

# VIRTUAL LEARNING

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While the world of training and development has tried to offer creative and compelling ways of delivering webinar training, the truth is that it can be a struggle to keep a group of learners engaged through webinar alone.

A training course without a physical training room does not have to mean a lifeless webinar. Virtual learning is not simply eLearning courses where participants click through slide after slide of content. It is a vibrant methodology that brings the classroom experience online, providing camaraderie, engagement and ultimately a better outcome for the learner.

When well executed, virtual learning can offer:

- Efficiency in terms of development time; it is a highly scalable platform.
- A budget-friendly option, particularly for geographically dispersed teams.
- Consistent messaging across the learning eco-system. This helps spread and embed key competencies without sacrificing engagement levels.

When the decision is made to move to virtual learning, there are key guidelines to keep in mind.

## Selecting your virtual learning platform

When researching platform options, look for the features that will enhance the training environment you are creating. This can include the ability to host your content, create break-out discussion rooms, deliver assessments and surveys, and bring a class together via voice over IP.

## Start the show with a pilot

Take time to practice or pilot your program. Find willing participants to test and trial the technology; this will uncover any oversights in the setup and content delivery.

## Sell it to the doubters

Be prepared for naysayers who expect a bricks and mortar training room. Prepare supporting data around the program's success and the resulting improvement in performance.

Developing a 'learn to learn online' session can work well so that groups become familiar with the technology. Strong upfront communication ensures each participant knows what to expect.

## Deliver activities with impact

Think of the current openers, closers and energisers you use; find ways of transferring these activities to the online space. Become creative in how you structure your sessions by thinking virtually to hold the attention of participants.

## Develop a virtual voice

Virtual learning reduces the ability to gauge body language. Video chat can help, but it is vital that your voice is modulated to reflect the themes and mood of the session. Think of yourself as a radio announcer who needs to convey everything through the power of voice.

## A moderator's job is never done

Pre-recording sessions and distributing a link is a great way to ensure everyone receives the same message - even if they could not make the original event. While this makes sense on the surface, a successful Virtual Learning Moderator will ensure that everyone has active involvement, even if it is after the session has completed. This means engaging with those who watched the video versus attending live. Develop a discussion group to answer questions and encourage participants dialogue.

## Emphasise the visual

Virtual learning is highly visual. Keep the pace moving and the images changing; short, concise slides are key to maintaining engagement. A successful virtual learning moderator will move through a slide in 30-60 seconds.

## The video trap

Embedded video can be very powerful. Do not rely too heavily on video unless you can combat the disruptive 'buffering' that happens when large groups of people try to upload the same video from the same computer server. Consider sending out links to videos as pre-work, so participants view the content before arriving to the session.

## Use the feedback

Asking if participants enjoyed a particular session is a standard way to obtain high-level feedback, but find ways of improving your survey. Use detailed answers to determine what went well, and where improvements can be made.

## Micro-bite learning

Keep live sessions short. A key way of giving out lots of content in a small amount of time is to host a resources section on the virtual learning platform. Summaries, copies of content that was shared, and even a transcript of the video are ways of providing relevant resources that will continue to engage learners after the session has ended.

Virtual learning is the future of the industry, and successful trainers will need to add these techniques to their toolkit to rapidly emerging technology is set to become a core part of modern, engaging learning practises.

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