Have You Done Your 2015 Learning Tech Tune-up? (Nov 14)

by Donna Wells

November 6, 2014

"Despite the time- and resource-constraints we all face—and even because of them—it's never been more important to do a disciplined review of your training program's past performance. And its strengths and needs relative to the three key success criteria of measurement, innovation, and feedback. Performing this annual maintenance sets you up for a fast start in the New Year—and success in driving increased learning and business impact down the road."

We're deep into the fourth quarter and the mad dash to year's end is officially underway. Your organization is likely under more pressure than ever before to hit business goals. And, hopefully, you are feeling better equipped than ever before to help your company reach those milestones through training. Or are you? With the rapid pace of change in both the technologies and the skills required to drive organizational success today—your training approach warrants at least the same regular "tune up" that your car does. After all, you should expect both to be high-performing machines.

But in our "do more with less" business environment today it's inevitable that many of us are not doing a regular assessment of our training programs' impact. We invest the initial time and effort to select a training method and create course materials only to let it run unquestioned for much too long. If you agree that training should evolve with the needs of your business—and your chief executive—but don't know where to begin, here's a checklist to get you started.

A seven-point inspection for your training program

Over the past 12 months:

1. What feedback have you received from trainees and executives? What areas for improvement have you identified?
2. What improvements in business metrics can you attribute to training? What new metrics has the organization adopted this year to which training needs to respond? If you're still working toward mapping training to bottom-line results, what is the most important metric you could impact and report against next year?
3. How often did you update course materials? Is your turn-around time on new materials aligned with the organization's pace of business? If not, is that due to your existing content-authoring tools, or your process for capturing SME input, or both?
4. Was your training able to grow with the organization's needs at a reasonable cost? Which higher cost, live-training programs (either in-classroom or web-based) are candidates to move to

blended learning or 100 percent online delivery? Which repetitive training courses are candidates to move to on-demand channels?

5. Are your trainees receiving a consistent experience? How are your course-creation processes, staffing, or other circumstances impacting your ability to ensure trainees are getting uniform experiences regardless of location, role, or function?
6. Are you reaching the right populations with your training? If your company added new channels or customer segments this year, were you able to include those new resellers, customers, and employees in your training?
7. Do you provide mobile training? Are your courses available to trainees in the places and on the devices they prefer to use? If so, what improvement in course completion rates did you see as a result? If not, what improvement in compliance might be achievable next year from expanded channels and points of access?

The three most critical success factors

Armed with the answers to these checklist questions, you're now prepared to act on the three critical elements of a successful training program, based on best practices from a variety of companies.

- **Measuring the impact of training on business outcomes.** While that "new car smell" of new courseware is great, it's critical to your program's long-term success that you can compare training results to actual business outcomes. Reports limited to the number of training hours completed are *not* going to interest your CEO. What will fascinate her, though, is a report correlating the sales increase shown by employees who completed training vs. those who did not. Technologies that can track trainee results in one organized database from which you can easily export reports help make it easier for you to generate business-based metrics. Bluebeam Software was able to show that resellers of their software who completed all levels of training showed a remarkable 400 percent business growth.
- **Innovating to ensure increasing cost efficiency.** Training leaders who continually challenge the status quo and deliver more and better training each year, at the same or even declining costs per hour of training, are champions in the eyes of the C-suite. Fortunately, several technologies make scaling your program much easier than before. Rapid content-authoring tools are just one example. Advances in video-conferencing quality and cost can be another big factor. I recommend targeting 20 percent improvement in training efficiency annually: lower costs by 20 percent or increase volume by 20 percent. As one example, by taking an innovative approach to the course creation and delivery processes through rapid development and scalable delivery technology, Kofax (a global software company with more than 1250 employees based in 48 countries) decreased the cost of training by 80%; that probably made the end-of-year budget discussion with the CEO pretty easy.
- **Capturing and acting on trainee feedback.** Interaction among trainees and between the trainee and trainer can be equally or more important to achieving the desired learning outcomes as the course content itself. And whether your training is live, blended, or online, you'll want to capture data on the types of questions trainees ask, on areas of the content that are not readily understood, or that are perceived as low value. And then use that information to improve the next training experience. Companies that establish and act on a dialog with their trainees produce better content and get better learning outcomes, in our experience.

Despite the time- and resource- constraints we all face—and even because of them—it has never been more important to do a disciplined review of your training program's past performance and its strengths and needs relative to the three key success criteria of measurement, innovation and feedback. Performing this annual maintenance sets you up for a fast start in the New Year—and success in driving increased learning and business impact down the road.

Learning Solutions Magazine, ©2014 eLearning Guild