

# How To Talk to a Talking Head

*Interactive videodisc technology offers new opportunities for involving learners, but you can also get some of the same benefits from conventional videotape.*

**F**act or fiction?: Videotapes in and of themselves can effectively teach and change behavior. The truth is that instruction must be active to be effective. The key to the effective use of videos in training programs is to create an interactive circuit made up of the videotape, the instructor, and the learner.

During the 1980s, few trainers could resist the allure of the thousands of new training videotapes being offered. Tapes were inexpensive and titles plentiful. Using the tapes in training had a certain glossy appeal and the cost was easily justified. But looking back, did they serve their purpose? Consider the following hypothetical interview.

Interviewer (to trainer): *Briefly describe your experience using training tapes during the past decade.*



David Street

## By Richard P. Lookatch

Trainer: *I've used about 200 training tapes. Some were pretty good, but I'm uncertain as to their impact. They served as a nice break from the usual classroom activities. . . . Well, perhaps that's the problem. They were a*

*"break" rather than a supplement to the instruction.*

Interviewer (to the trainee): *Briefly describe your experience with the videotapes you've seen in training over the past decade.*

Trainee: *I've seen quite a few in the past ten years, but I'll be darned if I can name any titles, or tell you what they were about or what I got out of them. But they did make the sessions go faster.*

## A movie instead of a lesson?

How often have we been in a training session and heard the trainer say, "Now we're going to watch a videotape"? Invariably, we're mentally transported to fifth-grade geography class, when we were happy to be getting a movie instead of a lesson.

Trainees typically react to the announcement that they're going to see a videotape by stretching, relaxing, and settling back into their chairs. When the tape ends, trainees look as if they have just been aroused from a deep sleep. Indeed, an atmosphere of lethargy pervades the room. The

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trainer asks, "How does what we just watched relate to. . .?" Often dead silence ensues as trainees avert their eyes and fumble with their notes in the desperate hope that they won't be called upon.

Then there's the inspirational tape, in which emotional outbursts by the lecturer/performer are accompanied by jazzy music and razzle-dazzle production designed to enthrall viewers.

When the tape ends and the trainer asks the wide-eyed group for comments, a trainee typically says, "It was really good, the best tape I've seen." Then the trainer asks, "How does this relate to our topic?" And once again, trainees avert their eyes and fumble with their notes. Why? Because the trainer relied on the emotional content of the video to teach. An inspirational tape usually gets trainees' attention but accomplishes little else.

## **Trainers who attempt video searches for the first time during an actual session will waste time and risk losing instructional credibility**

### **Making videos more interactive**

Videotapes alone cannot provide the instructional benefits of new interactive videodiscs using laser technology. But there are ways to integrate existing videotapes into training programs to make them more interactive: post-video discussion, discussion during the video, case studies, searching and skipping, and the use of print materials.

**Post-video discussion.** Most trainers follow a video training session with a question-and-answer or discussion period. Few trainers, however, use advance questions to enhance post-video discussion.

Here's how to do it: prepare and present discussion questions before you show the videotape. After the video, conduct a structured round-robin discussion and hold each trainee accountable for some contribution.

There are several benefits to the use

of advance questions:

- Advance questions set learning objectives. They alert trainees to the learning possibilities that will be available.

- Advance questions tell trainees what to look for. They alert trainees to the areas of the training that are germane to the organization, and can also help organize the material in advance, highlighting tape content and elevating attention levels on those areas.

- They let trainees know what will be expected of them. Post-tape discussion can be significantly enhanced when trainees know before they watch the video what contributions they will be expected to make.

**Discussion during the video.** Use the "pause" function on the VCR. But remember that the spinning tape head can damage the tape if left on one

section too long. Most VCRs have a safety device that shuts down the machine or advances the tape after a moment or two on pause. In most cases, a moment or two is long enough to discuss a particular scene on the tape.

**Case studies.** Another method of enhancing videotape presentations is to use a dramatic illustrative scene on the tape as a case study, a sort of video vignette.

For example, I once used part of a video on forklift repair as a case study. One scene on the tape depicted a supervisor inappropriately instructing a mechanic on a particular repair procedure. My trainees had little interest in forklift repair, but the scene served to illustrate a common flaw in supervisory techniques.

Video vignettes can illustrate desirable or inappropriate behaviors. To transform videotape scenes into case studies, follow these steps:

- Select case study scenes and prepare relevant discussion questions in advance of the training session.

- Provide trainees in advance with a list of questions on which the discussion will focus. If the scene is a model one, ask trainees to point out positive aspects and relate them to what was learned. If the tape presents inappropriate behaviors, seek recommendations from the trainees.

- Divide trainees into small groups so they can prepare responses to discussion questions. Or, allow a few minutes for trainees to reflect and to prepare responses. Ideally, trainees should be asked to write out their responses.

**Searching and skipping.** In many cases, trainers find that generic videotapes contain segments of little or no value to trainees, or a discussion may warrant the introduction of a particular section of tape (as in the video case study method). In the absence of random access features found in laser media, there are quick ways to locate or skip desired segments.

Most VCRs have either an electronic or a mechanical tape or time counter. Unfortunately, using this feature to search is tedious and less than precise.

Improve your chances for success by rehearsing searching and skipping before the training session—using the same VCR that will be used during the training. Trainers who attempt video searches for the first time during an actual session will waste time and risk losing instructional credibility.

**Print materials.** Most training videos are accompanied by support materials in hard copy, ranging from simple outlines to student workbooks and instructor's guides. Whatever their form, print materials help integrate video content into existing curricula.

### **Interactive videodisc technology**

The arrival of interactive video in training departments offers new opportunities to enhance existing training curricula, with few of the pedagogical dangers inherent in conventional videotapes. Here are a few features of interactive videos.

**Video Socrates.** One of the most significant contributions of interactive

video has been to transform the video from a passive to an active medium. Interactive video is by its very nature Socratic; the technology provides and requires dialogue as part of the presentation. Dialogue occurs—using a remote-control device or keyboard—in the form of questions from the narrator, commands to respond to video prompts, or the selection of options in a simulation. Each technique demands the attention and active input of the trainee.

**Video role playing.** A unique and powerful aspect of interactive video is the ability to direct the behavior of portrayed characters and see the outcome of choices made in feedback and test scores.

Most interactive video programs feature simulations as part of the overall instructional program. In other cases, trainers provide them directly through random access features. Video role plays or simulations fit well into traditional classroom settings. Role playing or simulations should include the following:

- introductory remarks to trainees on what they will be seeing and doing
- easy access to the desired simulation
- passing of the remote control (or other input device) from trainee to trainee at each point of interactivity
- a discussion of the decisions as they are made.

When the simulation is over, repeat it and view the outcomes of directives other than those selected on the first run-through.

**Freezing the action.** It is easy to hold discussions at input points during interactive videos. A well-designed interactive video has input points at intervals of about a minute during instructional segments and every 20 to 40 seconds during practice sessions or simulations.

The input points provide convenient opportunities for the trainer to integrate video content into the overall training session. For example, an input point during a video presentation on features and benefits could be coupled with a brief discussion of the specific benefits of the user organization's products.

Most interactive video systems offer trainers the opportunity to pause or freeze the video while remaining in

the program. For example, while using interactive video in customer relations training, I have often paused the video during customer contact scenes to discuss the physical appearance of the depicted employee's workplace, tying the discussion into our company's policy on workplace arrangement.

Unlike videotape, with interactive videos you can pause at any point on the disc for an indefinite period of time without damage to the video and with a perfectly clear image. Interactive laser videodiscs use light beams that "read" the disc, so no physical contact is actually made with the tape.

**Random access.** Instantaneous access (less than 1.5 seconds) to any spot on a videodisc provides trainees with an excellent tool for tailoring video content.

Typically, there are two types of ran-

dom access. The first and more practical is to remain in the program and select desired instructional or practice segments from a series of menus found in most videodisc programs.

For example, a popular bank training series provides trainers with a "random access code" that when entered allows the trainer to instantaneously access any simulation or practice segment on the disc and bypass the narrative instruction. This type of random access feature provides trainers ultimate flexibility for integration as simply as selecting a particular channel on a TV remote control.

Another way to use random access is to take the system out of the program and select from up to 54,000 frames of video or text on the disc. This method is useful for trainers who want to access text frames or graphic illustrations for class analysis and discussion. To resume full interac-

tivity, the system must be placed back in the program.

**Customization.** Many interactive video systems allow trainers to add computer-generated text frames to programs. With this feature, a frame of text will appear during the video program at specified points. This is beneficial when the system is used for one-on-one interactive video instruction, a situation in which integration by a trainer may be impractical.

## **A well-rounded learning experience**

Many videotape integration techniques also have a role in interactive videodisc integration. Case studies and printed material supplements, for example, can enhance interactive video instruction as well as videotape training.

# **Interactive video offers new opportunities to enhance existing training curricula, with few of the dangers of conventional videotapes**

The experiences of the eighties have taught that training videos are of little value unless they are effectively integrated into instructional programs. Interactive video systems—and videos rendered active through integration with classroom activities—constitute well-rounded training experiences.

Recent research has consistently demonstrated a positive correlation between learning gains from video simulations and the degree of instructional interactivity involved. In addition to learning gains, studies also indicate significantly improved attitudes and satisfaction among trainees when they are actively involved in video presentations.

The vast selection and quality of videotapes and interactive videodiscs available today, combined with simple integration techniques, present unlimited opportunities for trainers to improve substantially the outcomes of their training. ■