

Why Hewlett-Packard's Online Sales Training Works

By engaging, motivating and rewarding the independent retail associates who represent its products, HP's online training program promotes higher product sales.

By Bruce Carocci

Do your salespeople say: "I have to train because the boss said so," or "I can't wait to learn about the new products?"

If it's the former, chances are the training program's completion rates are lower than you'd like. With "I can't wait," the sales force is engaged in the training and sales are up.

How do you ensure that you successfully train salespeople and see high course-completion numbers? The answer is simple: Your e-learning training program must demonstrate value and include high levels of design and motivation.

An effective training program should:

- Offer relevant, useful content presented in an engaging and interactive manner, supplemented by helpful resources for just-in-time knowledge access.

- Motivate learners with program incentives. The chance to earn a new printer or pocket PC will encourage salespeople to learn the features of those new SKUs before launch.

Hewlett-Packard recently partnered with sales-force training company Via Training to carry out this dual-nature program design successfully. Via develops custom courses for HP's training Web site, HPinfolab.com. These courses train independent salespeople on product knowledge and applied sales skills. Because sales reps sell what they know, the objective is to develop mindshare for HP which in turn increases sales of HP products.

"Online training has become one of our primary training channels. Obviously, the medium reaches a greater audience and allows us to convey key messages to

our core audience," says HP Training Manager Todd Ross.

Currently there are tens of thousands of independent retail sales associates using the site in North America and in Europe, with additional language expansion underway. In an independent survey conducted by TRD Frameworks in 2002, HPinfolab was voted the No. 1 source of product and sales training information by independent sales representatives in the consumer electronics market. "Because HPinfolab is recognized as Best in Class,

we're more effectively able to communicate the HP message," says Ross. "We're able to go live with online training as soon as the products hit the stores."

Engaging the Learner

Via develops interactive training that encourages salespeople to engage in the learning process by solving real-life problems or participating in realistic scenarios or simulations. This method, called Active Learning, is applied to training designed for salespeople to apply new knowledge

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Active learning uses engaging activities to enable sales representatives to practice with product knowledge in selling scenarios such as qualifying customers.

and quickly interact with the products. Via's courseware enables practice using product knowledge in sales scenarios before salespeople have to face the customer. "Our online training program has evolved as the retail environment has evolved," says Ross.

A key component of training is providing support tools to learners at the most teachable moment - that sudden "Aha!" when learners make a connection and are ready to absorb something new. HPinfolab features a resource library for quick reviews and just-in-time information.

Motivating the Learner

Developing high-quality courseware is the first half of the training equation. Motivating the learner is the second half. A key reason for HPinfolab's success is Via's Incentive Management System (IMS) program. With the IMS, training managers offer HPinfopoints to salespeople who successfully complete courses and training activities. These points can be used toward the purchase of HP products.

The second month after rolling out HPinfopoints, attendance and course completion increased 300 percent. IMS software can be configured to support unique program requirements and any off-the-shelf learning management system. Training managers can track points, inventories and trends to customize their IMS program.

Rewarding the Learner


Every successful IMS features a robust rewards center. Motivated learners train hard and offering rewards increases course completions and overall user satisfaction.

HPinfolab users redeem their HPinfopoints for a changing list of rewards. Since the rewards program started in 2000, salespeople have earned everything from clothing and pens to digital cameras and Pocket PCs.

Measuring Results

An incentive program can draw attendance and improve course completion, but if the training does not provide valu-

able information tailored to a variety of learning styles, salespeople won't be back. You need both good design and attractive incentives. HP's experience with HPinfolab shows that salespeople know what they need. They've downloaded millions of PDFs on new products, most

being Via-designed selling tools and reference materials. 

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