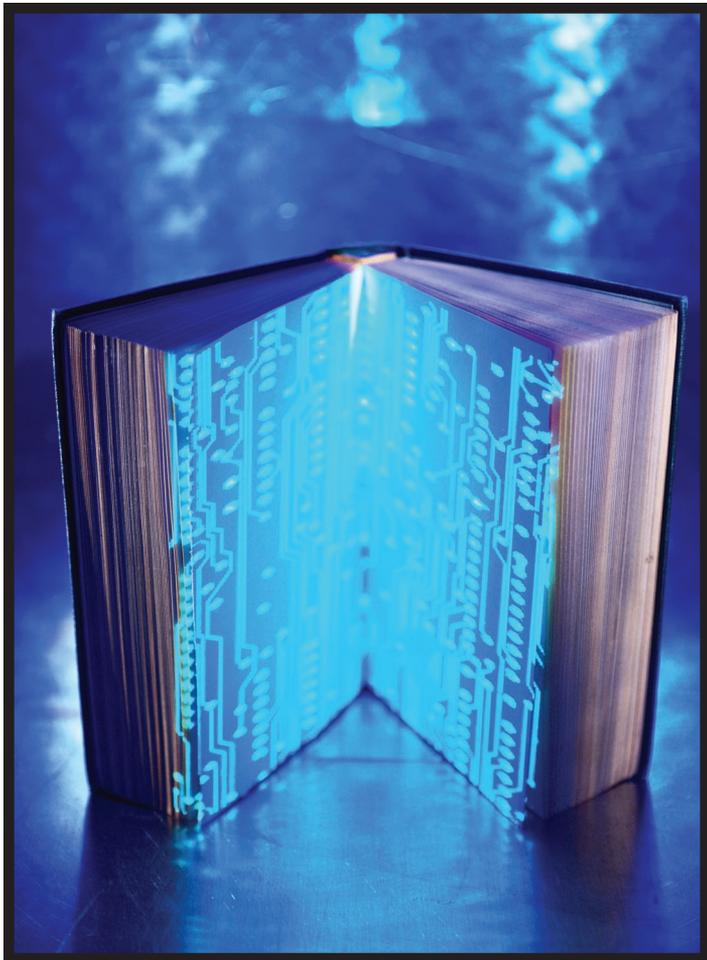


Online Training Platforms

PART 2:

Specialty Sites for the Hospitality Industry

It is convenient and cost-effective to incorporate online training into an overall training strategy, but it is difficult to decide which to use, when and for whom.



By Carol Verret

In the first article of this series the various kinds of online and related distance training available were identified, including online modules, webcasts and e-mail based training. Also discussed were distance methods such as coaching via e-mail, phone or teleconference.

In this second article of our series, the focus is online training sites and what they offer. Also included are some remarks from developers explaining the most popular and best uses of the medium.

The hospitality industry has adapted slowly to the online training phenomenon. Many other industries are far ahead in the sophistication and adaptation of online training. For instance, the insurance and brokerage industries use it extensively for agents and brokers, many colleges have their core subject courses online, including one in Australia where I taught in a school of tourism and hospitality. Even the restaurant industry has been quicker to implement online training for their kitchen and service personnel.

Not only is the hospitality industry a late adopter of this training method, but much of the material available is static and consists of little more than text on a page available through the Internet. Certainly other media can be incorporated and there are many ways of making the experience more compelling but things like animation are expensive to produce and the volume simply isn't there to justify the cost of production.

Many managers deciding to integrate online training into their training strategies have not had experience with its application and sometimes have difficulty appreciating that the Gen X and Gen Y employees who will be using it already have experience with distance learning.

First, it is important to identify some of the primary hospitality based online e-learning sites, the products offered and the most effective ways to use these products in a hospitality learning environment.

David the Trainer (www.davidtrainer.com) is a fascinating site that uses animation and an animated character named David to deliver the training message. This site works primarily within the retail and food and beverage arenas, specifically the restaurant industry. At the present time, they work on a contractual basis with several fast food providers. Again, this is because without the guaranteed revenue that these contracts provide, it is very expensive to produce both content and animation.

David the Trainer is a robust multimedia platform that uses touch-screen technology and enables clients to navigate easily through content. Another benefit for the food and beverage industry is that it also operates in multiple languages. The platform furnishes management with complete reporting functionality on all employees.

Luke Livingston, managing partner of the Creative Digital Group, said he would like to develop more programs and market them on a

Author's Note

This is the second article in a three-part series examining the options of online training. The third article will deal with the applications of various forms of e-training and the considerations in applying these such as hardware constraints, compliance and measurement tools.

retail basis but is unimpressed by the potential revenue numbers of that strategy vs. their contract business model. In the future Creative Digital hopes to expand its presence in the hotel industry as acceptance of the multimedia platform increases.

Jay Delerno and Paul MacKinnon created **HotelTraining.com** geared, primarily to the hotel industry. Both Delerno and MacKinnon have backgrounds in the hotel industry and worked to address a need within the industry. These programs were adapted for larger clients such as call centers, but also offer an array of products that are available on a retail basis to individual hotels and hotel companies.

Certificate courses, such as the responsible service of alcohol, are offered, which every food and beverage employee who deals with alcohol should complete. It is far more cost effective to require each employee to complete the online module rather than bring in a trainer, especially given the turnover in this area.

HotelTraining.com also offers front desk sales training programs and reinforcement with shop calls. MacKinnon said that after many requests for customer service training they offered a module, but no one purchased it so it was later dropped. He also indicated that many older managers simply fail to appreciate the generation of their front line staff and their familiarity with the online learning medium.

Delerno and MacKinnon offer hotel and management companies and managers the ability to monitor staff completion of the module. A quiz grade along with the time it took them to complete the module is reported in addition to the scores. This creates staff accountability

and encourages demonstration of the skills learned.

Mike Hampton, president and CEO of **HSA International** (www.hsainternational.com), said that online learning is a supplement to other traditional learning experiences. Hampton said, "Online training can reinforce, supplement and help to maintain knowledge and

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skills conveyed through other HRD activities included in a blended (training) solutions program."

HSA offers online training in front desk sales, e-coaching for those that need additional support and e-conferences. In association with HSMIAI, HSA has offered webcasts in revenue management that are available at a nominal cost. Also offered are webcasts on sales subjects featuring Howard Feiertag and one posted by this author. Hampton said that these webcasts are simply more convenient than the live product.

It is often difficult for line employees to participate in online learning as managers are sometimes reluctant to allocate the additional hours to engage in an online program. Hampton said, "Managers are more likely to engage in the programs and then transmit the knowl-

edge and skills therein to their employees."

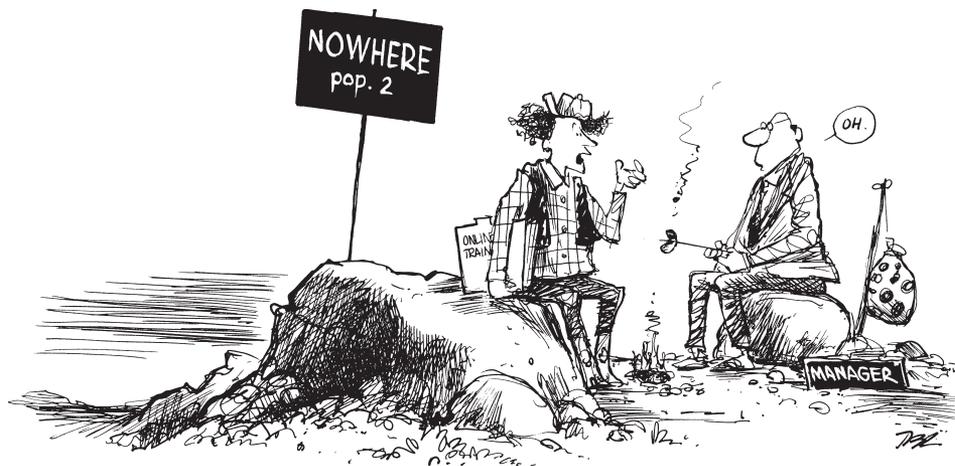
According to HSA, the elements of a good program include a program that is engaging, active, dynamic and fluid. Adult learners want options to access the information and skills that they require rather than follow a strictly linear progression.

The **Educational Institute** (www.ei-ahla.org), a branch of the American Hotel and Lodging Association, also offers several of its programs online, including many certification programs for the hotel industry.

While online learning will never totally replace the live training experience, it is a good way to provide skills to new hires prior to a live training program. In addition, online training is a response to the criticism that live programs often have a short shelf life and online training can provide some reinforcement. Online learning can also address a specific skill or skill set that a learner needs to acquire or refresh without having to engage in a complete program where that skill set is only one part of a package.

Given the reduced cost, convenience, access and the elimination of travel and its related expenses, it is reasonable to assume that online learning will occupy a larger place in the training strategies of the hospitality industry in general and the hotel industry in particular.

Carol Verret & Associates Consulting and Training offers consulting and seminars on incorporating and using e-tools to enhance productivity and functionality as well as revenue management and customer service. Visit www.carolverret.com or e-mail your comments to carol@carolverret.com.



"Let me define the 'distance' part of distance learning for you. Where will you end up in today's hospitality industry if you DON'T have an online training program for your Gen X and Y employees?"