

An Introduction to eLearning

Where do you start when it comes to adding eLearning to your business's learning strategy?

Whether you're from a training company or an internal training department, the benefits of eLearning can't be ignored, especially when considered as part of a 'blended learning' strategy. This ebook will take you through how to get started, creating and delivering eLearning content, using it as part of blended learning and much more.

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Getting Started

The Technology you need to get you started.

The right tools are key components to an effective blended learning strategy. We're proud to have built an industry leading, award winning TMS and LMS, so that's two tasks off your list!

Simply select a Content Authoring Tool and you're off!

- [Training Management System](#) - course management, CRM, reporting, course, sales etc.
- [Learning Management System](#) - the delivery of your course content, your 'eLearning shop window'.
- Content Authoring Tool - create the course material to feed into your LMS.

Why eLearning?

Perhaps you've been delivering classroom based ILT (Instructor Led Training) for years and are a little apprehensive as to how or why to embrace eLearning? The important role the classroom plays in learning will never be in question, but the advantages offered by eLearning certainly warrant consideration of a more blended approach. Take the plunge and you can expect a blended learning strategy to deliver:

Time efficiencies - using eLearning effectively can reduce the face-to-face time required to deliver training (without compromising on course effectiveness). For example, one of our customers managed to reduce an 11 day face-to-face training programme to 5 days face-to-face complemented by additional eLearning time using the Administrate [LMS](#).

Resource efficiencies - reducing face-to-face time should, in theory, allow you more time to focus on developing course materials and/or further teaching.

Improved profitability - if you're a training company, with reductions in both costs and time comes the ability to do more. And more training should = more profit.

Increased reach - take it global, with no need to step on a plane. Web based learning can open up international business opportunities as a training company, or allow training departments to educate staff around the world from a central training hub.

42% of companies surveyed said elearning has led to an increase in revenue

Ambient Insight
Worldwide Learning
Market Report

Flexible scheduling - useful for both teacher and learner; the battle to find a suitable time for everyone becomes less of a challenge. Often helpful in busy working environments when dedicated learning time can be a challenge.

Enhanced learning - use eLearning to help compliment the classroom. Prepare learners before they even step through the classroom doors with some introductory eLearning activity; they'll be warmed up and face-to-face time should be even more productive.

Sold? Fantastic, let's look at selecting a Learning Management System.

LMS selection

Selecting a Learning Management System can seem a little daunting given that there's over 600 out there. Now we might be a little biased, but we think the [Administrate LMS](#) is the way forward here. Especially if you want to adopt eLearning gradually with a blended approach across multiple devices using a cloud based platform that is very simple to integrate.

It's important to remember that the main focus of the LMS tends to be the delivery of content, but not production of course content itself. As you'll know, the quality of course materials are vital to the overall effectiveness of teaching - so equally important as the selection of a quality LMS is finding the right Content Authoring Tool.

Content Authoring Tool selection

When selecting a Content Authoring Tool, it's best to establish your requirements upfront. Firstly, do you opt for a cloud based or installed platform? Cloud-based solutions essentially mean you don't need to install any software. It's quick to get started and you'll always have the latest version, but you'll need an internet connection to use them. Our software is cloud-based so we're very much advocates of this approach. It removes many of the headaches associated with the setup of new systems and processes, giving you the time to focus on what you do best. Installed platforms need to be physically installed on your computers, servers etc. and updated when new versions are released (possibly at additional cost), but can be used without any internet connection.

Next, how many of you will be authoring content? If there's a team of

Learning through elearning typically requires 40-60% less employee time

than learning the same material in a traditional classroom setting.

Brandon-Hall Study

educators who'll be authoring content regularly, or a mix of authors and reviewers working on content production then a cloud based solution will very likely be your best bet as these lend themselves best to collaboration.

What about your learners? How will they be accessing your content - mobile? tablets? Will you be taking a [BYOD](#) (Bring Your Own Device) approach to eLearning? If you think it's quite likely that they'll want to learn on the move, on their own devices, then it's definitely worth considering a Content Authoring Tool that allows you to create content in (or convert content to) HTML 5 rather than Flash. Flash isn't supported on many mobile/tablet devices and appears to be a [dying content format](#), whilst HTML 5 is the relatively new kid on the block, establishing itself as the de facto format of choice in eLearning content production.

One caveat to be aware of is that HTML 5 launched as a markup language in October 2014 and as such, there's limited support by older web browsers (e.g. Internet Explorer 8 and lower), something to be aware of if a lot of your learners could be using older systems/platforms.

Also important to factor in is compliance with two very important acronyms; [SCORM](#) and [xAPI](#). For those not in the know, SCORM stands for Sharable Content Object Reference Model, which essentially means 'content that can be shared across systems'. This, coupled with xAPI (also known as the Tin Can API) ensures a uniformity in the way that content is handled by eLearning software products (like your LMS). Why are there two? Tin Can effectively supersedes the older format, SCORM, although there's a [bit more to it than that](#).

Narrowing your selection

Where can you find your new content creation wizard? Here's a few to get you started.

- [iSpring](#)
- [Elucidat](#)
- [Easygenerator](#)
- [Adobe Captivate](#)
- [Articulate Storyline 2](#)

Content Creation

Getting started with content creation

Now that you're ready to get started creating content, you need to do know how to make the most of your Content Authoring Tool and how to form effective eLearning material. Here are some key pointers:

Linear versus asynchronous

Before you get started, decide on whether you want your training course to be delivered in order, bit-by-bit, or offer learners the flexibility of completing the course asynchronously in whatever order they decide. This may well have a significant impact on the content itself and could result in you opting for a '[building blocks](#)' approach whereby you create smaller pieces of content. These can then be re-purposed to be used within future courses - a handy time saver!

Estimate time investment

Providing a table of contents at the start of your training course helps better establish the investment of time required for a learner to complete your training. It helps reassure them that they can fit the course into their busy schedules and stops them guesstimating about how long it'll take. You don't want a learner to take one look at your course and exclaim 'that looks like it's going to take me days' before clicking away in despair!

Why not go one further and add estimated timings to the different sections of your content? For example, 'part 1 will take you 15 minutes', 'part 2 30 minutes' and so on. The popular self publishing platform [Medium](#) employs this to great effect, letting visitors know how long it will take to read an article before they get started.

Forget Powerpoint!

We've all sat through a 'death by Powerpoint' presentation. One-way presentations are not always the most engaging and don't really facilitate interaction. If a picture speaks a thousand words, then how many does a video deliver? According to a recent [Hubspot](#) article:

"59% of senior executives agree that if both text and video are available on the same topic on the same page, they prefer to watch the video"

Select a content authoring tool that supports video to help improve course engagement. Better still, choose one that allows you to capture video right into the authoring tool itself. That way you can use a webcam to create a video introduction or quick congratulatory message with some follow up activity once a learner completes a course - perfect for adding a personal touch to your training! However, give people the option of text or video so that they can choose their preferred method of learning. Some people may be learning on their commute, without headphones, so could opt for the text version and others could just prefer reading to watching.



Don't forget mobiles and tablets!

Most modern eLearning solutions will offer support for mlearning (mobile learning) with responsively designed platforms that adapt course material to the size of the screen being used. This is exactly what you want to ensure a consistent cross-device learning experience, but it's important to consider the experience of those navigating your course on mobile and tablet.

We've spent a lot of time [optimising](#) the delivery of content through our LMS to ensure it's super-quick, no matter where you are in the world. However, if the majority of people are accessing your courses on smaller screens, there's a few things you can do to help improve their experience when creating content:

- Consider the amount of text you use - thumbing through pages and pages can get a little tiring.

Content Creation

- Make calls-to-action that little big bigger - tapping a tiny button on a touch screen can be a real headache!
- Try to keep file sizes smaller - big files (e.g. large images) can lead to longer loading times on slower mobile connections, use tools like Photoshop's 'save for web' to keep these down.

Ensure brand consistency

You've spent a lot of time, blood, sweat and tears creating a brand - it's your identity and differentiates your training product and team from your competitors. Chances are it's emblazoned on your website, business cards, stationery and more. So, don't forget your brand when it comes to creating eLearning content! Don't compromise your design and be sure to [brand your content and your LMS](#) to create a consistent learning experience both on and offline.

Proof it, proof it, then proof it again

It may sound a little obvious but the importance of having an internal proofing process when authoring content cannot be underestimated. In our experience, there's nothing worse than when a learner fixates on a spelling mistake in their course, rather than the subject matter itself. A top-tip is to have someone else read your content after you've created it, rather than try to proof it yourself, as we're all [notoriously bad at spotting our own typos!](#)

Ready to create? Experiment!

The detail is in the data. Why not split test your training? Send 50 learners to version 1 of your training course and 50 to version 2, which has a slight variation. Perhaps you've added some videos to introduce each section, or allowed students to complete the course asynchronously rather than in order. Use [reporting](#) to determine which course resulted in a higher pass rate or quicker course completion and take these learnings forward into future content creation.

eLearning Twist

Adding an eLearning twist to 'traditional' learning

So far in our introduction to eLearning, we've covered the [selection of appropriate eLearning tools](#) as well as shared some [tips on authoring better eLearning content](#).

In this final part, we're looking at ways to adapt traditional learning delivery approaches to include an eLearning twist.

Go beyond the course

A diverse range of students can make using a classroom only approach challenging - how do you accommodate preferences for different styles of learning or students learning at different speeds? Incorporating eLearning can help compliment your class syllabus for those students who are progressing faster than others. Provide additional course branches for faster learners to help them develop a deeper understanding around a subject or simply let them progress quicker through the course with a more self-paced approach to learning. Some of your students may never actually complete the eLearning element, but it's there as an avenue for those who may get bored if they can't progress.

Help your learners play catchup

Conversely to the above, what about those who are struggling to keep up with the rest of the class? Some face-to-face time will help you understand why they're finding things more challenging, but why not offer them the option of running through some recapping material through eLearning? They may be struggling with a concept in a class environment where there are always going to be distractions, so give them a route to follow up independently and help cement their learning.



Flip the classroom entirely

Instead of using classroom time to deliver your training and asking learners to complete assignments independently, why not use eLearning to completely flip this and do the reverse? If your training lasts 3 or 4 sessions, why not try delivering one session using video

through a Learning Management System and running the follow up assignment in the classroom? Give students the option to ask questions after they've viewed your video and cover these at the start of your classroom time before moving on to the assignment itself. Evaluate performance with a similar group who complete their course exclusively in the classroom and [measure the impact](#) on pass rates.

Deliver your training remotely

One of the main advantages of eLearning is the that you're not constrained to a bricks and mortar building - you have the option to deliver your training remotely. This can be especially important in situations where traditional Instructor Led Training (ILT) may not be logistically possible. Perhaps there's no physical room to accommodate a large group for training, the environment doesn't lend itself well to learning (noise, heat etc.) or there's challenges or considerable cost in actually getting an instructor to the location. ELearning ensures that even in instances such as this, investment

into your staff's training and development is still entirely possible if you change the method of delivery.

Tell a different story

Stories are fantastically effective at captivating our minds. They're [proven to activate parts of the brain](#) that aren't normally sparked by more basic presentation of information, helping engage learners in a way that transcends simply reading similar information from a presentation slide alone.

"The brain, it seems, does not make much of a distinction between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life"

Annie Murphy Paul, [NY Times](#)

Recounting a story about a real life scenario or experience will likely result in a greater affinity and emotional connection with the learner. This can be particularly useful in scenario based training, for example when providing training on sales techniques. An instructor detailing past experiences is likely to be much more effective than learners reading a series of bullet points discussing best practice selling techniques.

Storytelling has long been used in traditional class room environments with good effect, but what if you could move beyond the constraints of Powerpoint only? Use eLearning to elaborate on your story with embedded video, social media updates, interactive quizzes etc. The story suddenly becomes interactive and perhaps more relatable to your audience.

Use Project-Based Learning

Traditionally involving a team-based classroom approach, [Project-based Learning](#) (PBL), challenges students, to acquire a deeper knowledge around a particular real-world challenge or problem through developing their investigative and problem solving skills.

The wealth of digital resources available online make eLearning an ideal channel with which to deliver a similar PBL experience to that of the classroom. However, why not mix things up with a flipped classroom approach to PBL? Students find out the nature of the problem to be solved and any supporting materials through eLearning, outside of the class, and come to class excited to work as

eLearning Twist

part of a team to collectively find a solution. Well designed course content may well hint at further reading to encourage active learning outside of the core syllabus and whet appetites in advance of class based discussion. Reduce '[social loafing](#)', whereby some team members may exert less effort on a task if they are in a group versus working alone, by setting individual eLearning assignments.

Delivering eLearning

It's important to remember that a 'one size fits all' approach to incorporating eLearning isn't advisable. It's often best to run a pilot course including a portion of eLearning to see if it works for you and your learners first, before potentially rolling out it's wider use in other courses.

Finally, while we're big advocates of using eLearning within training programmes, we also recognise the use of [Instructor Led Training remains vital](#). With increased adoption of eLearning, ILT and face-to-face time with your learners may well be reduced. However, the time you do spend in front of your learners should be much more effective as a result, allowing you to achieve more meaningful progress within the classroom.

Would you like a demo of our LMS?

We'd love to show you how the Administrate LMS (Learning Management System) and TMS (Training Management System) can help you to deliver elearning as part of your blended learning approach. If you'd like a demo, please do get in touch:

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