6 STEPS TO MOVING YOUR TRAINING ONLINE

David Smith
6 STEPS TO MOVING YOUR TRAINING ONLINE

NEW WORLD OF TRAINING ................................................................. 1
BENEFITS OF THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM .................................. 2
CHALLENGES OF THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM ............................. 2
ADAPTING AS L&D PROFESSIONALS ........................................ 3
DECREE MODEL ............................................................................. 4
CONCLUSION ..................................................................................12

REFERENCES & RESOURCES .......................................................... 13

JOB AIDS

The Elements of Activity Design .................................................. 14
Design Time Calculator ................................................................. 15

AUTHORS

David Smith
David Smith is global director and cofounder of Virtual Gurus, a company dedicated to supporting individuals and organizations in harnessing the potential of virtual classroom technologies as part of the digital learning journeys create. David is a recognized thought leader in the virtual classroom world, as well as a regular presenter at global training conferences.

Community Manager, Learning Technologies
Justin Brusino

Editor, TD at Work
Patty Gaul

Managing Editor
Teresa Preston

Production Design
Iris Sanchez

Printed in the United States of America.

For help or inquiries about your subscription, please contact Customer Care at 1.800.628.2783/1.703.683.8100 (international).
Virtual classrooms are not new. The technology we use to deliver virtual training has been with us for more than 15 years, with many organizations using it to hold virtual meetings or virtual presentations.

Still, the technology and methods of adapting training accordingly might be new to many trainers and learners alike. As we move training content into the virtual classroom, we cannot expect what we designed for the face-to-face classroom to work as successfully in the virtual classroom. We need a new approach.

First, let’s be clear about what we mean when we talk about moving training online. We mean moving it into the live facilitated world of virtual classrooms, not just into the self-paced e-learning worlds that we create for our learners.

Six key steps—the DECREE model—help us think about how we digitize our learning content to create more dynamic, consumable, and engaging learner experiences as we move from the traditional face-to-face classroom to technology-based learning.

In this issue of TD at Work, we’ll look at:

- how technology has changed the world for learning and development (L&D) professionals and learners
- the benefits and challenges to live virtual training
- how to adapt to the virtual classroom as an L&D professional
- the six steps to moving face-to-face training to online training.

NEW WORLD OF TRAINING

It is no surprise how technology has changed our world. It has changed the way in which we consume music and movies, as well as the ways we communicate daily. We use technologies such as Skype, Twitter, and Facebook to communicate with friends and family, and virtual meetings, videoconferencing, and the like to communicate with clients and colleagues.

So, too, has technology drastically changed our world of learning, primarily how and where our learners access learning.

A 2015 study from Towards Maturity, a research organization that emphasizes the application of learning innovation to accelerate business performance, shows us that in the corporate world, technology is playing an increasing role in learning. For instance, 86 percent of learning professionals who responded reported that they are leveraging the virtual classroom as part of their learning offering. And we are seeing more organizations creating virtual-classroom-only content.

This is not to say that organizations are moving their learning content to live and online classrooms in a wholesale fashion, but rather that they are using the virtual classroom as part of a truly blended learning offering. It also is fair to say that the virtual classroom will not replace face-to-face training completely; there still will be a need to deliver learning to our audiences in the traditional face-to-face classroom.

LEVERAGING THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Virtual classrooms often are seen as a great environment for delivering soft skills we need in the workplace—skills such as communication, decision making, working in teams, leadership, and time management.

But there are so many other content areas that the virtual and online classroom can support. Research from the eLearning Guild shows that these content areas include desktop or web application training (88 percent); product knowledge training (79 percent); technical skills (85 percent); regulatory and compliance (56 percent); and new hire orientation (55 percent).
BENEFITS OF THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Moving our training to the live, online space brings many benefits to us as learning professionals, to our organizations, and to our learners. Some of these benefits are more obvious than others.

For instance, the two key benefits that seem to drive the adoption of virtual classrooms are reduced travel costs and overall training costs. Those are very much a given; you will of course reduce your travel and training costs as a result of not having to move learners and faculty around the globe to a physical training location.

However, there are many other benefits that often go unrecognized in using virtual classrooms:

- **Reduced time out of the office.** Learners can attend training without the inconvenience of travel or time away from their desk and clients.

- **Quicker response rate to training needs.** Training can happen more immediately because you don’t have to book training rooms, flights, and accommodation for faculty and learners.

- **Extended learning to a global audience.** As long as we line up the time zone differences correctly, our learners can attend a learning course wherever they are; many can attend courses that they wouldn’t have been able to access previously.

- **Improved training quality.** The virtual classroom allows faculty to be scripted and deliver the same consistent learning experience, as opposed to the more free-flowing face-to-face classroom environment.

- **Supported learning for remote workers.** Virtual classrooms remove the barriers to entry for remote workers, whether they are joining from home, coffee shops, or other remote locations, because the learning can take place anywhere, anytime.

- **Reduced carbon footprint.** There are clear environmental benefits to removing the need for learners to travel.

IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM WILL NOT REPLACE FACE-TO-FACE TRAINING COMPLETELY: THERE STILL WILL BE A NEED TO DELIVER LEARNING TO OUR AUDIENCES IN THE TRADITIONAL FACE-TO-FACE CLASSROOM.

CHALLENGES OF THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

However, just because we have opted to move our training programs from one modality to another does not mean we are going to be successful in the new fashion.

One of the biggest challenges to moving training programs is the change in duration of a training session. Often we invite learners to a full-day experience, maybe even two or three days, in the face-to-face classroom. With virtual online training, we need to provide the same information, but in a much shorter format. If we try to repurpose an existing three-day face-to-face course, we cannot fit it into a three-hour virtual classroom! Something has to give.

And in fact, the usual virtual training program is much shorter than three hours. During a recent event, Virtual Gurus asked about the common duration of a live online event—97 percent of respondents run sessions of 90 minutes or less.

Time constraints are not the only problem. There are a number of additional reasons that many organizations are not using virtual classrooms successfully:

- They have not adjusted the training content or redesigned the activities to work in the virtual classroom.

- Faculty or learners are not comfortable or familiar with the virtual classroom environment and toolset.

- Learners see the reason for moving training into the virtual classroom as a cost-cutting measure for the business and are somewhat cynical about it.
• Learners are multitasking because the content or delivery is not engaging enough to keep their attention.

According to the Towards Maturity study, key challenges for L&D professionals include a lack of the L&D teams’ skills (in Europe); a lack of stakeholder buy-in (in Australia); and a hesitancy of L&D professionals to engage in the technology (in the Middle East and India).

ADAPTING AS L&D PROFESSIONALS

Before moving to online training, L&D professionals need to adapt. Why, you ask? One of the reasons is the change in dynamic between trainer and learner in the virtual, online classroom. In the face-to-face environment, learning involves seeing others, their body language, or facial expressions; in the virtual classroom, we lose that visual element.

In the face-to-face classroom, we can sense when someone wants to ask a question or share a comment through body language or facial expressions. In the virtual classroom, we need to provide other ways for learners to indicate that they want to speak—we have to rely on virtual classroom tools like the feedback icons or the hand raise tool.

Part of this adaptation has to start with us as learning professionals. We need to develop new skills as we design and deliver training to an invisible audience because virtual classrooms are not just plug-and-play. There’s a separate skill set for designing and delivering engaging, effective instruction in a virtual classroom.

In a recent webinar, my team at Virtual Gurus surveyed the group of several hundred practitioners who admitted they were using virtual classrooms to deliver learning even though they themselves had varying levels of upskilling to truly leverage the medium. Of these practitioners:

• 15 percent had received some formal training.
• 30 percent had developed their knowledge and experience through trial and error.
• 33 percent planned on doing formal upskilling for the virtual classroom.

TRANSLATING ACTIVITIES INTO THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Facilitator-led brainstorm. Using the chat tool, ask learners to suggest ideas, which you can then summarize and debrief; alternatively, invite learners to write their ideas directly onto the whiteboard.

Case studies. Prepare a case study with detailed instructions, making them available in the breakout room. Assign learners to the various breakout rooms and invite them to collaborate on working through the case study. Then, bring the group back together and invite representatives from each group to present their solutions verbally.

Quizzes. Develop a series of questions with multiple-choice or yes-or-no answers and create a series of polls, which you can then run. Share the results with participants and then debrief the correct answers.

Group or plenary discussion. Provide a discussion question and show it on the screen or in the chat space. Invite participants to share ideas using chat or by raising their hand and speaking out verbally.

Group presentations. Give each group of learners a task (the same one or different ones), provide separate instructions and expected outcomes. Assign participants to the breakout rooms and invite them to use the different tools to complete the task or prepare a presentation to share with the rest of the group.