



The Online Learning Movement for Attorneys

Optimize Knowledge Retention

by Lee Ann Enquist

With the rapid integration of technology into the practice of law, there is an increasing migration toward online learning — especially in the world of professional development and continuing legal education.

Nearly a third of the learning hours made available across all industries in 2007 were technology-based, according to a report from the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). The average for technology-based learning (across all industries) was 32.6 percent of learning hours made available. This is up from 11.5 percent just six years earlier and continues to rise at a steady pace.

American organizations spent more than \$134 billion on employee learning and development in 2007, according to ASTD estimates. Because law firms today spend millions of dollars annually on professional development, it is imperative that these dollars are spent wisely. It's no wonder more and more firms are integrating technology into their learning processes.

"Time is my most valuable resource," said Chicago attorney Dawn Kahn. "What's great about (online learning) is that I could choose to do CLE programs at times of the day when clients aren't calling, the phone's not ringing and e-mails aren't flying in with 'immediate response' requested."

Remember that adage that time is money? Learning, whether to satisfy CLE requirements or for general professional development, needs to be both efficient and effective.

As one professional development manager at a large law firm noted, “The new model of online training is going to be that people are going to view it as the best way to get knowledge quickly and effectively.”

It’s not just the speed of online offerings that appeals to attorneys. They also appreciate how technological tools can facilitate the learning process. It is widely accepted that teaching on a student’s terms provides a deeper, richer learning experience and is ultimately more successful. Determining how best to deliver CLE content on an attorney’s terms is the key that opens the educational lock.

Professional development is subjective. People learn differently based on a number of factors, including the topic, complexity of subject matter, student’s stage of learning and sophistication in the particular subject area. The crux of any successful professional development partnership is to first determine how the students, in this case attorneys, best process new information.

Technology might be an increasingly valuable tool for professional development learning, but is not always the ultimate solution. The first question is exactly what types of content are best taught online as opposed to live events? Then, in what format will content be the most effective?

Holistic study allows us to match the learning style with the topic, complexity and use of information by the student to determine the best method for delivering information.

For example, while roughly 80 percent of the general population prefers to learn through visual (pictures, movies, demonstrations) rather than auditory (listening, discussing, reading) means, this does not hold true in the legal profession. A majority of attorneys would prefer to learn through an auditory process. Professional development materials aimed at attorneys don’t necessarily need to incorporate as much video as might otherwise be recommended. Giving attorneys audio and written materials proves to be a more effective teaching method.

While technology is vital in providing professional development resources, it cannot be the only tool used. Technology should augment the learning experience, but education, information and training providers cannot ignore

other more traditional teaching methods such as live events or written materials.

By offering a choice-driven format (content offered through various channels and technologies), the student ultimately decides how to receive the materials in a manner that best suits his needs. Some individuals prefer to learn in context, some in a classroom and some through downloadable on-demand podcasts. Some attorneys are looking for a broad overview, while others seek a more topic-specific offering. In the legal world, speed and efficiency are important. Time is money, so less time spent learning means more time spent billing.

Our job as education providers is to offer our students what they want, and how they want it, while minimizing the hassle and time commitment often associated with professional development. By listening to your audience and adjusting the use of technology accordingly, you can develop offerings that meet a variety of needs in a wide array of formats. **ILTA**

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