



The New Classroom

Gina Buser of Traveling Coaches tells us how trainers can lead their firms to greener practices.

Nothing burns fossil fuels like mass training sessions. While face time can be important, gathering attorneys and staff members from all over the country to attend a class at the home office not only guzzles fuel, it also guzzles time, which ultimately hurts productivity. However, these training sessions often seem unavoidable, especially for large rollouts.

But it doesn't have to be this way. "E-learning is the ultimate in green," says Gina Buser, president of training and consulting firm Traveling Coaches. "And today's technology makes it more possible than ever before." Ways to go green range from placing materials on intranets to utilizing webinars, podcasts and videoconferences. After observing corporate training trends, she predicts we'll see movement to informal learning delivery using Web 2.0 technologies like blogs, wikis, online learning communities and even organized training events taking place in virtual worlds like Second Life. From there, she says, it's all about building those communities and relationships. "Trainers need to get out of the classrooms, walk the floors and train people in remote offices to promote learning communities there, so the learning can take place onsite rather than having to bring everybody into a single location."



“The same tools that help you train people remotely can help you communicate with them to make sure they’re comfortable with the new tools.”

You can lead the way

According to Gina, trainers are uniquely qualified to be leaders for change since they understand how to change user behaviors. “Firms should take advantage of those skills to facilitate their green initiatives. Trainers are in a position to provide information and encourage sustainable choices among learners.”

One option is to create a “Green Learning Plan” — online, of course — with content on how to modify print options for draft printing, steps for double-sided printing, how to create digital documents, advanced search techniques to more easily find documents digitally and remote-access skills for efficient telecommuting.

“A great way to engage an entire practice group is to develop a curriculum for e-filing. Courts are actively encouraging law firms to file documents using e-filing tools instead of sending paper documents to the court, and often have considerable resources and best practices posted on their own websites,” she says.

“And if the idea of moving years worth of content online is overwhelming, start with a specific project in mind, like an e-filing learning portal,” she adds. “If your firm is upgrading or rolling out a new application, instead of printing handouts, post that content to an intranet or consider an online learning portal with green computing tips and note cards.”

So what benefits do Web 2.0 technologies offer? According to Gina, emerging technologies provide information at the time of need and implement powerful functionality, such as contextual searching, online collaboration, user commenting and bookmarking. These all allow the learner to retrieve information on demand.

Focus on being flexible

Because training is only one aspect that can affect a firm’s carbon footprint, training teams can adopt these same green initiatives within their own workflow. “While travel is the obvious consumer of resources, a lot of energy goes into content production,” says Gina. Consider online meetings and tools that allow you to

collaborate on documents online. Not only are these smart and eco-friendly strategies, making these a part of your repertoire now can be useful in the future as you grow in your professional skills. “We are seeing attorneys use online collaborative resources for project sharing. The original concept of sharing documents online through deal rooms or extranets has opened the door to document editing online. This is an opportunity for you to become the role model for change within your organizations.”

Additionally, off-the-shelf training content can make printing unnecessary and can be accessed easily online. A side benefit of good content design is that instead of courses for each skill set or competency, the curriculum can be more flexibly arranged and distributed, as well as mixed and matched based on individual needs.

“Within Traveling Coaches, we use learning prerequisites for new product rollouts to decrease our own in-class time. We also frequently work with our clients and remote team members using online conferencing tools.”

So how can teams use online conferencing tools with each other? “We travel quite a bit and are frequently working away from the office, so when we are preparing for a project, we will bring the team together for an online knowledge transfer,” says Gina. “It is a great way to make sure the team is consistent on the message and all last-minute questions are answered. Desktop sharing tools also allow each of us access to our own internal subject matter experts. We are constantly looking at our internal processes to ensure that we are working as efficiently and effectively as possible. If a routine or process is no longer efficient, we change it.”

Yes, but do they learn anything?

One of the concerns about e-learning tools and strategies, however, is whether the trainee actually learned anything. Not to worry, says Gina. “The same tools that help you train people

remotely can help you communicate with them to make sure they're comfortable with the new tools." For example, a Learning Management System (LMS) is effective at tracking and managing the learner's online progress. For firms that do not have intranets or other areas where content can be published online, an LMS can act as a content repository. "The great thing about e-learning is that even small and regional firms can benefit from using it. Because e-learning is accessible and affordable, it's no longer just a tool for large firms."

While the primary focus is conserving resources, there are other significant benefits to a green learning initiative. "For training departments that have been looking for an opportunity

to demonstrate how strategic training aligns to business goals and benefits the bottom line, or for teams that have been looking for a project to create a collaborative relationship with another department, this is your time to shine," Gina says. "Sustainable strategies have an impact on the bottom line not only in dollars saved by using fewer resources, but by retaining top talent who are increasingly aware of the importance of corporate environmental responsibility."

Green is good for the environment and for business. Says Gina, "Striking the right balance of classroom learning supported by e-learning, whether pre-learning or post-learning, saves time, money and most importantly, environmental resources." **ILTA**

Still in Class? You Can Still Be Green

Even though classroom training has been on the decline since 2001 according to the American Society for Training and Development, it still makes up the majority of learning delivery. There are times when classroom training is going to be the best option, but even then, the time needed in the classroom can be reduced dramatically by introducing pre-learning and post-learning tools.

And when classroom training is necessary, there are ways to reduce the environmental impact of live training events by considering practicalities like room temperature, lights and power settings on computer equipment. Don't automatically print handouts. Design training content that is easily accessible online so that printing is unnecessary. Direct learners to an online location and allow them to print only what they need.

"When it is necessary to print, use 100 percent recycled paper, print double-sided and reduce line spacing," says Gina. "Be a leader for change and set the tone by encouraging participants to recycle or return any published training content they no longer need. Put your classroom evaluation and skills assessment forms online as fillable forms, saving not only resources, but administrative time. If you want to perform your own research, sites like conservatree.com and edf.org offer online calculators and information about the environmental impact of different grades of paper."

Additionally, she offers the following: "If travel is required for the training event, start late in the morning to avoid the overnight hotel stay necessary for an early class. Choose central locations to limit travel miles, and require green practices from your suppliers and vendors."

Survey Says . . .

According to ILTA's 2008 User Support Survey, only 23 percent of respondents reported that they had a formalized online training program, often called a "firm university." Many respondents did report, however, that they utilized some form of e-training, the most popular type being led by an instructor and held via WebEx, LiveMeeting or some other virtual meeting tool.

TYPES OF E-LEARNING

Instructor-led	47%
Recorded instructor-led	21%
Sit and watch	28%
Interactive online	29%
Online testing	15%
None	33%

More than one response was allowed

"We've used a firm university for a good decade here at Perkins. Originally, we built one 'in-house.' About four years ago, we transitioned to UniversitySite. Online management of class schedules, enrollments and attendance is a simple way to 'be green.' In addition to giving the firm a better handle on tracking of continuing education, it equally provides the students something they can leverage come annual evaluations. If your CLE tracking is also included, you can extend that benefit to attorneys and make bar renewals a simpler, less paper-driven process each year."

Honora Wade
Perkins Coie
Seattle, WA
Number of Offices: 14
Number of Attorneys: 680



Gina Buser is president and co-owner of Traveling Coaches, a computer training and consulting company located in Dallas. Primarily serving the legal community, Traveling Coaches also includes among its clients corporations, nonprofit groups and government agencies. Since 1997, Gina has served as the company's managing partner, overseeing its administrative, accounting, sales, and marketing teams.