

# Orienting new employees with e-Learning

By Steve Hulse

**O**rientating new employees is a critical process, but as budgets tighten it's one that sometimes gets shortchanged. That need not be the case if e-Learning is used to bring new hires quickly up to speed on issues they need so they can hit the ground running.

A well-planned orientation can provide a consistent introduction to your company, your brand and your values. This is particularly important if your company is experiencing rapid growth through mergers or acquisitions.

With online e-Learning, you can reach all of your employees with a consistent, targeted message at a time and place convenient for both of you. And with smaller budgets, there's no need to tie up valuable staff delivering repetitive content.

## Easy updates

So what should be included in an orientation program? You begin with the essentials, such as organization history, vision, mission, values and business model. Other potential topics are endless—safety standards, government regulations, security and confidentiality issues, human resources policies, proprietary software tutorials—all can easily and consistently be delivered to employees via e-Learning. And when the content needs to be updated, the modular nature of well-designed e-Learning makes revisions a snap.

One high-tech company JPL works with asked us to help with ISO 9000 training. They had a high turnover workforce that constantly needed training, but the standards needed periodic updating, too. With e-Learning, content was able to be modified and rolled out to both new hires and existing employees with a very short turnaround time, ensuring that staff always had the most up-to-date information.

## Using technology for a personal touch

One company JPL worked with had a wonderfully charismatic president whose enthusiasm was contagious. Those with whom he came in contact approached their jobs with an evangelistic fervor. What did he talk about? The excitement of working for a company committed to providing a great experience for every customer, his confidence that tomorrow would be better than today, and his absolute delight that he and the new employee would be on the same team.

But since a busy schedule and the sheer size of the company prevented him from meeting every new hire, he was videotaped as part of an online orientation. The result? Each new staffer came away with the impression of having a personal presentation from the president on the very first day on the job.

Of course, the president's message was only a small part of the overall package. Other components described the sexual harassment policy, appropriate e-mail and Internet use, benefits, and paid time off. The use of photos, illustrations and voice-over narration kept it friendly and personal while leading employees through the program and delivering a consistent message every time.

Still other companies want new employees to know how to access information using the company intranet. Step-by-step guides show users how to find what they needed. The result is more information readily available when and where needed.



### Special needs employees benefit

Online learning is also an excellent way to reach employees with visual or hearing impairments that require a screen reader or, as PA Chamber member Giant Food Stores required, closed captioning. E-Learning can be designed to meet Section 508 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act to make orientation available to everyone regardless of disability. And when English is a second language, alternate language tracks can be seamlessly integrated into the program.

### An affordable investment

The question on everyone's mind, of course, is "how much does it cost?" But the real question should be "how much does it cost to keep doing it the same way we're doing it now?" When you add up the costs of paying staff for repeatedly presenting the same material, duplicating handouts, renting training rooms, and providing refreshments to attendees, the economics of e-Learning become very attractive.

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### More than just orientation

Employee training needs, however, don't end with orientation. A growing business invests in its staff by constantly updating their knowledge and skills. Once again, e-Learning is the method of choice. When properly designed, e-Learning can be easily updated and delivered, providing just-in-time training to employees when and where they need it.

Unfortunately in today's litigious society, employers sometimes need to document both what they've taught and what employees have learned. If e-Learning has been used in conjunction with a learning management system, employers can point to the exact content presented, the time and date it was delivered, and the employee's score on test questions that demonstrate his or her knowledge.

With e-Learning there is a one-time, up-front development investment after which programs can be updated incrementally as new information demands it. Training can be delivered to the employee's work station where it is available for instant reference, negating the need for handouts.

So next time you plan an employee orientation program, remember to consider not just the content but the method of delivery as well. E-learning provides a cost effective way to consistently reach and impress your most important asset—your employees. ♦

■ **Steve Hulse** is learning solutions manager for JPL, a strategic integrated communications company based in Harrisburg.



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