

# Broaden the Scope OF e-LEARNING

BY SHERRY W. BUDZIAK



**Thanks to advancements in technology,** associations are no longer limited to annual meetings and costly seminars to provide members with educational opportunities and information. E-learning provides members with 24/7 access to information along with several environments where users can experience collaborative learning. While e-learning will never replace annual meetings, educational sessions and seminars, there is every reason to believe that it will soon play a role in virtually every association's educational practices.

Most associations equate e-learning to highly expensive systems that take years to start up, develop and launch. But e-learning is simply the strategy of providing educational information to members, constituents and public via the Web. E-learning can broadly be achieved in a variety of ways, including:

- Interactive surveys and quizzes
- Online self-assessment tools
- Online tutorials
- How-to-guides
- Web-based training and professional development
- Member collaboration and communication
- Online chat and special events
- Pre- and post-tests related to a live event
- Voting and market research
- Webinars

## E-LEARNING IN MOTION

### *Online Tutorials*

Organizations are making strides in helping their members “learn” how to use applications and services via the Web. As an example, the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recently launched a new Web site ([www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org)). The AAD developed tutorials that allow physicians to download online presentations with streaming audio as a means to understand the new and improved programs available on the Web site.

### *How-to-Guides*

Another approach is to develop how-to-guides to support Web initiatives. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) launched an interactive community application that allows its members to participate in discussions, chat, post messages, share files, look at upcoming events and more. To ensure success of the community, NAEYC felt it was important to include

an interactive how-to guide to assist members in using the new application. This is an example of a simple way to reduce the volume of inquiries on staff and ensure resources are readily available to members.

### *Web-based Training and Professional Development*

The AAD has established an organization-wide initiative for a Web-based CME program that has been a valuable service to members and a source of non-dues revenue to the organization. “In addition to providing education and training in a given area or on a specific topic, we find our members truly value the ability of an e-learning environment to offer self-assessment tools to measure the knowledge gained from the activity,” says Gretchen C. Murphy, director, department of education. “Such options include pre- and post-test examinations, benchmarking of their own scores against those of their colleagues, polling results, etc. E-learning technology has the capability of providing this type of feedback instantly, which can assist the learner with immediately identifying their own learning gaps, and in turn motivate them to seek new or expanded learning activities within the association.”

The Forum also provides such training through more than 70 online courses licensed from third party providers on such topics as sales, marketing, employment issues and technology. They are not led by instructors but are self-paced courses, including interactive features such as short quizzes and other feedback mechanisms.

([www.associationuniversity.com](http://www.associationuniversity.com))

### *Collaborative Learning through Discussion Boards*

Discussion boards are a widely known, but under used, method for online collaborative learning. Associations can create topic segments with their discussion boards and assign a moderator. The role

for the moderator is to keep the discussion flowing, since for most organizations, the real struggle is retaining a continuous stream of discussion. Discussion boards can provide an environment where members can communicate, share ideas and strategize about future initiatives.

### *Webinars*

Web conferencing tools are quickly emerging as effective collaboration tools for learning. The American Society of Hand Therapists (ASHT) uses such Webinars or Web-based seminars. These educational seminars allow participants to listen to a presentation using their telephone while watching the PowerPoint presentation on their computer screen. The speaker advances the presentation on his/her computer while each participant views this information live online. Participants also have the opportunity to ask questions during the presentation in real-time by utilizing an online chat room. Everyone who has used this online learning tool has remarked that it is a great way to earn continuing education credit in the comfort of their own homes.

The Forum conducts quarterly Webinars aimed at “Making the Most Of Your Membership in the Forum.” These types of tools allow the Forum to easily highlight benefits of membership, while offering a truly interactive experience for the end-user.

### *Online Chat and Special Events*

Online chat is quickly becoming a powerful environment for collaborative learning. Associations can schedule chat times relating to a specific topic or initiative with a moderator. Special events such as online chats with content experts are now more readily available and easier to deploy due to advances in technology. Associations have also learned to market these programs and work with their members to make these events successful.



### MOTIVATING THE LEARNERS

The single most important factor contributing to the success of an e-learning initiative is the motivation of the learners. David Siegler of AAE explains, "All educators wrestle with the topic of how to increase motivation from their learners. Students overall learn at different speeds, and have different learning styles. Some students learn visually while others learn audibly. Most people thrive on rewards creating a drive towards mastery learning, while others may only see the intrinsic value. E-learning has the potential to be able to provide

an isometric learning environment, adjusting to the learning style of each student. Motivation can be provided through challenges and rewards, advancement into higher topic levels of learning and acknowledgement upon completion."

Chelli Johnson from the ASHT comments, "to motivate members and non-members to participate in our Webinars, ASHT offers continuing education units for completing the course. Most people are very willing to participate in an inexpensive online course that will help them maintain their certification."

### IDEAS FOR MOTIVATING YOUR LEARNERS

- Combine online and face-to-face seminars; or blend the learning
- Bundle online purchases with discounted or free online course offerings
- Offer variety of interactivity to meet different learning styles and interests (can include self-assessment, game format, streaming video, text and graphics, etc.)
- Offer certificates and/or continuing education credit for program completion
- Reduce rates to members
- Bundle pricing on a course series
- Create a Frequent User Program for course registrants

Discussion boards can provide an environment where members can communicate, share ideas and strategize about future initiatives.

### KEEP E-LEARNING ALIVE

For many organizations, an ongoing struggle is discovering new ways to infuse life into e-learning and market course material to their audience base. Some key marketing tools include:

- Highlight e-learning in case studies, contests, student testimonials and tips of the month via your Web site and association newsletter
- Blast faxes and e-mails to members
- Lunch and learns for your staff and your membership
- Disseminate surveys to membership
- Incorporate e-learning, as a component or add-on, to annual meetings and seminars
- Provide incentives for e-learning completions
- Introduce e-learning to members during orientation or welcome package
- Offer demonstrations at annual meetings, events and symposiums to promote e-learning options

ASHT promotes Webinars by sending out a postcard to hand therapists with dates of upcoming Webinars, including information on the Web site and online newsletter, and sending blast e-mails to the membership to remind them about the courses. Since the Webinars are online, most of their marketing efforts are done via e-mail. However, they do use testimonials from those who have participated in their marketing messages.

As technology advances and our members become more reliant on the Internet, providing access to information and resources is vital. Creating an effective e-learning environment is not just about installing a tool, or creating content, it's also about teaching your members how to use the tools, motivating the learners and encouraging collaboration. It's about providing an interactive, self-paced learning environment to your constituents that adds real membership value. ■

Sherry W. Budziak may be reached at (847) 240-1374 or [sbudziak@neton-line.com](mailto:sbudziak@neton-line.com).