

THE WINDOWS MOBILE GLOBAL TRAINING CHALLENGE

The Microsoft Windows Mobile operating system is the platform supporting thousands of mobile communications products. Offered in every developed country, the mobile communications products are feature-rich devices that sell best when presented by well-trained sales personnel.

Studies show that retail sales professionals (RSPs) who sell these advanced mobile phones are the single most important part of a customer's buying decision. But in 2003, RSPs knew little about Windows Mobile software.

THE NEED

Training was essential. The question: How could Windows Mobile reach this widely scattered, culturally diverse RSP audience? Working for a variety of retail channels, the RSPs spoke dozens of different languages and lived in widely varying cultures.

Microsoft asked Via Training to create a global sales training program that would address this key audience and help them understand why advanced mobile phones powered by Windows Mobile are a great choice for their customers.

THE SOLUTION

Within four months, Via created and rolled out an international Windows Mobile Training (WMT) program that made an immediate impression on RSPs across the world. Using a blended learning strategy, Via began with an extensive online training program and motivated users with training incentives and promotions. Beyond the Web, the program was enhanced and supported with virtual classrooms, face-to-face training, PDA-based training and print materials.

"This is quite possibly the best training effort ever put forth by Microsoft. It is scalable, interactive and able to define ROI easily. A lot of complicated material is being presented in a straightforward and approachable manner."

Windows Mobile Creative Challenge Award

VIA TRAINING'S GLOBAL TRAINING STRATEGY

The initial assignment was to present sales and technology training in eight languages to 12 target markets in such a way that training materials could evolve rapidly, respond to a variety of cultural and linguistic differences and serve a wide range of retail channels.

To meet those needs, Via developed an innovative, online training approach using Web portals. The portal structure allows one primary site to present content tailored to multiple audiences in multiple languages, avoiding the need to build different sites for each language. When users sign on to the training website, they are immediately directed to a specific area within the site that targets their exact needs.

To further adapt to the variety of marketing channels, within each language portal are numerous partner portals. These partner portals offer unique sets of content based on the product mix sold by a particular retailer or manufacturer.

Meeting the evolving needs of WMT, the portals combined rapidly developed and individualized training content with rich technical resources. Using a specially designed development toolkit, content templates and a modular course structure, Via kept the development cycle short, providing better, more responsive support for channel partners and stretching the Windows Mobile training budget.

THE RIGHT BLEND

The initial global roll-out of WMT featured online courses, strategic face-to-face training and printed materials. Face-to-face training of locally based representatives was the critical first step in attracting users in different localities. Via produced multiple “train the trainers” sessions in England, Italy and the U.S., creating a dedicated corps of evangelists ready to introduce RSPs to WMT’s online offerings.

But that was only the beginning. Microsoft’s goal was to have different portals evolve in response to local input, allowing training for different countries to reflect the cultural and logistical requirements of each market. The highly flexible portal structure, combined with Via’s rapid-response development tools, allowed tailored development to begin as soon as the initial portals were introduced to regional users. Each portal featured a rich online e-Learning environment. As the portals responded to local needs, Via enhanced them with a mix of localized sales training and product training, targeted at brands and models unique to each portal.

Standard online courses were supplemented with Web-based Virtual Classroom training covering specialized technologies. Also available were language-specific industry news, advanced technical training and performance support materials such as demo scripts and presentations. The programs were supported by “learn-to-earn” incentives and sweepstakes, each designed to appeal to a specific region and designed to meet local legal restrictions.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Windows Mobile Training was designed to increase RSPs’ awareness of the Windows Mobile operating system and to create advocacy for advanced communications products driven by the operating system.

The results have been impressive with more than 35,000 users across North America, Europe and Asia Pacific.

Why does it matter? Studies indicate that sales reps who spend 30 minutes or more per week in e-Learning are as much as 70% more productive than their peers who spend less than 30 minutes in e-Learning. And the success of the program continues to build. In its second year, WMT has doubled the number of users from the previous year, and more than doubled the number of courses completed.

MICROSOFT OBSERVATIONS

Joel Brazil, Lead Marketing Manager for Windows Mobile, says, “The work that Via Training has done has ensured that the quality of localization is as high as it can be. They’ve worked so closely with local markets, allowing us to give local markets custom content, while still fitting easily into the global process. Managing all that complexity and making it happen quickly with as few corrections as possible takes skill and hard work.”

FY 2004	Goal	Actual
Total Users	20,000	20,418
Courses Completed	40,000	40,194

FY 2005	Goal	Year to Date
Total Users	30,000	36,015
Courses Completed	70,000	123,665

“It’s difficult to comprehend the scale and complexity of what’s been accomplished. This industry is extremely dynamic,” notes Brazil. “Products come to market on almost a daily rate across many different countries and through different channels. Managing all that complexity, without perfect information, is quite a task. And getting content turned around in a timely way across numerous languages and numerous partner portals is an impressive feat.”