

ASSOCIATION E-LEARNING

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Six Snapshot Case Studies

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The Fine Print

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Building Internal Capacity—and Interest Community Associations Institute

Dave Jennings at the Community Associations Institute (CAI) is consciously thinking of how to engage the staff—and not just the education staff—in the organization’s e-learning.

“Let’s say, if we have 55 staff here, we’d be getting a team of 7 or 8 staff people who are interested in this, who want to be involved,” Jennings explained. “They may work in any department in the building, whether it’s customer service or accounting, but they might think that this is interesting and fun, they want to learn about it, they want to help.”

The idea is to harness the staff’s enthusiasm and interest to build up internal knowledge and experience. An interested staff member can develop her own idea for a Webinar—or be assigned one—and then she runs with it: contacting the speaker, dealing with contracts, getting the event produced. For Jennings, the advantage is clear: “If we say a year from now, or even 6 months from now, that we are going to do podcasts, the gap between where the staff thinks they are and what they think it will take to produce a podcast right now might be a 100-point gap, but after 6 to 12 months of doing Webinars, that gap could shrink to 20 points. So we get a staff that thinks they could do that—if they want to do it, then they can do it.”

Although CAI is happy to have good vendor relationships that work well now, Jennings likes having the option in the future to do more internally, save time, and be more efficient. Involving all interested staff in the production of CAI Webinars is part of his plan for getting there.

“[A]fter we’ve done 20 or 30 of these, a major benefit to us will be having a staff that is very comfortable producing Webinars, and I think that will help us create other products more easily.”

Dave Jennings, vice president, education





Cindy Hartley

Director of member relations at the Southern Building Material Association

Cultivating Success Southern Building Material Association

When Cindy Hartley launched a Webinar series for the Southern Building Material Association (SBMA), a group that serves building materials dealers across four states, she knew success was not guaranteed. “My industry does not tend to be the most technologically advanced,” explained Hartley.

“To help make sure that I was successful,” Hartley continued, “I went to our board of directors and urged them to help, ‘Please join us for the first one. I need your input on how this worked, what you think should be changed, what benefits you see in it. You are a member of our board of directors, and I really want your support in developing this.’”

“I called [our board] on the telephone and said, ‘I need you to support this. We will never get started if we can’t get the first [Webinar] done....’”

Cindy Hartley, director of member relations

Hartley personally sent the board members registration forms for Webinars and called them to remind them she needed their support and feedback on SBMA’s first foray into e-learning. Hartley said that enlisting the board was a “tremendously helpful” part of getting the program off the ground, but she didn’t stop there.

Hartley also embraced the enthusiasm of SBMA’s sister organizations who contacted her when they saw the Webinar program and asked to participate. “[T]hey asked how we were doing it. When they saw us put out the second and third ones, they asked if they could join in.” So Hartley created a registration form the other organizations could use and brand with their logo.

Now when SBMA delivers a Webinar, the attendees may include members from sister organizations across the country. SBMA bills its sister organizations at cost for the attendees, but Hartley lets them keep the profit. “We get participation,” said Hartley, “not a tremendous amount, but a little bit from all over the place gives you enough to do these kinds of things when you are small.”

Given current economic conditions, the Webinar series has replaced the face-to-face trainings that SBMA used to deliver across the region. Hartley does not expect that to be a permanent situation. Eventually the organization will offer both place-based and online training, but in the meantime, Hartley has found the right partners to ensure success of her current program.



Barbara Swarthout (left) and Melissa Polito

Director of e-learning programs (left) and e-learning instructional designer at the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans

More Demand for “Fresher,” Shorter Topics International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans

In the fall of 2008, the International Foundation of Employee Benefits (IFEBP) launched its 60-Minute Power Series, “a collection of nine live Webcasts that are along the lines of practical, how-to information,” described Barbara Swarthout, director of e-learning programs.

Early data shows these 60-minute Webinars sell better than IFEBP’s 90-minute Webinars. What’s the secret? Finding fresh topics that are in demand and marketing them the right way. “These Power Series were very successful...we projected 450 registered sites, and we got 419 registered sites. So in our book, compared to what we’d been doing on the 90-minute side, these were extremely successful.” Swarthout continued, “We think it’s because we bundle them and because there are such different topics—they are more how-to topics; we have real-life scenarios.” Learners can buy three, six, or all nine Webcasts in a Power Series—or individual sessions.

“[T]hese were extremely successful. We think it’s because we bundle them and because there are such different topics—they are more how-to topics; we have real-life scenarios.”

Barbara Swarthout, director of e-learning programs

IFEBP works with volunteer subject matter experts (SMEs) for its 90-minute Webinars, which can sometimes be adaptations of presentations the SMEs have already given elsewhere. But when branching out to find unique topics for the Power Series, IFEBP realized that recruiting volunteers to develop a presentation from scratch would be a big task. So they moved to a paid-SME model. “For the 60-minute program we offer [the SMEs] \$200 to do it, so I can request things a little bit easier than with our 90-minute programs,” explained Melissa Polito, e-learning instructional designer at IFEBP. “We ask them to put in workplace scenarios that people can work through, practical examples of the material during the presentation. I also ask them for a quick reference guide that we put together on the topic, so that the attendees can have that before the event.”

Although paying the SMEs clearly adds to the cost of the Power Series, if the early popularity continues, this is the kind of expense it’s easy to afford.

Certification Creates Demand; E-learning Assists National Air Duct Cleaners Association

In 1995, the National Air Duct Cleaners Association (NADCA) introduced the air systems cleaning specialist (ASCS) certification, which could be earned through a rigorous, 150-question, multiple-choice examination. To help candidates prepare for the exam, NADCA developed a one-day, place-based prep class. Although the certification took off, NADCA soon realized that its approach to training wasn't working for all members, as John Schulte, executive director, shared: "What we heard from our members, the owners of the companies (really, that's our primary audience), they said, look, I'd love to get my guy trained through your ASCS course, but I have to send him down to Florida. I'm on the West Coast, and there's a travel expense. I can't really afford to train all of my guys that way." That type of feedback combined with the fact NADCA has members in 30 countries led the organization to explore e-learning.

The association began with a full-day live Webinar for a flat fee of \$795 (meaning companies attending could train more than one staff person from the same site), and now it's moving to an e-learning library of resources so NADCA doesn't have to deal with the hassles of scheduling an

"It was a no-brainer for us to figure out if we could deliver this better [than place-based training]."

John Schulte, executive director

instructor for every offering—or the costs of paying an instructor every time—and learners get on-demand convenience.

To be a member of NADCA, at least one person on staff has to be an ASCS, and NADCA membership is a common requirement for winners of six-figure jobs awarded through formal bidding processes. Add to these requirements the convenience of e-learning, and NADCA training is in demand. "Our certification and our standard and therefore our membership have all been well adopted by end users in our market." Schulte elaborated, "So that all ties together—one drives the other basically."

Certification, or credit towards a certification—whether it's your organization's or not—is a powerful driver of demand, as true for e-learning and as other types of training.



John Schulte
Executive director of
the National Air Duct
Cleaners Association

Creating New Value—Globally

SSPC: The Society for Protective Coatings

Based in Pittsburgh, SSPC: The Society for Protective Coatings provides training for the industrial painting sector of the construction industry in the United States and, increasingly, abroad.

Five years ago, the organization started offering a correspondence version of two of its basic classroom programs—an introduction to the industry and a course on planning and specifying projects. Students would download a PDF version of the required text, complete their readings, and then take a proctored exam that was then sent back to SSPC headquarters to be graded.

The correspondence offerings were a success, but as their popularity increased so did the complexity of managing in-person exams—particularly outside the United States. “As our overseas market grew we decided to move to something a little more sophisticated,” said Pamela Groff, technical materials development specialist at SSPC. For SSPC, that meant implementing a learning management system with content management capabilities.

Working from their existing textbooks, SSPC created Web-based courses that included all the content from the correspondences course as well as the examinations that had previously been place-based. “It’s an asynchronous online experience for the students,” explained Groff, “They can do it whenever they want all over the world. And the quizzes and final exam are graded automatically, proving the students with instant feedback.”

The ability to manage the exams online has boosted operational efficiency for SSPC, cutting down on both the labor and the time needed to process grades. This newfound efficiency has, in turn, translated into higher value for many members. “Students are able to begin their career path with us much more quickly than they were before,” noted Groff. “Also we are able to reach the international audiences more readily.” Given that SSPC training of one or more employees is often required for companies to qualify to bid on contracts, greater reach and convenience are significant benefits.

Since taking the initial two courses online, SSPC has added two more offerings—both of which provide initial training toward a certification career path—to its online catalog and expects to bring another nine programs online by the end of 2009. Groff envisions even more growth in the future.

When asked for advice she would give to peers hoping to implement a learning management system, Groff strongly advocates talking with other associations to find out about their experiences. “We talked to about six or seven other associations,” she said.

“Find out what you really need,” Groff continued, “Is it really necessary to spend half a million dollars to develop a really customized LMS? Or is a basic system suitable for your needs? You have to decide what kind of experience you are going to give to the student. Really decide what the tradeoffs are and what’s feasible within your budget.”

As SSPC’s example suggest, the right decision can translate into significant value for both the association and its members.

“Students are able to begin their career path with us much more quickly than they were before. Also we are able to reach the international audiences more readily.”

**Pamela Groff,
technical
materials
development
specialist at
SSPC**

Simple Satisfies

Association of Cable Communicators Chats

You don't have to use cutting-edge technology to deliver valuable online content to your constituents. Simple, affordable solutions can satisfy associations and their members. Every other month, the Association of Cable Communicators (ACC), a three-staff association whose members work in communications, public relations, community relations, and government relations in the cable industry, hosts very successful hour-long online chats using the inexpensive ParaChat software.

“The chats are more popular than the Webinars, which was surprising.”

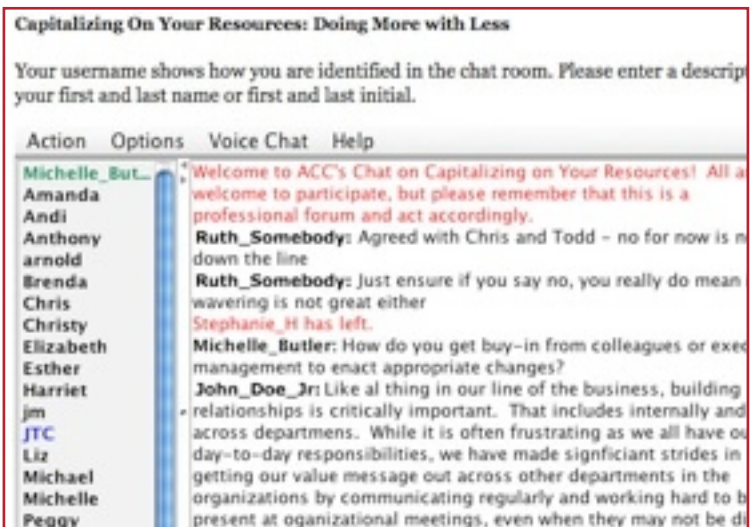
Michelle Butler, associate executive director

“The way that we modeled the online chats were almost like panels,” explained Michelle Butler, associate executive director at ACC, “so I line up three to four experts to market as being a part of this particular topic.” The panelists start the chats by introducing the topic at hand and then invite questions from the participants. Butler reported that the whole event is very interactive: “It’s getting to the point now where other members will share their experiences on the particular topic as well.”

To prepare for the chats, Butler develops a short list of questions to send to the panelists. They prepare responses in advance and have that text to draw on during the chat. Butler, as moderator, chimes in with questions to keep the conversation going if it lags. ACC then posts the cleaned-up transcripts from the chats in its online education portal.

These free chats are marketed to the members, but technically anyone can join—Butler views these sessions as a way to recruit new members and increase the stickiness of the ACC membership. The chats are proving even more popular than ACC’s Webinars. “The chats are in the 30 to 40 range [for attendees], sometimes a little big higher,” Butler reported, “and the Webinars are more in the 20 to 30 range.” Whatever the exact numbers, members find both the online chats and the Webinars valuable benefits.

Michelle Butler, associate executive director of the Association of Cable Communicators, and a screen shot of one of ACC’s popular online chats



Appendix D: About Tagoras Publisher of The Report

Tagoras is a market research firm and consultancy focused on the design, marketing, and management of digital learning and knowledge. We work with associations, philanthropies, and small-to-mid-sized businesses to help these organizations better understand and leverage the opportunities made possible by the new Web—what we like to call the learning Web. Our emphasis is on what achieves results, not on new gadgets and theories. *Association E-learning 2009: State of the Sector* represents the first in a line of research we plan to publish on e-learning in the association sector.



About the Authors

All the research and writing for this report was done by Tagoras principals Jeff Cobb and Celisa Steele.

JEFF COBB



Jeff has nearly two decades of experience in the world of education and technology. After starting his career as a research analyst for the Investor Responsibility Research Center, he first became involved with computer-assisted approaches to learning in the early 1990s as an instructor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In

1997, he joined University Access, a company focused on developing online learning experiences for colleges and universities and ultimately went on to lead the academic division of the company. He became senior vice president of business development when the company merged with IEC, a leading developer of computer-based training for Fortune 500 companies, and re-branded itself as Quisic.

In 2001, Jeff left Quisic to found Isoph with the specific aim of helping nonprofit organizations develop successful online learning initiatives. Serving as Isoph's chief executive officer, he worked

directly with a wide range of nonprofit clients and developed a deep understanding of the business, technical, and instructional issues that impact nonprofit learning initiatives. In 2005, Isoph was acquired by LearnSomething. Jeff continued on with LearnSomething until the fall of 2008, when he embarked on the research and consulting activities that now form the core of Tagoras.

Jeff is an award-winning teacher, a frequent speaker in the e-learning world, and author of the e-book *Learning 2.0 for Associations* as well as the popular Mission to Learn blog. He serves on the Professional Development Council of the American Society of Association Executives as well as on the advisory board for Philantech, provider of the PhilanTrack™ online grant proposal, reporting, and management system. He has previously served on the research committee of the eLearning Guild and the editorial board of *Innovate*, a leading resource for information about technology and education.

CELISA STEELE

Celisa has led the development and deployment of successful online education sites with numerous nonprofit organizations ranging from smaller groups like the Frameworks Institute and the Alliance of Chicago Community Health Services to large national and multinational organizations like the American Red Cross, the American College of Radiology, the Society for Human Resource Management, and WebJunction, an initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



Celisa is a managing director at Tagoras, and she was a cofounder and chief operating officer of Isoph, one of the leading providers of e-learning services to the nonprofit sector. Prior to Isoph, she worked in creative services at Quisic, a developer of high-end online course content for major universities and Global 2000 companies. Before joining Quisic, Celisa worked in curriculum

development for the not-for-profit Family and Children's Resource Program (FCRP), part of the Jordan Institute for Families at the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

A veteran of the e-learning world, Celisa served on the research committee of the eLearning Guild and has served multiple times as a judge in Brandon Hall's annual e-learning awards.