

**Virtual Training Classes: a new competitive
advantage for Training and Continuous Education
Organizations**

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Executive summary:

Business leaders look for a competitive advantage and ask their Training Providers to offer training courses and the administration of those training courses in a virtual mode known as eLearning.

eLearning platforms are a competitive and modern method for Training Providers to create, publish and administer training courses. The platform can be used as a primary training tool or as a training support tool. Training Providers generally serve several organizations and have to provide each of them with a learners' and programs management private space.

An eLearning platform automates delivery of training and administrative tasks thereby reducing costs for organizations. Consistency of training quality is assured. Productivity is increased by having employees-in-training and administrators available to the "value chain" at all times. All training records are safe and readily available.

eLearning also opens new markets and new opportunities to Training Providers.

An eLearning platform offers these cutting edge advantages:

- Attracts new learners by proposing modern training means to help them with their professional development
- Creates learning communities by establishing and maintaining links between learners, trainers and employers
- 24/7 availability for on demand personalized training and live tutor's meeting points
- Accurate and real time tracking of all training paths and learners' activity
- Easy design and conversion of training courses for instant Internet publication
- Easy linking to resources such as documentaries, archives or news
- Support for learners and administrators anywhere with collaborative and "alert" tools
- Efficiently orients learners upfront from online questionnaires and pre-assessments
- Encourages group work beyond differences and distances
- Exchanges and updates information with other systems before and after the training
- Avoids multiple data entries and resource redundancy
- Strong leverage and scalability letting trainers concentrate on high value added tasks
- Records offline and online activities, synchronous or asynchronous sessions
- Allows previous qualifications to be used as prerequisites to access courses
- Provides learners with special needs or difficulties a stressless means for training that encourages them to work at their pace under a tutor's control

Training Providers gain a competitive advantage for any company by offering their clients a modern training environment which supports employees' long term career development.

Learners will be inspired to develop their knowledge, qualifications, and key attitudes enabling them to work effectively in a constantly changing workplace.

The Users and Their Needs

An eLearning platform involves the following user profiles:

- courses developers
- training program managers
- learners
- tutors
- scorers
- learners' employers

Course developers

A course developer creates training content, including exams with open questions, and customizes and organizes the modules' structure to optimize learning efficiency. Course developers work alone, or as part of a group. When a training module or an update is ready, the course developer will upload a published version to the server hosting the eLearning platform. Course design is a major investment and developers will receive a significant return on this investment by potentially training thousands of learners 24/7.

Course developers need to work autonomously, in a familiar environment, unencumbered by specific time frames or special connectivity requirements of their workplace. They do not want to become programmers, nor be dependant on a new technical environment or consultant services. Course developers should not need to change their work habits and they should be operational immediately. They need to be able to preview their courses as the learner will see them and be able to make any changes before publishing. At anytime they must be able to update their courses and upload new versions online.

Often an eLearning platform will include a user-friendly authoring tool to create course screens. A screen editing tool will allow for customizing courses using screen styles from a gallery. The developer can blend interactive multimedia pages with review pages using quizzes, build slideshows and set an interactive and adaptive navigation process based on the learner's behavior. When creating exams with open questions the developer can fill a special "scoring guideline" field for the reference of a scorer.

Training program managers

A training program manager installs the courses that have been uploaded by the course developer onto the eLearning platform, sets programs' attributes (title, description, dates, prerequisites, self-serve option, certificate delivery, recurrence, etc.); names a program supervisor; organizes learners' groups and assigns programs.

When a course becomes available for publishing, it can be included within one or several training programs. These programs can then be assigned to learners individually or through a group assignment. Each assignment can be automatically personalized from pre-established rules set in the system or set manually by a training program manager. A training program may be comprised of several modules including exams. Passing a given module will unlock access to the next module. A learner should be given several attempts to pass each exam;

each attempt will have a different score to become more difficult. Access to some programs can be controlled by prerequisites such as previous assessments or compliance with some legal matters. When personalizing the assignment of programs delivering certificates, training program managers will specify the recurrence period that determines the expiration date of the certificate and will trigger a new request for training. Each time learners become members of a group they will automatically receive this group's assignments. If a learner leaves a group the subsequent assignments will be stopped.

When monitoring scores the program manager should ensure that a learner does not show a complete lack of knowledge in a specific course. An average score for all courses and a specific score for each course are considered and the eLearning Platform will track this information. This management tool is called skill gap analysis

Training Providers generally serve several organizations and have to provide each of them with a learners and programs management private space. Therefore system must be able to separate people and training components belonging to different organizations or entities but sharing the same eLearning platform. In these cases each entity's member will have a space restricted to their specific audience and will have their own training program managers. At an upper level there will be "Super" training program managers to control and monitor all entities.

Most of the training program manager's tasks can be automated using a connector to transfer data between the eLearning platform and other applications like eCommerce, HR or CRM already used by the Training Provider or the learner's organization. The connector automatically creates learners, groups, and assignments. Reciprocally, training records can be reported to these applications.

At anytime training program managers must be able to access various reports and analyze learners training paths and programs efficiency.

Learners

A learner' personal account should be created by various means such as self-registration, administrator-manual registration or automated registration via a database connector between the eLearning system and another application. In all cases connection information will be sent to the learner. Once their account is created, learners will be able to access their personal learning page through a secured connection at anytime from anywhere. Each learner has a link to communicate with tutors and supervisors.

It is also useful to offer guest learners access to overview the proposed programs to see if they match their needs. This free space can also help with pre-assessments of the programs which can optimize the best training program for each learner.

An appealing and multilingual welcome page will efficiently promote the eLearning center, give learners information on the available training programs, provide a description of the goals and prerequisites, and provide links to Learning Managers.

Courses must be taken according to a list order and completion of a course will unlock the next course in the list. When a program or a course is not accessible, information will be provided to the learner. When a learner comes back to a course, bookmarks and checkmarks will indicate the last screen visited and what has already been completed. Courses should remain available as long as they do not expire. However, exams, once completed, will generally be locked for a particular program assignment.

Depending on the course design, the learner will navigate through the course, watch videos, listen to audios, and review pages as their time permits. If there is an exam to take, before starting and after leaving the exam, warning messages will appear, explaining the rules to follow. Learners' screens must be clear, simple and provide all necessary explanations on each program, course status and rules.

To reduce administrative bottle necks it will be useful to let learners print their own certificates as well as edit their own activity reports.

In addition to assigned courses, it may be interesting to offer learners a self-serve catalog of optional courses.

Tutors

Tutors are in charge of pedagogic follow up and quality of learning paths. Tutors are a key resource to learners and must be easily available to answer questions and give guidance. They must know in real time of any events concerning learners or programs for which they are responsible.

Automated alert messages will tell them about major steps in program deployment such as:

- Registering or removing a learner
- Assignment of a program to a learner or a group
- Start of a program by a learner
- Schedule issue
- Exam's result
- Completion of programs
- An essay question is in score pending

From each event, Tutors will know in detail the quality of the learning paths of the learners they supervise.

Tutors can also conduct periodic live virtual classes through web conferencing. The classes enable tutors to collect feedback and to collectively address issues with groups of learners. These classes are called synchronous as opposed to asynchronous (that are available at all times). These synchronous classes must be seamlessly integrated into the eLearning platform, and are published and scheduled like an asynchronous class. The difference is that every participant must be connected when the session occurs. It should be possible to record such sessions and make them available as an asynchronous course for later review (though in a watch and listen mode only).

Scorers

Scorers have a specific authority to score on-line exam's essay questions. Essay questions or "open questions" can also be used to validate offline steps within a blended training process (e.g. a field practice or an in-person training session) or to gather opinions and feedback from learners.

To support their judgment scorers will have to know:

- How long it took the learner to answer
- How many attempts have been used to answer and how many are left
- Where the score is before and after scoring the current question
- The score to pass
- A guideline to support scoring (originally written by the course developer)
- Ability to set a score as temporary until having an overall view of other learner's performance

"Alert" messages will tell a scorer that they have pending questions to score involving a learner or a program they supervise.

Learner's employers

Learners are the primary resource used to achieve an organization's goals and bottom-line results are expected from the time spent in training. Learners' employers have to justify training initiatives and budgets. It is crucial to keep them informed of training activities and to include them as "alerts" recipients. Setting up a 2-way communication channel between learning audience and training management is an important key for success in an eLearning strategy. Employers will need thorough details on how the program was handled showing the level of commitment and understanding of each learner. Most of this communication has to be paperless and printed materials limited to legal requirements. A coherent real time information loop respecting everybody's role and duties is created.

Answering the needs

A Training Provider and its clients will be able to reduce their administrative load by:

- a) Avoiding multiple entries and consequent error risks
- b) Speeding up the whole process by automating most steps
- c) Using alert messages to target actions and record training path milestones
- d) Providing training on demand and letting learners edit their own documentation
- e) Updating data automatically between the Training Providers and other systems

A Training Provider will often deal with several clients and must be able to communicate with learners' managers within their proper organization. It also provides each organization's management with proof that their expectations have been met. These powerful tracking capabilities will be crucial when facing audits within a quality assurance process such as ISO 9000 compliance.

Summary

A collaborative eLearning platform enables to use the power of the Internet to efficiently train learners, monitor and manage learning paths while offering a loop of communication that will enhance the development of new learning communities.

Each Training Providers' client can use the platform as a separate entity.

Training Providers can extend their reach far beyond the traditional brick and mortar training center and provide local or remote customers with the best possible training opportunities.

The key benefits of such a system are to automate administrative tasks and to deliver on-demand training while combining fine tracking and data access security. These benefits optimize and leverage a Training Provider's resources.

Akuter Technologies provides such a platform and follows carefully the FDA's 21CFR Part 11 guidelines that regulate the way to implement secured features to accept a proof of compliance provided by an electronic system.

Akuter Enterprise is multilingual, non invasive and natively designed for the Net.

Our purpose is to promote a new intelligence and to provide virtual training classes. Training Provider's clients can enhance employees' skills within a modern professional network.

The involvement and collaboration among management, educators and learners is a success key. Well-trained and involved employees are the essential ingredient for any successful organization.

Akuter Technologies' eLearning platform can gain you a genuine competitive advantage.

Contact me at didierb@akuter.com for feedback or questions on this document.

Thank you to our customers, users and partners without whom we would not be able to evolve.