

Pfizer:

Moving Product Sales Training Online



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– Tim Kern, Pfizer



BY MICHELLE EGGLESTON

Innovation is the creation of better or more effective products, processes or ideas. In the pharmaceutical industry, this equates to the creation of medicines to treat diseases and find cures for health care challenges that face our society. At Pfizer, innovation does not stop in the research and product sectors, but has flowed into the business of learning to push product sales training out of the “dark ages” of the classroom and into the proverbial virtual light.

Pfizer is the world’s largest research-based pharmaceutical company. Once prescription medications are discovered, developed, FDA approved and ready for distribution, it’s up to the sales team to effectively and compliantly sell these drugs to providers. But before any sales can be made, training must first take place.

With roughly 6,000 learners in product sales at Pfizer and with large scale change occurring more frequently in the pharmaceutical industry, it was becoming economically impractical to retrain employees in the classroom. Tim Kern, vice president of training at Pfizer, is overseeing this virtual transformation, along with 20 other members of the product sales training team.

Until November 2010, application training for product sales was uniquely classroom-based, a format Pfizer was succeeding at. When the idea sparked to move the classroom online, stakeholders remained uncertain of the shift.

“We were almost a victim of our own success as a hall of fame training organization with the prevailing attitude of ‘Don’t fix what’s



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not broken,” said Kern. “It was a blend of the perfect storm of how to keep cost down while continuing to meet training needs.”

This figurative tug of war between classroom versus virtual was taking shape, prompting the idea to put the stakeholders through a virtual training course to fully see it, feel it, participate in it. Not only did the stakeholders’ mindset need to shift, but the company culture needed to be open to other delivery channels as well. The workforce played a large part in the reason to go

virtual.

“In today’s workforce many have two working family members and can’t easily leave home,” said Ron Schanze, senior director and team leader of Pfizer representative training. “The workforce was used to learning in a virtual format if they’ve gone for MBA or undergraduate degrees online and they were more than accepting of it, even more so than the business in general.”

Once stakeholders, including Compliance, approved the method and saw the

positive metrics from the pilot, the program launched, propelling the Pfizer training program into the virtual world. The first virtual training event yielded \$3 million in cost avoidance. The quantitative metrics were also met with high marks, matching those of classroom-based training with ratings of 4.0 to 4.1 on a 5-point scale. With a successful launch under its belt, Pfizer was now a part of this virtual world.

“What’s been interesting is the quantitative metrics topped it off, which many

ABOUT ... Tim Kern



Title/Company: Vice President Training, Pfizer

How Long Have You Been in Your Current Post? 7 Years

What Are Your Top Focus Areas? How training supports the transformation of the Commercial Model in Pharmaceutical Sales.

Who is Your Professional Role Model? Do not have a single role model, I try to learn from the best leaders. Every leader has different strengths and areas of development.

Any Words of Inspiration for Future Training Leaders? The job has never been more important!

If I Weren’t in Learning, I’d... be coaching or training standard bred horses.

ABOUT ... Ron Schanze



Title/Company: Senior Director, Team Leader/ Pfizer Representative Training

How Long Have You Been in Your Current Post? 14 Years

What Are Your Top Focus Areas?

1) Utilizing technology to provide training with identical metrics to Classroom training.

2) Providing flexible product and sales training solutions in a rapidly changing business environment.

Who is Your Professional Role Model? I like to learn from multiple leaders across many different industries. I admire those leaders that have overcome adversity and are inspirational in transforming their companies/organizations to a new level of performance.

Any Words of Inspiration for Future Training Leaders?

“Adversity elicits talent and innovation which under prosperous conditions may have remained dormant.”

If I Weren’t in Learning, I’d... be selling in a highly technical field.

thought they would and then you read the qualitative metrics about how you kept people off planes, got them back to their territories faster and how much more appreciative the learners were, coupled with how much you saved; it's a pretty amazing story," said Kern.

Credit for these high metrics goes in part to Pfizer's willingness to learn from Wyeth, which it acquired a few years prior. While Pfizer was already heading in the direction of virtual training, it was able to effectively leverage Wyeth's online training best practices to accelerate its launch and make it a success.

"As people look at the evolution of the overall pharmaceutical business model, they re-examine all aspects, including training," said Schanze. "Therefore that allows you to make change that before was not possible."

The training team looked at all aspects of its training program following the timeline of an employee's career pathway. Any kind of application training that used to require classroom training as it relates

to products was converted to the virtual platform. The onboarding application classes are currently in this format, but the advanced classes will follow suit and be added in the near future. This analysis has prompted them to re-evaluate the basic knowledge points and how to deliver those aspects.

"This is not the death of classroom training. It's important to see where this delivery methodology is the right choice and see where you can go without degrading any of the applications or metrics," said Kern. There is cost savings right away but there is a need for a blended approach. For product training, it was a great story where we can leverage the virtual classroom."

Through a blended approach, Pfizer is offering different delivery methods to meet the training needs of its employees and the business. The product sales training makeup is currently 90 percent online; with 50 percent e-learning, 40 percent live virtual training and less than 10 percent training in the classroom.

Regardless of the delivery method, the quality of the content and participant interaction has not been sacrificed with this shift. Pfizer is utilizing Adobe Connect to allow the participants to interact and communicate with the instructor and other attendees. Everything that would appear in the live classroom is now in the virtual classroom.

"Virtual training is going to evolve and be the centerpiece of how people learn," said Schanze. Attendees are happy not to travel, stakeholders are happy with the metrics and the business has found an innovative, compliance-focused and economical approach to take training to the next level.

"This has changed training at Pfizer forever, at least how we do sales training with products," said Kern. "It would be like going back to horse and buggy versus the car."

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