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## Stop training your staff – or have you already?

### The Truth- like it or not – measurable income from day one!

In times of economic downturn the first budget often to get hit is the training budget. Of course trainers will say this is short sighted, however the truth is that like it or not, training is a cost. The feeling from the people holding the money strings is, there is no tangible income one can attribute directly to training.

There have been too many promises, especially with eLearning spanning almost 20 years, which have not really delivered. The board is no longer interested in this magical fix and therefore the capital expenditure willing to be made in years gone past, is no longer available. Your budget has just become a part of someone else's budget. Time to turn that around, don't you think?

We can fool ourselves and you can think Kirkpatrick, however Kirkpatrick never wrote a single word about ROI. What is thought of as Kirkpatrick level 5 was written by Jack Phillips of the ROI Institute and don't get me wrong, it's a great set of tools to evaluate training already delivered, with 3000 people having spent good money to get accredited in how to calculate it.

Bob Mosher wrote in CLO Magazine:

... the journey to true ROI is actually divided into two parts:

- Mastery, or a learner's ability to demonstrate gained knowledge.
- Competency, or a learner's ability to effectively apply what they've learned to their job or work environment.

I have been pushing the three stages of real learning as **'Information – Comprehension – Application'** not too dissimilar from my esteemed friend.

Both of these views however are quite clearly after the event. So promising an ROI to your purse string holder, before you start out on the road to delivery, is as far as they are concerned, a bit of a long shot.

Further we have seen huge cuts in staffing levels in some industries. Public Sector in the UK has reduced by a factor of 10 in some departments. Let's face the truth; there is just very little money to spend on new training at the moment.

So how do we convince the stakeholders that there will be a measurable return? That we can offer training that will hit a spot so directly that they will be able to measure the income from day one?

## Measurable Return

Now my title may seem somewhat controversial.

### Stop training your staff: or have you already?

Before I explain, I want to be upfront and say the concept I offer does not work across the board, (this won't work in system training, but for that I have alternative views) but there are real places where it can be invaluable and can turn an intangible training cost into a measurable return.

Shall I say the heading again a little louder so the boss can hear it? Yes I did say '**measurable return**' on every penny you put into your new-style training budget.

There will be some pain of course with some not so simple changes, more like sweeping change to be honest. That probably sounds scary, but the time has come that we all need to make big changes and if we are going to do so, then why not just do it once and properly. These changes are easily manageable and should start to show results very quickly.

### Stop training your staff

Yes you heard me, I am not crazy, why train your staff when you can spend the valuable budget to train your potential clients instead?

The scenario...

Consider what would happen if your clients or potential clients had available to them everything they needed to know about your product or services, really understood them and were willing to apply them to their own businesses? **You would make a sale!** Would you need to provide anything else to your own staff other than the same material and a backchannel for communication?

For those of you who knee jerked and said, 'don't be ridiculous, of course you need to train your staff more fully...' let me give you a couple of examples of customer training with measurable outcome, or income!

First let's take a look at Apple Inc. and namely the recent launch of iPad2.

- Apple staff had no sight of the product or any more details than the general public until the day of release.
- Apple started an educational rumour machine some weeks earlier with what became general knowledge by the release date.
- The papers, magazines, websites all had details of what the pundits and media commentators thought the new product would contain. Amazing how close they were.
- On release day Steve Jobs stood up in his black shirt with blue jeans and told the world what it already knew.
- On the day the product hit the shops, they queued from 2am outside most stores.

Not one of the people in the line was there to ask about the CPU, they all knew it was the A5. (who cared what an A5 was or what it did, but it had one and they knew it)

None of the people in the line were there to ask about resolution, memory, carrier, Smart-Cover or anything else about the product.

They were in the line to purchase a product (or even two) they had never even seen. Each and every one was so happy when they found out they were to get one of these products, some jumped for joy. Three weeks later the lines still continued with arguments outside shops on a daily basis.

Could Apple Inc., measure the success of their client-training program? You bet they could. They did no other form of actual advertising before release.

Apple Inc., sold 1.7 million iPhone 4's in the first 3 days and 3 million iPad 2's in the first month. (They would have sold twice that number if they could have made them). As for iPhone 4s, they sold almost 4 million in the first 3 days.

Compare this to Motorola's Xoom Android tablet, hoping to topple iPad's supremacy, advertised with normal old fashioned techniques, which was outsold some say by 260:1 in the first 3 days. Not heard of a Xoom? Think I may have proved a point!

Second, let's take a look at Toyota in the USA.

Their site is very clever. It is based on a good old LCMS and some cleverly designed learning material.

When you go to the 'build a car' part of the site, you are first asked for your zip code. Then you choose your course... sorry car type...

You then follow through the material and make some choices. Engine type, Colour, Trim, Extras... The whole time the car is being graphically built, you are given information and explanations of the benefits of each area and the price is being shown. You learn all about hybrid, and other technical terms and all of this from your armchair at home.

At the end of the course, sorry sales pitch, you are given a quote for your car, and asked for your personal details. You then choose your nearest dealer and book the experiential test drive at your

selection from given times and dates.

Sounds like a fun interactive site? Yes it is, I learned loads about a Toyota.

Well there is more to it than you see on the surface. The salesman is ready for you when you arrive. He knows from the reporting of the LCMS, or was it a LMS?, exactly what you looked at, engine type, trim, colour etc.. Bet your bottom dollar that exact vehicle is sitting outside the showroom, engine warmed up ready for your experience. The print out he has from your visit to the LMS shows the dealer everything they already taught you. What you looked at, the decisions you made, how you reduced the cost by taking out the things you may have wanted but could not afford. All he has to do is let you drive it and talk about finance options. While showing you all those lovely extras you already removed for the upsell.

How did the dealer learn about the car? Using the very same software you did online. How do I know? I was involved in the building of very similar software for another Japanese carmaker.

Two different scenarios of learning, and both very measurable in sales, profit to the bottom line of the company. This is what the CFO is after when you want a slice of the budget. Some have forgotten, we go to work – to work, not just to do eLearning and become more efficient!

### So what's the change? Seven steps to success...

Time to be a little controversial for some, for others this may be the breath of fresh air you have been waiting for.

- **Resource Identification.** The people in your organisation best suited to creating materials for customers, from which they learn about your products and services, are not the marketing or sales department. It is the training department. This department spends all day creating learning so others are better informed, have comprehension and can apply what they have learned. Typically today the sales and marketing is conducted by people with no knowledge of how to transfer learning in this way. Identify those who will make the best team.
- **Move your trainers.** Move this team from your training department now under the control of HR to be under the control of MarCom. This is the area where customer-facing material is made and they will have a very different input and budget to HR.
- **Decide your assessment tool.** The methods you are going to assess results of your new customer training are very important. Consider at this early stage the methods you will use to prove success of your material. This type of training is measure in real results not numbers completing courses.
- **New techniques require new methodology.** Delivering material to the end user or potential customer requires a slight change in mindset for the trainer. New instructional design techniques and knowledge will be required. Give your team the education they need.
- **Understand the user.** The expectation of the user is going to be different to that of a staff member and you need to understand the user from a sales and marketing place. So spend some time to identify who the user is. Working under MarCom will give you a wealth of information in this area that already exists and was never used by the training department before. However remember, the end user will learn in exactly the same way.
- **Make your LMS friendly and exciting.** Your LMS was probably designed for internal staff, it looks and feels like a learning space. The front end and delivery needs to reflect who is receiving

the content. Go look at Toyota's site, you would never believe you were on the front edge of a LMS.

- **Don't forget your staff.** Your staff still needs to learn from the same material; they need to know what the client or potential customer is finding out. Use their questions to tailor a backchannel and offer them the social links required to discuss the content and clients methods of using the content, without too much restriction.

## Conclusions

The truth is already out there, however we can continue to bury our heads in the sand or we can become proactive to make change. We are all aware that there is a vast difference between training and learning and not everything can be delivered so the user self learns. We still need to deliver training, many are returning to what I heard referred to as 'old fashioned' training. How funny they were considering reusing the classroom. Some of us never stopped!

We must be willing to accept that we have all made mistakes by trying to cut costs and create cheaper delivery. It has been one of the biggest selling points over the last 10 years.

We have to accept that lower budgets should not mean poorer content. The statistics available from end users is quite clear as to what they like and what they do not. What they will spend time doing and what they consider is a waste of time. Look at this information and make great decisions for the future.

Understand how your clever competition will make use of tools you have already in your possession and turn these tools to work for you to create a measurable return on your investment in your business, be it by starting with those who bring the money in or not.

**Have you stopped training your staff? Are you ready to start now?**