



# Getting the Word Out

**Marketing learning initiatives doesn't have to be expensive to produce great results.**

By Elizabeth L. Brock

To develop a learning program and just assume that learners will show up is like throwing a party without sending invitations. Training officials need to think of marketing and promotion as an invitation to experience great learning. Give your audience a compelling reason to come, and chances are your programs will be flying off the shelves.

I once worked for a manager who believed that if we developed exactly the right training content, learners would somehow materialize. Our development team never failed to produce well-designed programs with thought-provoking content, but the courses always languished on the shelf, failing to generate much interest.

Frustrated, we kept asking ourselves why. It wasn't because the courses weren't good; it was because nobody knew about them.

The moral of the story is that no matter how good your program is, it is of little value if your audience doesn't know about it. Regardless of whether you serve external or internal customers, promotion should be a

key component in every one of your learning initiatives. In a business environment where everyone is expected to prove their worth, good marketing is critical to your success.

## **Strategic pitch**

For some, the idea of marketing conjures up images of used car salesmen hustling customers. Indeed, many training professionals scoff at the need for marketing, believing that good training should be able to sell itself. Ultimately it can, if it is supported by a good communications strategy that promotes the training's value to the right people. If you think of marketing as an opportunity to educate rather than sell, you will be providing a valuable service to your audience that helps them achieve greater understanding about how your programs and services can address their critical business needs.

As with training development, good marketing and promotion take a little creativity and in-depth knowledge of your audience's needs. Here are just a few suggestions for generating awareness and promoting the value of your learning programs and services.

## **Create a comprehensive marketing strategy.**

First, it should define your overall goals and objectives—what you wish to accomplish with your marketing efforts. Defining these goals and objectives up front will help you later when you want to measure the success of your promotion activities. Your plan also should identify each target audience and their information needs, the desired timing and frequency of all communications, and the best ways in which to deliver the communications. Having a plan will help you develop appropriate ongoing promotion strategies for new programs as well as key messages to help your audience grasp the relevance and value of your services.

## **Familiarize yourself with your audience's most critical challenges and priorities.**

To effectively position your offerings to meet your audience's

needs, you must know what they do and what type of problems they encounter. Having answers to such questions as "What's in it for me?" is very much like addressing learner motivation when designing a course. For example, to promote an e-learning program to nurses, you might focus on the convenience of around-the-clock availability for shift workers, and the ability to train large groups of people at one time. For sales professionals, you might choose to focus on e-learning's portability and how it is possible to capitalize on downtime while traveling in the car or on a plane.

**Ask satisfied stakeholders and learners for testimonials and use the testimonials in a variety of ways.** For example, you can display them on your website, link them with specific courses in your learning management system (LMS), include them in communications packages describing training programs, or mention them in updates and newsletters. To illustrate value, it is important to develop case studies about particularly successful initiatives and publish them.

**Make the course visible to potential learners.** Visibility is critical to awareness. Using various mediums, training officers should explore ways to continuously reach out to learners. Webcasts and podcasts are great ways to introduce new programs, present best practices, and share other topics of interest. Consider publishing monthly newsletters, surveys, and blogs to keep everyone up to date. Attending department meetings also enables you to promote training and learn more about your audience. Use meetings to educate stakeholders on how your programs support their key initiatives, and you will establish yourself as a knowledgeable partner who is committed to their success.

**Endorse blended learning strategies and opportunities for ongoing learning.** Within a subject area, look for ways

to integrate and promote live training with e-learning and to recommend additional learning opportunities to past attendees. By doing so, you will be helping individuals who are pressed for time advance their learning with opportunities that they may be unaware of.

**Encourage people to kick the tires on e-learning.** Remember that e-learning is still a new concept to many people and as with anything new, it may be difficult to embrace right away. Live demonstrations are a great way to introduce the concept to newcomers because they provide opportunities to preview and discuss the technology. Trial or demo versions of courses also are helpful in generating interest. Be sure to make them available for download from the web or an LMS, or put them on a CD or DVD to hand out at company events and trade shows.

**Don't let your message get lost in translation.** You may have a very compelling story, but if it is buried in training jargon, your audience won't know or care what you are talking about. Avoid using training lingo, such as the ADDIE model and criterion-referenced assessments, in your promotional activities and focus instead on business value. Learn to speak the same language as your audience so they can easily understand the value of what you have to offer without translation.

The ways in which you can promote training are limitless. However, budget, time, and staffing constraints will ultimately influence what you do and cannot do. Just remember that marketing does not have to be expensive or time consuming to produce valuable results.

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