the learning methods that work best for their employees and the situation at hand. According to "The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Design," hallmarks of this type of training include accessibility, flexibility and cost-effectiveness.⁴ Learners go at their own pace, and businesses develop and manage the exact type of training they need.



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Blended Learning Benefits

Because people learn differently, providing a variety of ways to learn may engage and appeal to a wider range of employees and result in longer-lasting benefits. A 2003 examination of blended learning by researchers at the University of Calgary concluded that this method “has the proven potential to enhance both the effectiveness and efficiency of meaningful learning experiences.”⁵

There are dozens of studies, surveys and reports that tout the benefits of blended learning. The American Society for Training and Development, in a 2006 article,⁶ cites these specific benefits of using a blended learning approach:

- Promotes connections and conversation among individuals within an organization
- Provides consistent and updated messages across an organization
- Capitalizes on the knowledge of all employees
- Improves performance and controls costs

Additionally, in a 2006 survey⁷ of corporations in China, South Korea, Taiwan, the United States and the United Kingdom, a majority of respondents reported that “improving the quality of the learning experience, an increase in the availability and accessibility of learning, and cost reductions” were the major reasons why their organizations had adopted blended learning.

Types of Learning Available

Blended learning may offer online training; face-to-face, instructor-led classroom training; and more traditional media such as DVDs, manuals and handbooks. Each has its unique benefits.

Online or elearning delivers consistent instruction and content, i.e., each trainee receives the same material delivered in the same manner with the same examples. It is available 24/7, allowing trainees to learn at their own pace and at their convenience. Online training also means retraining and refresher training are not limited by classroom availability and other scheduling conflicts. Studies have shown online learning to be cost effective and a major time-saver.⁸ Finally, online methods allow for easy documentation of training.

Instructor-led training provides hands-on, face-to-face interaction between instructor and trainees. This give-and-take allows participants to ask questions and receive immediate answers, engage in impromptu – yet relevant – discussions, and complete assignments under the guidance of a mentor. Instructor-led training is also one of the best methods for teaching problem solving. The class as a group is able to discuss a given problem, its variables and potential solutions.⁹

Traditional media allows for portable, on-the-go instruction. For example, trainers who travel frequently and don’t have online access in certain locations are able to check out DVDs and handbooks at their convenience. Traditional media can also deliver training in multiple languages. Additionally, media such as posters may be posted in public work areas outside the classroom.

Footnotes

¹ Cited by Charles R. Graham in “Blended Learning Systems: Definition, Current Trends, and Future Directions,” 2005.

² Forward, “The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Design” by Bonk & Graham. 2006.

³ Bershon & Associates. “Blended Learning: What Works?” 2003.

⁴ “The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Design” by Bonk & Graham. 2006.

⁵ University of Calgary. “Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education.” The Internet and Higher Education, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2nd Quarter 2004. pp 95-105. <http://www.citeulike.org/user/jryall/article/138122>

⁶ “How Blended Learning Changes What We Do.” Allison Rossett. 2006. American Society for Training and Development website, http://www.astd.org/LC/2006/0906_rossett.htm

⁷ “Blended Learning Trends in Workplace Learning Settings: A Multi-national Study.” wiki-riki.wikispaces.com/file/view/AERA_08_Full_paper.pdf

⁸ “Blended Learning for Compliance Training Success.” 2002. www.astd.org/NR/rdonlyres/456DB5F7.../O/blendedlearning.pdf

⁹ “Blended Learning for Compliance Training Success.” 2002. www.astd.org/NR/rdonlyres/456DB5F7.../O/blendedlearning.pdf

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