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Spiderman, Spiderman!

Using Web conferencing for training

When Joe's CEO asked him to host a regional meeting as a Web conference, he thought it was child's play. After all Web conferencing only involved including visual aids and messages in presentations and sharing it with an online audience. And he knew all about the power of visuals.

The power of visuals!

Visual perception accounts for 75 percent of environmental stimuli. The best presenters include visuals to optimize the presentation's impact. Visual messages are responsible for 55 percent of what the audience learns. Audio messages, on the other hand, account for only 38 percent audience learning.

Presenters who use visual aids reach their audience objectives 67 percent of the time, compared to a 33 percent when visual aids are missing. The use of visuals implies shorter meetings, besides saving on man-hours and money. According to a University of Minnesota study, the average length of meetings using visuals is 26.8 percent shorter than those with no visuals. With such statistics behind it, what could go wrong with Web conferencing? Surprisingly, a lot!

Begin by asking questions

Ideally, organizations need to address certain crucial questions before embarking on a Web conferencing venture.

Does Web conferencing fit into the organization's learning model? A part of an organization's acculturation process for a batch of new sales representatives is live classroom instruction. Web conferencing might not be as effective. The purpose and user must always be kept in mind.

What learning model does the organization propose to use? Trouble starts when organizations allow technology to determine how a particular course should be taught. A multitude of factors need consideration.

Answers to these questions lead some companies to believe that Web conferencing can't address all their training needs. They may decide on a multi-faceted approach that includes elements like self-study, and instructor and computer-based training tools.

Working it out

Web conferencing works best for broad, high level content, such as the demonstration of newly introduced software. A big limitation, however, is that Web conferencing is inappropriate for highly technical or task-based content. With such content Web conferencing should only be brought in for a follow-up question-and-answer round.



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Bandwidth is another issue. Low bandwidth allows for the use of limited features. At 19.2 Kbps slides with a few graphics, animations, audio and text chat work at a great speed. Unfortunately, the minimum recommended speed for video though is 128 Kbps. Bandwidth affects connectivity too. With global participants, Internet connectivity is a major problem. Xerox found a solution to this problem too. It distributes CDs and videotapes of training sessions to its global offices.

More on Web conferencing

Web conferencing has been widely accepted as a business communications strategy. As a combination of data and voice conferencing over the Web, businesses turn to Web conferencing to reduce training costs and increase the frequency of business communications. Web conferencing allows presenters to meet their audience online, wherever they are located, through a network or on the Internet.

An improvement over chat rooms, its appeal lies in its functions. Web conferencing allows business representatives to pull widely distributed team members together for online meetings. Apart from being cheaper than teleconferencing, any technically sound person can arrange a Web conferencing session.

Web conferencing allows online slide shows and interactions among those online using text, audio and video. A presenter can use the electronic whiteboard to visually present his ideas. A participant can watch any other member perform a task or exercise. This function is particularly useful during training sessions. A presenter can thus take control of a participant's system to guide or assist him or her in completing his/her tasks.

Integrated with collaboration tools like Web touring, file transfers, document sharing, polling, chat, archive recording, whiteboard and more, Web conferencing is a highly effective training platform.

Web conferencing - an alternative

Organizations consider Web conferencing a better alternative to CD-ROMs, videotapes and traditional seminars for many reasons. Primary among them is that conferencing extends the availability and reach of traditional classroom sessions. It is highly effective for delivering information to those who possess a reasonable level of expertise and knowledge. For instance, lawyers can learn about the recent developments in the income tax law through Web conferencing. They can share notes and clear doubts online. Web conferencing enhances such professional development that is more dependent on discussions and exchange than practice.

Signing up

- Define training needs and culture, select learning models and determine the audience
- Identify constraints: budget, systems available and their connections, proficiency level of trainees, facilitator support
- List features (whiteboard, document sharing, polling) that would make the learning model work



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- Employ a consultant and check out competing vendors
- Arrange orientation programs. The use of Web conferencing isn't intuitive!
- Do a 'dry-run' of how Web conferencing would deliver a training program. Subsequently, review IT skills of facilitators and technical staff. A skilled facilitator is critical for highly technical applications and features.
- Web conferencing is still in its infancy; therefore, security and privacy are issues right now. Considering them and a few other issues (expandability, open-versus proprietary systems) early on would only mean lesser trouble when conferencing expands.

Web conferencing can reach and teach an unlimited number of trainees at far-flung locations. A Web-enabled computer and telephone conferencing alone can eliminate travel costs and time away from work.

From non-profit organizations to small firms to multinationals, for a dozen to a thousand trainees, on a tight or a lavish budget, Web conferencing suits all!