

They came,
they saw,
they couldn't
log on.

Here are some
straightforward
tips for fixing
that common
problem.

First, look to
your technical
support team.

Marketing E-Learning

There are several ways you can determine how well your employees have received your organization's e-learning program. Using techniques from surveys to focus groups, feedback can be gathered to assist in the program's ongoing development. But there's another source for feedback you may have overlooked: technical support. Your learners call technical support on a regular basis, and it may be time for you to ask technical support why.

Noel Nicholas, director of technical services at GeoLearning, lists the most frequent calls her technical service staff receives from users:

- * They need their user name or password, or they don't know how to log on to the training Website.

Often they don't even remember the URL to get to the site.

- * The course they're registered for doesn't launch when they click on it to begin.

- * Their course did launch, but they had to quit in the middle. When they returned to the course, it hadn't been bookmarked.

- * They completed the course, but the course still registers "incomplete."

- * They want to know why they have to take the course for which they've been registered.

Some of those issues are due to a need for technical information—such as whether the course they're trying to launch requires a plug-in or certain security settings on the desktop. Sometimes,

By Caron Osberg

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a learner just needs to allow the system to refresh the page he or she is viewing so the course resumes. Also not commonly understood is that a user must exit a course properly in order for the LMS to bookmark where he or she quit the course. Last, some of the bulleted issues indicate the need that many e-learning participants have for basic knowledge.

Nicholas says that many organizations put that type of information on a FAQs page and believe that participants will seek and find out what they need. "Clients with the fewest calls to technical support get good results because they have frequent and active communication from the top down, as well as back and forth from students to administrators," she says.

But you told them, right?

Don't be dismayed that your e-learning participants don't understand the most basic information—information that you *know* you told them back when the project was rolled out. In fact, there's a need for ongoing marketing of your e-

learning (and all training) initiatives.

Now's the time to market your e-learning program to employees, including management, to keep everyone informed and to create ongoing demand for your product, which in this case is *their* training.

Kevin Kruse, founder of e-LearningGuru.com, agrees with Nicholas regarding communication. "Effective communication requires learner-centric messaging that is repeated over time," he says. "The 'What's in it for me?' perspective should drive your branding and marketing efforts." Kruse adds, "Too often, internal marketing is limited to a one-time poster campaign that announces the list of available courses."

So, what elements of marketing should you use?

The how-to and why

A quick search online about how to market e-learning in your organization will uncover some ideas you may think unnecessary, expensive, or silly. Don't be surprised when some of these ideas actually work. The reality is that formal learning isn't an everyday occurrence, so it's important to consider that it's not just what you do, but also how you market and what message you convey. That's why your ongoing marketing program must keep learners acquainted with the most basic how-to and why parts of their training.

Kruse suggests, "First, make sure your e-learning efforts are tightly aligned with organizational priorities. Second, use methods of consumer marketing to generate awareness, desire, and action."

Several concepts in marketing can be rolled into your overall campaign.

Marketing strategy should direct you towards your target audience in such a way that you gain their attention. For example, participants may be more interested in training right before or

right after their performance reviews.

Corporate policy might involve making training mandatory for employees.

Social marketing can bring about change by creating a social norm that encourages employees to use e-learning to their advantage.

You'll also need to determine your market segments. Alan Andreasen, professor of marketing at Georgetown University, points out the reasons. "Programs to influence action will be more effective if they're based on an understanding of the target audience's perceptions," he says.

There's another challenge in your marketing: People aren't easy to predict. "Not only do you need to understand how they perceive e-learning and training in general, but you also can't foresee how they'll react to your marketing efforts," says Andreasen.

Don't hesitate to try some attention-getting stunts to market e-learning. What won't reach some employees will make other employees sit up and take notice. Do realize that not everyone will sign on and take a class. And even those who do often don't remember or don't understand some of the most basic information—information you need to repeat frequently through emails and newsletters—and reinforce with rewards, recognition, and letters. If you have an in-house newsletter, use it to explain how training will benefit employees. Use peer testimonials to gain acceptance, and try to incorporate into e-learning the social aspect of learning in your organization.

Once you've determined your market segments, follow a basic formula with a repetitive message for marketing e-learning to employees. Your efforts will keep the program in front, convey the benefits of the training, and acquaint learners with how to access and use the system. **TD**

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