

# The Tagoras Collection



## **3 Tips for Selling More E-learning**

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I've worked for and run companies that sell online learning, and over the years I have helped numerous associations and other organizations to develop and distribute e-learning. In many cases, in spite of these organizations having created high quality content that aligned to the needs of their markets, actual sales of the products did not initially meet expectations. There is no one size fits all answer to this issue, but in this article I cover three areas where I find less successful organizations often fall short.

## Validation Matters

Most people value high quality content, and most professionals – myself included – will strongly agree that lifelong learning is intrinsically rewarding. But we're all busy, and we face innumerable choices about how to spend our time, online or off.

All else being equal, prospective learners are simply more likely to choose an e-learning offering that **validates** their time in some way. Usually this means offering continuing education credit (CE, CEU, CME, CPE, etc.) or some form of proof that the learner has met a compliance or credentialing (including certification) requirement.

A critical twist on this rule is that the segment of your market that cares the most about credit is likely to be the easiest source of sales. If a particular audience needs a certain amount of credit to obtain or maintain a particular credential, the convenience of e-learning – already a strong part of its value proposition – becomes even more powerful.

Many organizations may be able to take this value proposition even further by providing more convenient ways for learners to manage their ongoing continuing education credits. This might mean facilitating the process of submitting credits to accrediting bodies, or providing a portfolio option that enables learners to accumulate and manage diverse credit activities – not just ones from your organization – in a single place.

In general, organizations should:

- offer credit for e-learning if at all possible,
- forefront the availability of credit in their marketing efforts, and
- target a significant part of their marketing effort to segments that care most about credit.

While all of this may seem obvious, I have found again and again that organizations do not *execute* as well as they might in this area.

And what if an organization is not prepared to provide these types of validation? Can it still succeed?

Yes, but in my experience this tends to happen only when all or a significant part of an organization's audience demonstrates a "self-validating" tendency. Education and training professionals, for example, tend to place a much higher intrinsic value on ongoing professional development than individuals in most other fields. Members of this group may be more willing to pay for e-learning they perceive to be of high quality even in the absence of the types of validation described here.

In general, however, success without validation is more the exception than the rule.

## Big Sales Can Make a Big Difference

Many organizations, I have found, tend to think in terms of sales to individuals. This is particularly true of organizations that sell memberships on an individual basis or that follow a business-to-consumer (B2C) rather than a business-to-business (B2B) model. Even these organizations, however, can often find other organizations within their markets that represent relatively large groups of potential course participants.

Consider, for instance, if your market is nurses. Even if your members or customers

are individuals, are there potentially sales to be made to hospitals or HMOs? Or if your audience is accountants, or human resources professionals – large companies are full of them.

You get the idea. It may take some time to determine your best targets, but securing a handful of “**bulk**” sales from large organizations can often take considerably less time and effort than selling the equivalent amount on a one-by-one basis to individuals.

Securing sales from larger organizational purchasers requires actively and effectively marketing to these groups. It also requires a certain amount of direct, personal selling – an activity that is generally absent from e-learning sales to individuals. I suspect this requirement is why many organizations do not pursue larger, B2B-type sales very aggressively, if at all: They do not have someone on staff who plays a direct sales role, and the director of education or whoever is in charge of e-learning products does not think of himself or herself as a salesperson.

In my experience, most people are capable of selling something that they know and care about. It’s a matter of establishing a relationship and explaining the value of what you offer. If you are an established organization in your field, chances are you already have good relationships to tap. If you aren’t, more work will be required, but it is the sort of work you will need to be doing anyway to establish your presence and brand in the market.

None of this is to say that you should abandon trying to increase your volume of sales to individuals – but focusing on securing a smaller number of larger sales can really help to jumpstart an e-learning program.

## Landing Pages Must Convert

Of course, for most organizations, there is still the issue of driving smaller transactions through their Web sites. To make this

happen, you have to attract potential buyers to your Web site. This can certainly be a challenge, but in general I find that attracting traffic is not the most significant barrier that organizations have to achieving higher e-learning sales. A more significant issue is not understanding how to use **landing pages** effectively to convert those visitors once they arrive.

So what’s a landing page? It’s what most organizations will think of as the description page for a particular course in their catalog. It’s the place where, ideally, you should be communicating the value of the course offering and converting a prospective buyer into an actual buyer.

A landing page is where the action is when it comes to selling products online. It’s usually the last place a visitor “lands” on your site before clicking the “Buy” button, and often it is the first place as well. If a user finds a particular course offering through a Google search, for instance, she may go straight to the page in your site with information about that course – i.e., the landing page for that course – and never see anything else in the site. The stakes are high – you need to get that user to click “Buy” while she’s on that page, or you may lose her forever.

So what’s to be done? Here are ten tips for making sure your landing pages convert:

### 1. Use concise, benefit-driven headlines

A good landing page will have a heading at the beginning of it – i.e., large, bold text – that gives the visitor an idea of what she will find on the page. Don’t just use the title of the course for this: state concisely a major benefit the visitor will receive from the course. Speak to what you feel your prospective learners care most about.

### 2. Put the important stuff “Above the fold”

“Above the fold” simply means the area of the screen that most people see in their browser without having to scroll. People tend to focus on what is at the beginning of a page, and to a lesser extent, what is at the

end – they are likely to skim most of the rest. If you offer credit or some other form of validation for the course, make sure that is obvious along with other key benefits. A testimonial and picture above the fold can also be highly valuable (see below). Finally, you *usually* want a clear “call to action” above the fold.

(Whether the call to action is above the fold or further down will vary according to factors like the complexity of the product, price of the product, and how users arrive on the page. In general, the more costly and more complex the product and the “newer” the visitor, the more likely the call to action will need to be further down the page – after you have provided the visitor with compelling reasons to take action.)

### 3. Have a clear call to action

A “call to action” is simply your request that the visitor *do* something – and usually this means clicking a “Buy” button to make a purchase. As noted above, you usually want to make sure this call to action appears above the fold. You should also repeat it at least once on the page (generally at the end), and perhaps more than once, depending on how long your copy is.

### 4. Lead with a strong value proposition

I find that many organizations simply launch into a description of the course content at the beginning of their landing pages. It is important, of course, to have good descriptive content, but a potential purchaser cares much more about the value he will derive from the content. What problem does it help the prospect solve? What new doors will it open? Make that clear – and make it clear above the fold.

### 5. Focus on the buyer

Your organization is great. So are your subject matter experts. But those are secondary considerations for the buyer. She wants to know that you understand her situation and have created something that really meets her needs. Use the second person when you write your landing page

copy. Forget the “we’s” and the “I’s” and focus on the “you’s.”

### 6. Make use of testimonials

One of the best ways to convey the value of an offering to a buyer is to offer testimonials from past buyers with whom she can identify. If you are not in the practice of gathering testimonials from your e-learning participants, start today. And start putting a high quality testimonial above the fold on each of your landing pages.

### 7. Include pictures of people

Pictures are a good thing on landing pages. In the case of online learning products, which may prompt some prospects to worry about lack of communication with an instructor or other learners, pictures of people can be reassuring. If possible, you may even try to get pictures of the actual customers who give you testimonials.

### 8. Use sub-headings

I note above that visitors to a page will generally skim most of the content below the fold. Using sub-heading – i.e., larger, bold text – to call attention to key areas of your copy throughout the page can help make sure that key points that do not merit a place above the fold are noticed.

### 9. Don’t send visitors away for more information

The only reason a visitor should leave a landing page is to take the action you want them to take. If you feel you have to provide additional information that might make the page copy too long, do it by using pop-ups or rollovers.

### 10. Keep it simple

This rule applies first and foremost to the call to action. Don’t list five different pricing scenarios with a “Buy” link for each scenario. Use a single “Buy” button, or possibly a member and non-member button. If you really have to offer more pricing scenarios than that (and think long

and hard about whether you really do!), then do it on a screen after the landing page. In general, keep your language simple throughout the text on the landing page, and don't present the visitor with extraneous options. Remember, your goal is to get visitors to take a single action. To the greatest extent possible, anything that interferes with that should be removed.

## No Rocket Science Here

If you haven't noticed already by this point in the article, there is nothing I have covered here that requires intense strategic thinking or innovation. These are all tactical moves that simply require resources, focus and discipline. Effectively address each of the three key areas covered in this article, and I can guarantee you will see improvements in the number of e-learning sales your organization secures. ■

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## About the Author

Jeff Cobb serves as the managing director of Tagoras, where he heads up the company's consulting and education services. He is an experienced Web entrepreneur who writes and speaks frequently on topics related to social media and the strategic implementation of Web 2.0 and learning technologies for engaging customers and members. **More information about his speaking is available on his personal Web site at [jeffthomascobb.com](http://jeffthomascobb.com).**

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