Harnessing live online learning
The UK’s first research study into virtual learning
A Towards Maturity Benchmark Report
Supported by Commelius Solutions
October 2011
It’s clear that live online learning environments now form a staple in the L&D toolkit.

The recession and a renewed focus on reducing carbon footprint has caused many organisations to cut their travel budgets and look for alternative ways to bring people together to share and learn.

Furthermore, as the evolution of learning technologies has continued, especially with the advancement of cloud based technology, traditional forms of training have come under increasing scrutiny.

As a result, the Towards Maturity Benchmark has been tracking steady growth of live online learning environments and now over three quarters of organisations are now using them.

But, we are always fascinated by the real experiences of organisations that lie behind the statistics – what is working and what isn’t? What is hype and what is reality? And perhaps most importantly, how can we learn from the experiences of others?

For this reason Commelius Solutions asked Towards Maturity to investigate these questions and more in this unique study.

It’s the first of its kind in the UK and we would like to thank everyone who participated. We hope you find the results useful on the next stage of your journey with live online learning.

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1. About this research

The results of the latest 2011-2012 Towards Maturity Benchmark survey show that over three quarters of organisations\(^1\) are now using some form of live online learning environments. But how are they being used and what can we learn from these organisations’ experiences?

This research is the first of its kind in the UK and is delivered in partnership by Commelius Solutions and Towards Maturity. It’s designed to dig deeper into how and why live online learning environments are being used in business and uncovers practical lessons that can be shared with those less familiar with live online learning technology.

Background

The economy, skills shortages, dispersed workforces and global time zones are all external factors that impact the ability of organisations to train staff effectively and efficiently. But training remains business critical. The performance of organisations still depends on having highly skilled, highly motivated staff.

As the evolution of learning technologies has continued apace, traditional forms of training have come under increasing scrutiny. The CIPD ‘Focus on elearning’ report shows that the use of technology in learning is now common (78% of organisations now use some form of e-learning and over half are planning to increase their use in the next 12 months)\(^2\)

Over the past few years, the Towards Maturity Benchmarks have flagged that e-learning is no longer just about self-paced courses but in fact that those successful in adopting technology are using a blend of learning technologies.

There is no doubt that the tried and tested model of attending face-to-face training in a classroom is no longer accepted as the status quo.

Using a virtual space for other business activities such as meetings and conference calls is now widely practised and provides an opportunity for staff to communicate, share and learn together. But how can we exploit this medium to its full potential in training? And why aren’t more organisations harnessing the power of live online learning? This research aims to provide the answers in breaking down barriers to adoption and dispelling misconceptions while clarifying the benefits of live online learning and the business challenges it can help solve.

Aims of this study

The 2011-2012 Towards Maturity Benchmark highlights that a wide range of learning technologies are now being adopted by organisations across the private, public and not for profit sectors. There is clear evidence that the use of virtual environments to support live online learning is on the increase.

This study provides an opportunity to focus on the experiences of people who have specifically implemented live online learning in their own organisations. We invited those people to take part in this ground-breaking research and over 180 organisations contributed, adding valuable data to the results which are included in this full-length report.

The aims of this research are:

- To identify adoption rates and trends in the use of live online learning within organisations today
- To define effective practices and ideas to support the effective implementation of live online learning

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\(^1\) The 2011-2012 Towards Maturity Benchmark draws on information gathered from over 600 organisations during the summer of 2011. See www.towardsmaturity.org/2011benchmark for details.

\(^2\) CIPD – Focus on elearning report June 2011 http://www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/survey-reports/fo...
Definitions

Here are explanations of some of the terms used throughout this report.

Virtual meetings: A virtual meeting may involve two or more people who are geographically dispersed and who gather for the common purpose of discussing a topic.

Virtual classroom: A virtual copy of a normal classroom setting. This means there are the usual components of learners attending the training, a live instructor presenting the materials, break out rooms, course notes and joining instructions. The difference is that there is no physical meeting space and everything happens online. So, there is no need to travel, there is less out–of–office time and there is an opportunity for learners to attend from any location, anywhere in the world.

Virtual presence/immersive environments: Also called virtual reality or virtual worlds, the virtual presence consists of immersion in an artificial environment where the user feels just as immersed as they usually feel in consensus reality. The phrase is often associated with serious gaming and avatar driven environments.

Webinars: Webinars are online seminars. They are often informational, short (60 minutes or less), and provide a call to action at the end.

Methodology and profile of participants

Individuals responsible for implementing live online learning in the workplace were invited to take part in an online survey which was developed in association with a number of independent industry experts. Our thanks go to Colin Steed (Learning and Performance Institute) and Clive Shepherd (Onlignment) for their input to the survey questions.

The survey was distributed via social media networks and direct invitation for four weeks during August 2011.

A total of 180 participants completed this short confidential survey. Many shared hints and tips and the report covers practical ideas from a number of organisations including Serac UK, Axa UK, Chartered Institute of Payroll Professionals, Urenco UK, First Data, HP Education Services, Mott MacDonald, Standard Chartered Bank, Radisson Edwardian Hotels, South Wales Police, Action for Children, First Group and Aberystwyth University.3

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3 All organisations named in this report agreed that they can be quoted
Sectors represented by respondents:

59% private
30% public
11% not for profit

Size of organisations represented:

10% small <250
8% medium (250-999)
44% large (1000-4999)
38% > 5000 staff

70% of the participants had some form or management or strategy responsibility.

See appendix for more information on participant profiles.

Overall experience in creating live online learning environments

- No experience - planning to introduce: 21%
- No experience - no plans: 24%
- Some experience - piloting the approach: 51%
- Significant experience: 5%
2. Trends

This section outlines the initial trends emerging in live online learning. We investigate the tools that are currently used and planned, together with overall attitudes towards cloud based technologies.

Adoption

The adoption trends mirror assumptions made at the outset of the research. Figure 1 shows the current use and planned use of 4 live online learning tools.

Current adoption and usage rates for virtual meeting and virtual conferencing software are high at 68% and 58% respectively. This is unsurprising as something of a tipping point has been reached and these tools have become an accepted, everyday way of communicating, interacting with others and doing business.

The largest expected growth is in the use of virtual classrooms to facilitate live online learning, where nearly 60% of learning professionals have planned for new investment or further development.

![Figure 1 - % of organisations using live online learning environments](image)

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Adoption by sector

The live online learning environment most likely to be used in all sectors is virtual meetings, although its use is more widespread in the private sector (where 77% of organisations are currently using) and not for profit sector (76% are using) than the public sector (where 51% are using).

The not for profit sector is most likely to use virtual classroom environments (56% using) than the private sector (42% using) and public sector (32% using).

Virtual conferencing is currently in use by 73% of private sector companies, 47% of public companies but only 29% of not for profit businesses.

In terms of future adoption:

- An additional 47% of the public sector plans to adopt virtual classroom technology (versus 41% of private sector and 33% of not for profit companies)
- An additional 35% of the public sector plans to adopt virtual meeting technology (versus 14% of private sector and 53% of not for profit companies)
- An additional 53% of the not for profit sector plans to adopt virtual conferencing technology (versus 14% of private sector and 31% of public sector companies)

Reality check for serious games

Whilst adoption rates for virtual classroom and virtual meetings and conferences follow a predictable curve, it seems that virtual world-style serious gaming environments are off the agenda for four out of every five learning professionals delivering training into workplace today.

When asked about the live online learning systems they use to deliver business training or plan to use, less than 9% of the Learning and Development leaders taking part in the study said that virtual world-style immersive or avatar-driven training resources were likely to be part of their company's learning mix anytime soon.

This figure is consistent with other Towards Maturity Benchmark studies conducted over the past four years4. Figure 2 shows the use of virtual worlds has remained steady at 8-9% despite predictions of growth.

Figure 2 – Longitudinal trends for immersive learning from Towards Maturity Benchmark studies 2006-2011.

In 2006, 18% of 200 organisations predicted they would use virtual worlds but in 2008, only 8% of a sample of 300 was using the technology.

Likewise, in 2008, usage was predicted to be 26% but by 2010 but only 8% of a sample of 400 had implemented virtual worlds in their organisation.

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4 See www.towardsmaturity.org for details of benchmark reports.
In 2010, 22% predicted that they would be using virtual worlds but in 2011, only 9% of 600 organisations were using it. These statistics contradict the growth and adoption predicted for virtual worlds by many industry experts. Either there is not a perceived need for this type of technology or the benefits are not seen as significant enough to justify the investment. Set against a backdrop of recession and economic cuts, this is perhaps not wholly unsurprising.

**Attitudes to the cloud**

An interesting result of this research has been to explore the attitudes of UK organisations to cloud computing in general. It seems everyone today is talking about ‘the cloud’ and we wanted to see what this means to people and whether or not they understand the concept.

Figure 3 highlights responses to the question:

*Many organisations and technology providers are talking about ‘the future of technology is in the cloud’. How do you respond to that statement?*

![Attitudes to the cloud](image)

Surprisingly, given the profile of cloud based technologies, there seems to be a general unfamiliarity among the respondents with cloud based technology as well as an element of fear and uncertainty around data security and the stability of these solutions. Overall, 44% of organisations are embracing or preparing to implement cloud based technology at the moment. The adoption rate is higher in the private sector (48%) than in the public sector (31%).

Attitudes to the cloud also vary with organisation’s experiences with live online learning (see Figure 4). Interestingly, 65% of respondents with significant experience in live online learning are also actively embracing or preparing to use cloud based solutions. And it is those with significant experience who are getting the best results from their live online learning solutions. This would seem to demonstrate a predisposition to trialling and adopting new technologies.
Included below are thoughts from some of our respondents that demonstrate the varied attitudes that exist towards cloud-based technologies:

‘I’m aware of cloud technology but not sure of organisational plans for its use.’

‘I think cloud technology is something we will be using if we’re not, we should be.’

‘Cloud technology will, I feel, eventually be the norm.’

‘I think this language can put people off and can come across as very pretentious.’

‘Cloud is just the next new shiny thing in some respects.’
3. Business drivers

Section 3 explores the business drivers of organisations harnessing live online learning.

We asked respondents for details of the business challenges they are addressing or plan to address through their use of live online learning – see Figure 5.

Nine out of ten say that live online learning will help them tackle the skills shortfall either now or in the future. Concerns over skills shortages in the workplace have overtaken flexible working to become the number one driver for companies procuring live online learning resources like virtual classrooms and virtual conferencing.

Table 1 – Top 5 business challenges to be addressed now and in the future with live online learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 5 training challenges addressed with live online learning today</th>
<th>Top 5 training challenges live online learning will help address in the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Accommodating remote/flexible working practices (44%)</td>
<td>1. Skills shortages (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ensuring compliance (43%)</td>
<td>2. Accommodating remote/flexible working practices (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rolling out new IT systems and processes (41%)</td>
<td>3. Speeding up induction for new starters (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Skills shortages (37%)</td>
<td>4. Rolling out new IT systems and processes (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Increasing IT skills (34%)</td>
<td>5. Insuring compliance (38%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 - What business challenges are organisations looking to address with live online learning?
Figure 6 highlights that those organisations currently in the pilot phases are primarily driven by the need to improve flexible and remote working. Their priority from a skills perspective is to support the rollout of new IT systems and to ensure regulatory compliance.

However, as their experience increases, they are much more likely to be addressing a broader range of business challenges.

Compare with those piloting, those with significant experience are twice as likely to use live online learning to:

- Speed up the induction process
- Improve IT skills
- Improve leadership development
- Rollout new IT systems
- Increase IT skills

![Figure 6 – How do drivers differ with experience?](image)
Drivers by sector

Compared to the average respondent, those from large organisations with over 5000 staff are more likely to be looking to use the live online environment to:

- Provide frontline support to staff via helpdesks (33% multinationals do this versus 23% average)
- Roll out new IT systems (54% large organisations compared with a 41% average)
- Ensure compliance (56% versus 43% average)

Figure 7 highlights the differences between private, public and not for profit organisations.

Interestingly, the public sector is more likely to use live online learning to facilitate remote working than the private sector (48% in comparison to 43%). It is also more likely to use live online learning for IT skills (42% public sector versus 33% private sector).

However, the private sector is more likely to be driven by the following challenges:

- Improving leadership development (36% compared with 24%)
- Providing front line support (28% versus 21%)
- Ensuring compliance (51% in comparison to 35%)

The sample for not for profit organisations was smaller but overall this sector is much more likely than both of the other sectors to be driven by the need to accommodate remote or flexible working practices (53%), closely followed by addressing skills shortages (50%).
4. Barriers to adoption

This section explores the barriers to the adoption of live online learning in organisations today.

The barriers holding organisations back from adopting live online learning are linked to technology, quality of the experience, cost and engagement, with issues relating to insufficient bandwidth to handle multimedia, concerns about security in the cloud and firewall access (see Figure 8).

The barriers concerning organisational culture can be perhaps more challenging to change than the technical barriers. Fears of the new technology by the trainers and user reluctance to shift to online learning need to be tackled with a hearts and mind approach. If people are not convinced of the benefits that live online learning can deliver, then making it a success is going to be extremely difficult. Technical barriers are potentially easier to overcome once an organisation is convinced of the benefit that change can bring.

**Technical barriers**

It’s important to note that, whilst the technical issues constitute a major barrier for almost half of the sample, these were not consistently reported. Large organisations of over 5000 staff and public sector organisations are most likely to report technical issues as a barrier, for example:

- 67% of multinational companies and 75% of public sector companies are concerned about security in the cloud versus 49% of the total sample
- 66% of multinationals and 72% of public sector businesses are concerned about bandwidth issues regarding multimedia (compared with 52% of the total sample)

**Figure 8 – Barriers to adoption**

The barriers concerning organisational culture can be perhaps more challenging to change than the technical barriers. Fears of the new technology by the trainers and user reluctance to shift to online learning need to be tackled with a hearts and mind approach. If people are not convinced of the benefits that live online learning can deliver, then making it a success is going to be extremely difficult. Technical barriers are potentially easier to overcome once an organisation is convinced of the benefit that change can bring.
The effect of experience on barriers

Experience also makes a real difference to the perceived barriers, as shown in table 2.

Table 2 - How barriers differ with experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 5 issues for those new to live online learning</th>
<th>Top 5 barriers for those with some experience</th>
<th>Top 5 barriers for those with significant experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bandwidth for multimedia</td>
<td>Security about working in the cloud</td>
<td>Bandwidth for multimedia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security about working in the cloud</td>
<td>Bandwidth for multimedia</td>
<td>Reluctance to shift to virtual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Reluctance to shift to virtual</td>
<td>Quality of learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firewall access</td>
<td>Firewall access</td>
<td>Security about working in the cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers do not support it</td>
<td>Less opportunity for interaction</td>
<td>Firewall access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less opportunity for interaction</td>
<td>Multi-tasking whilst in training</td>
<td>Lack of online delivery skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experienced organisations are less likely overall to report barriers.

For example, as an organisation’s experience increases, both technical issues and cost become less of a major barrier to adopting live online learning.

- Only 10% of those with significant experience see costs as an ongoing concern compared with 50% of those with little or no experience
- Those with significant experience are half as likely to view security issues in the cloud as a barrier to adoption
- Only 18% perceive a lack of management support as a major barrier compared with 44% of those at the beginning of their journey
- User reluctance to engage in this type of learning drops with experience too
Certain barriers increase with experience – as organisations become more familiar, new challenges and barriers emerge:

- Quality: 30% of experienced organisations are concerned about quality versus only 27% of those piloting
- Both experienced users (and newcomers) are more concerned about trainer skills than those piloting which may be due to experienced users extending the use within a wider trainer community
- Both those piloting and experienced users have found that previous bad experience is an issue that deters learners from adopting live online learning

So it’s important to get it right first time, to build skills of training staff and give them a good experience up front. Poor learner experience in start-up or pilot phases can cause barriers to adoption at a later stage. Getting the experience right first time is vital for both trainers and users to ensure successful adoption.
5. Business benefits

Section 5 details the benefits achieved by organisations implementing live online learning.

We began by asking respondents about the business benefits they have already achieved using live online learning against those they hoped to achieve but haven’t realised yet (Figure 10).

Experience makes a big difference to the benefits delivered (see Figure 11). Respondents with more experience are at least twice as likely to report they are already achieving benefits as a result of embracing live online learning.

Over four out of five of those with significant experience report that they are currently delivering the following benefits to their organisations:

- Reducing travel costs
- Supporting learning for remote workers
- Reducing out of office time
- Increasing access to learning
- Reducing overall training costs

![Figure 10 – Benefits wanted versus benefits achieved with live online learning](image)
Again, those with experience are reporting an increased improvement in training quality, compared with just 20% of those still piloting live online learning. These results are a great indicator to those organisations in the pilot phase, and those who still have not started with this approach yet. Time and experience should bring measurable business benefits.

**Benefits by sector**

Unsurprisingly, table 3 highlights that all of the sectors are reporting a reduction in travel costs as a result of using live online learning.

Overall, the public sector is reporting far fewer benefits than other sectors while the not for profit sector is reporting the most significant reduction in travel costs, in out of office time and in increasing support for remote workers. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that the not for profit sector has fewer constraints on adoption (it may also be due to the smaller sample size for this sector).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Not for Profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing access to learning (48%)</td>
<td>Remote/flexible working (33%)</td>
<td>Reducing travel costs (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing travel costs (46%)</td>
<td>Reducing travel costs (32%)</td>
<td>Supporting learning for remote workers (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing out of office time (44%)</td>
<td>Increasing access to learning (30%)</td>
<td>Reducing out of office time (44%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quantifying benefits

Whilst a significant number are reporting overall improvements, what is the extent of that improvement?

When asked to quantify the benefits that live online learning is delivering to their organisation, shockingly only 13% of the whole sample (29 participants) felt able to do this.

Those with significant experience were better able to answer this than others; 24% of those with significant experience contributed to this question.

Compared with traditional training methods, live online learning is providing the following benefits:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study time Saved</th>
<th>Cost savings (excl. travel savings)</th>
<th>Cost savings (excl. travel savings)</th>
<th>Improvement in time to proven competency</th>
<th>Improvement in trainer productivity</th>
<th>Improvement in overall staff productivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 %</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td>29 %</td>
<td>28 %</td>
<td>27 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 – Quantified benefits

Approximately half of these organisations were in the pilot stages and half had significant experience.

Those with significant experience reported, on average, twice the benefits than those that were piloting. The numbers in this sample are small but do show emerging trends in cost savings, improvements in time to competency and the saving of study time for learners; thus delivering real benefits back into the organisation as a whole.

The implications of these figures are important for organisations that are looking to improve productivity of both L&D staff and learners, and to support the organisation in responding faster to change.

It’s clear that experience matters and more mature organisations are leveraging more benefits from the medium. This echoes findings from the 2010 Towards Maturity Impact Indicator study which showed that those who measure impact are also more likely to report more benefits than those who estimate the benefit that they are achieving. However, the 2010 Towards Maturity Benchmark highlights that measurement and evaluation is generally poor across all sectors – only one in four organisations identify appropriate business metrics to influence through learning and even then, only 13% of organisations are likely to measure against those metrics. This is an area that we need to improve on if we are to win the hearts and minds of business stakeholders.

6. Implementation

This section explores how organisations are implementing live online learning and includes hints and tips from respondents, gained from their own experiences.

In Clive Shepherd’s book The New Learning Architect, he helps us to understand blended learning:

‘A blended learning solution combines educational and training methods within different social contexts for learning (self study, one to one, group) with the aim of increasing learning effectiveness.....It may also mix the learning media used to deliver the solution (face to face, online, offline) as a way to optimise the efficiency of the solution.

These choices are made in response to particular learning requirements, audience characteristics and practical constraints and opportunities’

From the research, we wanted to understand the types of learning methods and activities that are being supported by live online learning and how these are combined to create blended learning solutions.

We asked respondents what learning methods they believe are being enabled by live online learning:

- Business presentations 64%
- Business meetings 63%
- Discussions 54%
- Software demos/training 52%
- Workshops 38%
- Collaboration between learners 23%
- Practical IT skills eg via labs 21%
- Presentation of learner assignments 20%
- Action learning meetings 19%
- One-to-one coaching 18%

The results demonstrate that most organisations are embracing live online learning to perform activities most obviously associated with learning methods such as presentations (64%) and meetings (63%).
However, when we compare more experienced users (Figure 12), the results begin to change:

![Figure 12 - % of organisations using live online learning to address a variety of learning methods](image)

The more experienced respondents are moving from presenting to learning. They are:

- Three times more likely to use live online learning to provide coaching
- Over three times more likely to use to create live online practice opportunities

They are also over twice as likely to use live online environments for:

- Action learning meetings
- Presentation of work assignments
- Online collaboration between learners
- Software demos and training

At present, it seems that the potential of environments such as virtual classrooms are often underutilised and could be leveraged across a much wider range of learning activities, providing learning and development departments with more value for money and greater agility to immediately meet organisational needs.
Learning media

We also asked respondents for details of the different learning media they are using in conjunction with live online learning (Figure 13).

There is a clear trend showing that organisations are using live online learning as part of an overall blended approach, combining a variety of online tools and techniques. The results suggest that more experienced users will be more likely to move their solution to the next level by combining live online learning with other face-to-face interventions such as coaching and classroom sessions. Interestingly, 80% of experienced users are creating blends including a wide variety of learning types such as online support, online resources and self-paced study materials within the mix. (Figure 14 breaks this down in more detail).

Figure 13 – What % of organisations is combining live online learning with other learning media?
Social and mobile learning

In the 2011 Towards Maturity Benchmark study, we also see that mobile learning is becoming part of mainstream delivery with 39% of organisations currently using the mobile learning and growth is predicted by an additional 49%.

In this study, we see that experienced learning professionals are planning to align live online learning with social learning solutions such as communities of practice (40%).

And while only 13% currently combine mobile learning with virtual classroom as part of their approach, over 50% are planning to do so in the next 18 months.

This would seem to underpin the predicted growth in mobile learning overall and indicates it is an important component in organisations’ learning strategies going forward.

Figure 14 - How learning media vary with experience
Hints and tips

With the wealth of experience of some of the survey's participants, we received a number of useful hints and tips for those organisations piloting live online learning or those considering adopting the approach.

Hints and tips for moving from classroom to live online learning

It's clear from these comments that working in the live online learning environments is different from working in a physical classroom and it's important to approach the medium with a new mindset, which often means training for existing trainers.

- ‘What hasn't worked well? Using the same materials as we would a face to face course!’
  Project Manager, Serac UK

- ‘The key is adapting previous methods to a new media, standard presentations and facilitation techniques do not work. Trainers, facilitators and designers need to look at this again to improve audience engagement. Using traditional styles has turned off students as there is not the face-to-face engagement.’
  Learning innovation consultant AXA UK

- ‘Participate in as many online events (as a learner) as you possibly can, use this time to look and listen to what works and what doesn't’
  Learning Technologist, Urenco UK

- ‘We saw a significant increase in the quality of our product once we had enrolled staff of the IITT COLF programme. The strategy moving forward is to create a more structured development plan for all who will be involved in production or delivery of our online products.’
  Associate Director, Chartered Institute of Payroll Professionals

Hints and tips on design

The following comments provide useful insights on how to design live online learning.

- ‘Focus on developing content more suited to virtual classroom learning rather than relying on PowerPoint.’
  Director of Training, First Data

- ‘Keep sessions focused and short. You do not know if the audience is awake or not!’
  Business Manager HP Education Services

- ‘What has worked well? Learner presentations post face-to-face around set assignments, Action Learning Set meetings, senior induction sessions, presentation and debate run by Board members, combination of system simulation software and syndicate room facility’
  Group L&D Manager, Mott MacDonald

- ‘Practice and rehearse – enforce this even with subject matter experts. Mandate interactivity in design of webinars, virtual activities (preferably every 5-6 minutes). Follow up with surveys and online social communities with recognition that there is a high dropout rate given heavy workloads and changing priorities.’
  Curriculum Manager, Standard Chartered Bank

- ‘Never ask “Does anyone have any questions so far?” Use the ‘chat’ facility instead; use it for quick pole questions which require short answers: e.g. yes/no, how much, how many, etc. Use the chat facility as a temperature check and as means of maintaining engagement; say every five minutes.’
  Learning innovation consultant AXA UK
Hints and tips on winning hearts and minds

Creating great live online learning experiences isn’t enough – it is also important to find ways of creatively engaging the business with new ways of learning.

• ‘People say it is what they want but actually getting them using it is a constant challenge’
  Learning & development director, Radisson Edwardian Hotels

• ‘Raise cultural awareness of the benefits and sell the impact on the business as a money saver that will eventually save jobs and time which will make the business more efficient, hence creating growth.’
  Senior Design & Development Officer, South Wales Police

• ‘Pick small target audience with a tightly focussed and relevant programme; demonstrate potential and thereby get champions who are out in the business to advocate the approach.’
  Head of HR & Learning Technologies, First Group

• ‘Resource it properly before you start. Identify enthusiasts, use them to cascade good practice. ‘If groups have met prior to undertaking online learning, it works as an icebreaker and the online elearning works more effectively’
  Enterprise skills and development officer, Aberystwyth University

• ‘Listen to feedback on issues - do not brush over them, or assume technology is the answer to all.’
  Programme Manager, Action for Children
7. Conclusion

Live online learning is not a new concept. And using a virtual space for business activities such as meetings and conference calls is now common place. So why aren’t more organisations harnessing the power of live online learning and delivering their training via this medium?

Evolving business drivers

The focus for live online learning technology has been centred around its ability to bring people together regardless of their location or time zone. Most organisations have simply adopted this as a two dimensional resource to connect people for meetings and perhaps broadcast to them via webinars.

As we have started to become more comfortable with this approach, the wider world has also changed. With the downturn in the global economy and the associated spending cuts and travel bans, organisations have needed to get more creative with the resources they have to deliver what they need to their staff. And as a result, learning and development professionals have begun to evolve. We have recognised that live online learning comes with many of the cost saving and time saving benefits of e-learning but also with the interaction and trainer expertise associated with traditional classroom training. Virtual classroom usage is therefore set to increase dramatically in the next 18 months.

Breaking down barriers

The research shows that as users of live online learning progress through adoption and early pilot phases to more experienced use of the technology, the barriers to success decrease. Technical concerns are overcome and any previous poor experience or lack of trainer skills are addressed to ensure an engaged workforce that is happy to learn via the virtual classroom.

As their experience increases, so does the sophistication of the solution. So we are no longer using virtual classrooms just to facilitate remote working, but it’s being harnessed to address much more complex training needs including skills shortages in key areas and to deliver measurable business benefits.

The overwhelming message from this research is that where live online learning is concerned, organisations should just get started and build on the experience and knowledge of others that have gone before them to create a practical and successful cloud based training solution.
8. Appendix

Demographics

The job roles and skills sets of those participating in the study were heavily skewed towards learning strategy and management (40%) with consultants (10%) and trainers, content developers and technology specialists making up around a quarter of respondents (24%) and the rest classed themselves as all of the above (30%).

![Pie chart showing job roles and skills sets]

- Learning strategy and management: 40%
- Consultancy: 10%
- Content development: 8%
- Trainer: 6%
- Technology specialist: 6%
- All of the above: 30%

Live online learning adoption by sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Current usage</th>
<th>Planned use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not for profit</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Virtual meetings use by sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Current usage</th>
<th>Planned use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not for profit</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Virtual conferencing by sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Current usage</th>
<th>Planned use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not for profit</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Drivers by sector**

**Private sector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Addressing now</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Addressing in the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring compliance</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>Speeding up induction</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolling out new IT systems</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>Addressing skills shortages</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote/flexible working</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Increasing IT skills</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Public sector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Addressing now</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Addressing in the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remote/flexible working</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>Addressing skills shortages</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolling out new IT systems</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Speeding up induction</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing IT skills</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>Improving leadership development</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Not for profit sector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Addressing now</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Addressing in the future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remote/flexible working</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Addressing skills shortages</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing skills shortages</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>Speeding up induction</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speeding up induction</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>Improving leadership development</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barriers and sector differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Not for profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security about working in the cloud – 43%</td>
<td>Security about working in the cloud – 75%</td>
<td>Bandwidth for multimedia – 56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandwidth for multimedia – 43%</td>
<td>Bandwidth for multimedia – 72%</td>
<td>Cost – 39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance to shift to virtual – 39%</td>
<td>Firewall access – 58%</td>
<td>Reluctance to shift to virtual – 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firewall access – 39%</td>
<td>Cost – 54%</td>
<td>Security about working in the cloud – 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less opportunity for interaction – 34%</td>
<td>Reluctance to shift to virtual – 52%</td>
<td>Multi-tasking while in training – 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost – 29%</td>
<td>Managers do not support it – 48%</td>
<td>Firewall access – 17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. About Commelius Solutions

Commelius Solutions has been delivering training solutions for over 10 years and is one of the largest, most highly experienced and successful developers of blended learning solutions which support the development of personal and organisational skills and capabilities. We successfully design and deliver high quality, innovative solutions for our clients across a wide range of subjects to support business goals and objectives.

We take an impartial perspective of training delivery, providing customer-specific solutions which best meet learner and organisation needs. Our experience has taught us that each customer and project is unique. While the overall offerings can be similar and based around a blend of classroom training, e-learning, virtual classroom and learning management systems, how they are seamlessly integrated with a user-centric approach is the real challenge.

We are preferred suppliers to world class organisations including CSC, NATS, AMEC, ITV, Hill Dickinson, Airwave, and many more.

Visit www.commelius.co.uk to learn more about our company and services.
10. About Towards Maturity

Towards Maturity is a benchmarking company that provides independent expert advice and support to help organisations use learning technologies to accelerate business performance. It leverages the data of its in depth Benchmark study, the UK’s largest learning technology benchmark, gathered by Towards Maturity over eight years with over 1800 organisations.

Thanks to the support of Towards Maturity Ambassadors (fifteen leading learning organisations), annual benchmarking findings, case studies and resources are available to download for free on the website. www.towardsmaturity.org

To find out about our ambassadors visit www.towardsmaturity.org/ambassadors

To learn more about Towards Maturity benchmarking tools and models visit http://mybenchmark.towardsmaturity.org/

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