How to Market Training

Four Principles of Effective Online Learning

Online training reaches more people in more places in less time. But in the noise of a global business environment, our challenge as trainers extends beyond simply having great content and making it more accessible.

Applying proven principles of marketing – the classic "4 Ps" of the marketing mix – is not reserved solely for trainers charging fees for content. It is an important step for all trainers charged with extending the reach of their key training messages.

In this brief we will equip you with the four principles proven to help you reach more trainees with the same headcount, make more effective use of your budget, and present your organization as a thought leader in your industry.

The Product Principle: Create Compelling Content

The foundation of effective marketing is having something worthwhile to tell people about, and a foundation of good training content is essential. Ideally, good training, like a good product, resonates with potential trainees in a way that helps them quickly understand, "What problem does this training session solve, and for whom?"

Your "product" is the promised outcome of your training session. Your content will create the most possible value when you:

- Identify clearly who will benefit and why.
- Present them with a solution to a real problem.
- Create an opportunity for dialogue and interactivity.

Benefits come in many forms and are often very specific, so getting clear about who will benefit and why is critical to attracting trainees. Furthermore, there may be mixed or multiple benefits. Examples might include the following:

Corporate	The company will save money, comply with the law, and gain a unique advantage
Personal	A new transferable job skill is learned, and a certification is gained
Social	Trainees have a chance to learn from an industry luminary, subject-matter expert, or celebrity
Promotional	Attendees will be entered into a drawing for a free giveaway

Benefits may touch on motivations that extend beyond the training content itself, but your training content is the foundational and sustainable means of motivating attendance.

Presenting a solution to a real problem, however, is about more than the content itself. It's also about the experience the trainee can expect. A powerful benefit of live online training is that trainers and trainees can interact – sometimes one personal question answered by the trainer is more powerfully applicable than all the rest of the prepared content. Prepare your compelling content by not only being clear on the "how to" of problem solving, but also by involving other remote subject-matter experts who lend knowledge and credibility to your sessions.

The Pricing Principle: What Would They Pay For?

If you intend to charge a fee for online training, your price should be subject to careful research, just like any other product introduction. Common value drivers to consider include:

Scarcity – Is the content available from other sources or at other times?

Authority – Does the content or the trainer command special attention?

Exclusivity – Is the content only available for select groups of people (e.g., "first 30 registrants," "members only," etc)?

Certification – Will the trainee be able to represent their participation in some way?

Perhaps the most overlooked opportunity, however, is by trainers who are delivering content at no charge, especially if that training is to be delivered to an internal audience. Even if your content is available to trainees without a price tag attached, remember that trainees are still investing a precious resource: their time. Keeping this in mind, trainers who want to improve their reach and attendance should still ask themselves, "What would trainees pay for?"

The value equation is simple. If there were a price tag, you wouldn't make the sale until the perceived value is greater than the cost. Given the noise of life, successful trainers must take care to build value just the same for free sessions as for paid, making theirs a "must-attend" activity that trainees will make an effort to get to.

The Place Principle: Choose Your Space and Time

In classic marketing parlance, "place" refers to availability of the product or service. How it is distributed, where people can get it, how it can be purchased, etc., all contribute to who can buy it and how much effort they'll undertake to do so. While online training obviously removes the distance barrier for trainers and trainees alike, two key considerations are worth evaluating as you move your training online.

Choose your best distribution method – the online "room" setup.
In-person or online, the dynamics of communicating change as the audience gets larger. Small groups are often highly collaborative, and the nature of interactivity is less structured. Larger groups can indeed be interactive, but the nature of that "dialogue" between presenters and audience members needs some structure to optimize the experience.

Online training rooms arrange features such as text-based Q&A, hand raising, attentiveness monitoring, tests and polls so that the trainers "on stage" remain in control while still interacting freely as time and content allow. The trainer can control the size of the class and build interaction based upon the class size

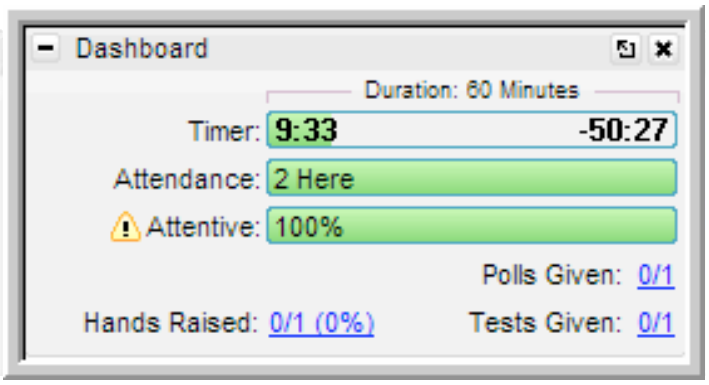

Figure 1 – Trainer Dashboard

Choose your best day and time.
Your best day of the week and time of the day to hold training sessions online are purely a function of your audience's availability. Much of the corporate world prefers Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Wednesdays – in that order – with mid- or late-morning a popular time slot, but there are numerous exceptions when a Friday afternoon or even nights and weekends become the best options for audiences. A best practice is to simply begin using a registration question or poll in your presentation to ask the preferences of your particular audience(s).

The Promotion Principle: Communicate Compelling Value

Promoting your training sessions shouldn't feel like you are selling snake oil. Promotion is the process of creating awareness, building desire, and inspiring action – a process that works best for all when done with integrity. Communicating the value of your online training sessions, albeit in a compelling way, improves your reach and effectiveness as your audience discovers you to be a trusted advisor.

Choose the right incentive.
In many cases, the content of the training session alone is sufficient to draw an audience. For many reasons, though, an organization may also wish to increase responsiveness by offering an incentive to respond, and successful promoters of online training pay attention to whether an incentive is personal or corporate in nature.

For example, a discount off the training session fee benefits the company, but not necessarily the trainee. Offering the same session with the promise that all trainees will receive a complimentary gift probably means the gift is retained by the trainee – a change in who is being motivated.

A best practice for marketers of free training sessions is to provide supplemental information. For example, a book, a white paper, a 15-minute one-on-one phone call with the subject-matter expert, or a checklist could provide unique additional value.

Promote both proactively and passively.

To promote your training sessions proactively, consider what groups you can promote *to* and *through.* Direct invitations, newsletters and lists, and sales, marketing, and services teams all offer rich opportunities to get the word out.

Often overlooked are opportunities to passively promote your training sessions. Passive promotions are those that take advantage of traffic patterns, such as visitors to your Web site. Other creative opportunities might include:

- Leaving a plug on your voice-mail or on-hold message
- Including a link in your email signature
- Displaying table tents in your cafeteria
- Including mailer inserts with invoicing or other regular correspondence

With all promotions, use the reporting and analysis tools to help you to monitor and adjust your activities to improve response. Often these are available on-the-fly, making it possible to make decisions quickly.

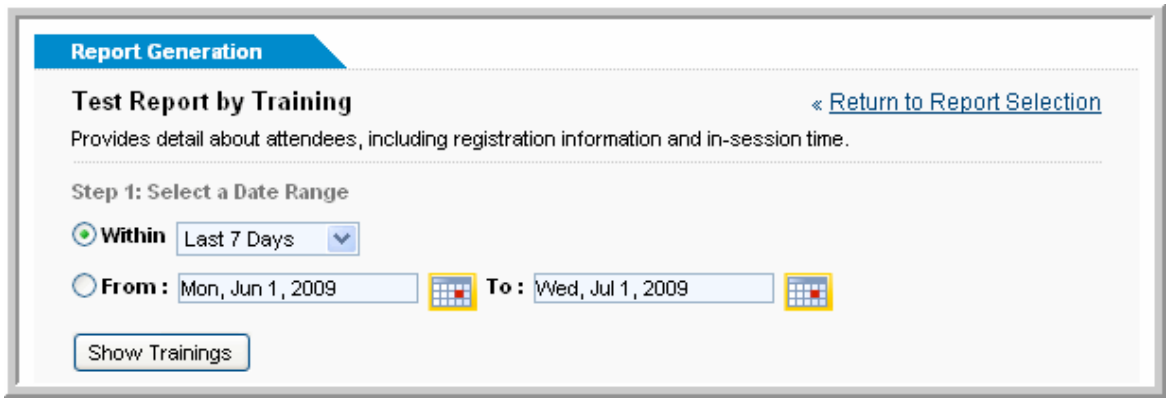

Figure 3 – Online Training Registrant Reporting

Bottom Line: Marketing Creates Motion

Effective marketing is more than promotion: It's an approach to thinking about your online training offering in a comprehensive, value-oriented manner. With careful planning your online training offerings will naturally resonate with your audience, helping you reach more trainees more quickly with your key training messages.

About Roger Courville and 1080 Group, LLC

Roger Courville is the author of *The Virtual Presenter's Handbook* and sought-after speaker on improving productivity using live online communications. Roger is the principal at 1080 Group, LLC, an independent training and consulting firm that helps companies learn and optimize online presentations and Web seminars, and his real-world expertise is backed by that of the seasoned professionals at 1080 Group – who together have worked with hundreds of clients on thousands of events involving more than a million event attendees. For more information, visit www.1080Group.com or call +1-503-329-1662.

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