

SUPPLIERS

A Vendor-Provided Case Study

Using an OutStart solution, Great-West's insurance policy pays off in a more effective salesforce, reduced costs, and a convincing business case to upper management.



Boston Massachusetts

outstart.com

Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Co., a leading life and health insurer, historically relied on costly classroom training to prepare its new sales representatives. Each new associate, who was often also new to the sales profession, was flown to Denver twice during his or her first six months with the company for two, two-week-long training programs.

Great-West's programs initially focused on product information and later expanded to cover sales strategy training. The costs of the four total weeks of training, travel, and time out of the field were high, especially considering that many employees had yet to prove they were capable of making their sales quotas.

Great-West concluded that the portion of the classroom training that focused on products was too costly and failed to optimize learners' time. Once reps left the classroom, many had trouble retaining the product information they'd learned. The company realized that it would be more effective, and far less expensive, if reps could learn about products on their own and at their own pace while in the field. That would also allow the company to reserve costly, face-to-face training time for strategic soft-skills training that reps needed to sell the products and were unable to learn on their own.

Great-West needed to push training back into the field in order to decrease costs, while enabling reps to learn at their own pace, any time they needed to.

The solution

Great-West didn't want to invest in a massive e-learning infrastructure until the concept had proven to be effective. The company decided to pilot its CBT initiative and began looking for a low-cost alternative to enterprise learning platforms. It selected Trainersoft, a product of Boston-based learning software com-

pany OutStart Inc., for authoring and deployment of e-learning courses that would supplement classroom training.

From Great-West's standpoint, there were three primary reasons to select Trainersoft over other offerings. For starters, it liked that Trainersoft was no harder to use to create courses than PowerPoint is to create slides. Also, Great-West had heard great things about Trainersoft's service, which proved true. And the price point allowed Great-West to get in the game of online training with a reasonable budget and build a business case to expand the initiative as it proved itself, rather than require massive infrastructure investments up front.

The results

Great-West began by pushing the product-information portion that traditionally occurred in the Denver classroom back into the field, using e-learning. That allowed a reduction to just one, one-week training event, giving sales reps more time in the field and greatly reducing travel and classroom expenses.

Within the first nine months, a small group of employees authored more than 30 hour-long online training modules, without any programming knowledge. Module developers had complete control of the courses and didn't have to wait for programmer involvement.

Pushing product training back to the field proved less expensive for Great-West and more effective. Great-West realized several huge benefits, the first being the value of repetition. New sales reps could continually go back and access product information as many times as they needed to, whenever they needed to, at their own pace. That improved their product knowledge dramatically versus a classroom approach in which they were exposed to product training one time.

A second benefit was consistency. By accessing the same courses, new reps were trained uniformly on product information, regardless of when or where their training occurred. A third benefit was that online learning with Trainersoft enabled Great-West to make much better use of its training budget, including better use of the high-cost classroom training in Denver by focusing it on selling skills delivered by managers and top sales performers.

In the first year, Great-West estimates it saved at least US\$100,000 by eliminating a week's worth of classroom training that was able to happen in the field. In the first year, more than 10,000 exams were taken, showing heavy use of the system. The test scores showed that product knowledge increased for the salesforce overall, using Web-based training as opposed to classroom-only instruction. The

feedback from the field on the courses was extremely positive.

Although the Trainersoft initiative began in sales with only five licenses, other areas of Great-West have gravitated to CBT as a result of the initial success. Today, Great-West has 15 Trainersoft licenses and has purchased the Manager LMS. It tracks learner scores, making it possible to test and certify baseline product knowledge of the sales team.

Other areas of Great-West cite flexibility of scheduling among Trainersoft's core benefits. Call center managers, for example, can now schedule individuals and small groups to take online training, rather than having to put large groups in classrooms to capitalize on instructor availability, which left the phones short-staffed.

Great-West is currently rolling out Trainersoft e-learning to most operational

areas, including call centers and claims examiner units. When the federal government mandated training on the new HIPAA Privacy Rule compliance requirements, Great-West decided to turn to Trainersoft courses to roll out HIPAA training across the company and track learners to prove and certify compliance.

Now Great-West has more than 90 learning modules online. The success with Trainersoft made it an easy sell to management on the value it brought the company and built a business case to grow the Trainersoft initiative throughout the enterprise.

Provided by Steven Franklin, an associate manager of employee benefits training and development at Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Co.