



The Inside Track to Live Internet Learning

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The Inside Track to Live Internet Learning

The intent of this whitepaper is to offer instruction on how to implement *live Internet learning* in your organization. This paper covers the live, instructor-led virtual classroom environment where instructors and students meet in real time via the Internet, intranet, or LAN to interact, share knowledge and learn together.

The online learning market can be confusing at best, with terms such as asynchronous, Web-based, virtual classroom, distance learning, and collaboration all vying for attention. Your first task is to determine what mix of online learning methods will serve different students with different learning styles in your organization.

Once you have decided that a live instructor-led online environment is an important element of your technology-based learning solution set, you can begin to evaluate the options, plan for internal selling, design your pilot, and look forward to implementation of live online (Internet, intranet) learning in your organization. Here are some guidelines for a successful transition.

Evaluation: What to Look For

During the evaluation phase, you may be comparing product features and claims. There are some important points to consider when selecting a live Internet learning vendor. For example, consider whether the vendor is committed to your success with live Internet learning, or whether the sale ends the business relationship.

Ask for customer experience information and customer references – focus on implementation and ROI.

Find out about strategic partners and how their products are integrated to add capabilities that enhance online learning and match the business goals and strategic planning of your organization.

Choose a software company that employs the best learning technology, rather than a technology company with a learning tool.

Ask about the company's upgrade strategy – how often and how distributed.

Choose a product designed with a full complement of learning tools for the most effective educational experience.

Study carefully the instructor control and interaction with the class – look for active floor control, hand raising, and assistant instructor capabilities.

Examine the tools available to verify student progress – feedback, Q&A, hand raising, and polling. Inquire about flexible and varied content options to match existing and future courseware needs (PowerPoint slides, multimedia courseware, Web-based material, streaming video, shared whiteboard, and shared software applications.)

Find out how students can be tested and how the results are captured and reported.

Look for a variety of communications (audio and videoconferencing – integrated streaming video) to match the learning needs of varied corporate environments and future needs.

Look for a variety of bandwidth options including firewall access and multicasting.

Look for Web-based administration functions.

Consider what security options are available for access to course material and classes.

To Host or Not To Host?

Without going into the details of your specific deployment of live Internet learning, we suggest that one of your first questions be: Who will host – you or the vendor? The LearnLinc virtual classroom is available as a software package, installed on your server(s) and maintained by your IT and training staff, or as a Learning Application Service Provider (ASP), which you access on a per class basis with per student hour pricing.

Here, we will focus on the purchase of a software package that you maintain, support and deploy inside your organization. The next paper in the series will detail the steps for success with the LearnLinc Hosting Service.

How Do We Succeed?

Now your corporation, university, or government organization has decided that online learning is the way to go. The benefits of reduced travel costs, enhanced training delivery, and more effective learning has convinced at least some of management team to invest in technology delivered learning, specifically a live virtual classroom such as LearnLinc. Several staff members have seen a demo and come away excited about the possibilities of a highly interactive, instructor-led learning environment accessible worldwide, from the desktop.

You have been chosen as the leader of this new approach to learning/training and now you ask: How do I go about gathering the support of my employees, co-workers, and supervisors to make a smooth transition and reap the benefits of Internet learning? This paper seeks to outline the challenges, suggest the steps to take, and give you the confidence to be a technology-based learning leader.

Your Role as Key Player

You may be the trainer, the teacher, the business manager, the IT supervisor, or serve any other role in your organization, but if you are not also the Live Internet Learning Key Player, you need to find one. This is the person who has the time, resources, and the support of enough staff to lead the organization in adopting a new and exciting mode of learning.

The Key Player must motivate, coordinate, and steer the organization to be successful with live Internet learning. Our experience with hundreds of customers at the Mentergy has taught us that an internal Key Player is essential for full-scale adoption of live Internet learning.

Convincing the Other Players

The shift to online learning involves many people inside an organization. Try to empower as many departments as possible with the knowledge they need to get behind the project. Here are some tips for internal marketing:

Evangelize and market to all departments and other managers, not just the upper management.

Run constant Demos/Presentations (never stop selling). At the end of one demonstration, mention other opportunities. Use the results from one demo to promote other training events.

Use word of mouth advertising.

Offer free on-line workshops for people to get a feel of the environment. Try before you buy!

Utilize company newsletters, email, correspondence, open houses, etc.

Don't forget the IS and technical support departments. Inform them of the infrastructure needs as early as possible.

Remember to include other training departments in your internal marketing.

Enlist the corporate communications department to get the word out, if possible.

Calculate your online learning ROI, complete with verifiable numbers and costs.

Look for alternative uses for online learning technology: meetings, design groups, Customer/Tech Support, etc.

Your Pilot Program

The pilot is where the "rubber hits the road." Proper planning pays off at this stage. You'll need to employ a "Systems Approach" to

program design, specifying all of the component systems required to make a program successful.

Design the pilot to be representative of the real target audience, including constructive critiques to ensure good design and delivery techniques.

Create a schedule with milestones to be accomplished, and a checklist of hardware components needed, implementation checkpoints, and the expected software learning curve.

Know the demographics and learning characteristics of your audience. You'll want to help the early adopters set limited goals, and provide them with concrete feedback on their goals and accomplishments from a learner perspective.

Training the Trainer

It's important to ensure that all instructors are fully trained and aware of effective practices for teaching in the on-line environment.

Choose instructors who are animated through a voice only medium; they must have a clear speaking voice.

Choose instructors who are flexible, can bring in relevant material on the fly, and can go where the students may lead.

Rehearse all trainers thoroughly and hope that things go wrong (or make things go wrong!) during the rehearsals so they can learn how to cope and gain confidence to carry on even when there are problems. Set-up many practice classes, have trainers train and critique each other

Use a second instructor to help keep track of the class feedback while the first instructor concentrates on teaching.

The Student

Provide clear, concise, logical information to the students in advance regarding how to download the client, how to download ancillary software if needed, and how content will be accessed.

Ensure that there is a provision for students to learn about how to use the system either as a special test session or as an element in the first class.

Establish a single point of contact for students engaged in the education / training process (a centralized student service approach).

Insist on accountability and demonstrated progress for students to remain in the program, and provide recognition for students who do complete and succeed in the training.

Provide the opportunity for informal chat sessions after the formal class is completed. Don't forget to elicit and record student feedback and needs.

Instructional Design

Employ a team approach to course design and content creation, including: the faculty/trainer (content expert), multimedia developer, and instructional designer.

Develop content based on instructional design strategies, and make sure you have clear learning objectives.

Sessions should be kept fairly short - no more than two hours. Never lecture for more than five minutes straight. Break it up with frequent question and answer sessions, interactive exercises, and other techniques.

Use a storyboard template to design and develop your course. If it's in a table format, you will be able to easily ensure that you have incorporated interaction every five minutes.

When creating content, plan for your lowest common denominator. No photo quality graphics if you have students on 28.8 connection. When you use PowerPoint slides, keep the amount of information minimal and confined to key points. Elaborate by discussion, not slide overload.

Design a great deal of interaction into the class. Use polling screens, pass the floor frequently, games, Q and A, feedback, sounds, multimedia clips to involve student and keep their attention. Use sound bites supplied through supplemental computer sources (national anthem, cheering, cartoon voices).

If you know your target audience, customize the materials to give them a sense of identity and inclusion.

Schedule self-paced learning before and after live classes to extend the learning. Text chat can be used to elicit answers or record a discussion. Save the contents for later reference.

An assistant instructor can monitor student text chat and feedback, while the main instructor concentrates on teaching and classroom control.

Logistics

Make sure you do plenty of advance testing. Have a distinct plan for technical trouble shooting during a session. Who does what? Ensure that this is communicated to the student. If possible, have a computer monitor set up next to the instructor showing the student interface so they can keep track of what it looks like on the other end. Have a technical person available to the instructor throughout the class, and consider them a team member to ensure an effective class.

Rolling It Out

Once the pilot is a success, all the hard work will pay off and you will be ready to roll out classes within your department, other departments, and enterprise wide.

If you need help with any phase of the process, let us refer you to the LearnLinc Success Team. Our experience in designing distance

learning solutions has taken us across the U.S., and around the world. We have worked with a wide variety of learning organizations and technologies. As a result, we created the LearnLinc Success Team to take this experience, apply it your organization, and design a unique learning solution that integrates multiple technologies and instructional styles. Once you have purchased LearnLinc, the LearnLinc Success Team can provide the following services:

- Training Department Assessment
- Needs Analysis
- Pilot Project Management
- Installation and Network Configuration
- Instructional Design
- Multimedia Content Development
- "Train the Trainer" Instruction

Take advantage of Mentergy's experience to extend your existing training resources into the computer world! Call us today (801)-325-7850 for rates and a free proposal.