



White Paper

Online Training for Franchisors & Retail Chains



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Online Training for Franchisors & Retail Chains

Training is the foundation of a strong franchise system. Successful franchising is all about duplication and consistency. A brand is strongest when the customer has the same experience each time they visit a franchised location, no matter what time of day or which location. The only way that brand consistency can be accomplished is through training.

- Canadian Franchise Association

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Background

Thriving franchisors understand that **training is the foundation of a strong franchise system**. McDonald's® Corporation, arguably the most successful franchise in the world, knows that training is critical to their success, which is why they created Hamburger University. This 130,000 square foot facility located in Oak Brook, Illinois has seen over 80,000 managers graduate since it opened back in 1961.

Nowadays, innovative franchisors are moving their Corporate University to the Internet. Subway®, a restaurant franchise with 30,000+ locations worldwide, recently launched the *University of Subway*, an online Corporate University that allows them to train their management team and staff on various topics such as merchandising, store equipment and food safety.

Purpose of this Document

This document was developed to help franchisors and retail chains understand the benefits of online training and more particularly, an online Corporate University. It presents best practices and “how to” information to help franchise systems successfully and economically develop an online training program to teach their franchisees’ management staff and employees about their products, services, equipment and operational procedures. It also elaborates on common characteristics of adult students and describes principles that are critical to the success of any training program; online or offline. Finally, it discusses various options for hosting your Corporate University as well as budgetary price ranges.

NOTE: This document focuses on franchise systems, but applies equally well to retail chains. The legal structure of your corporation does not impact the general principles of online training and adult learning.

Problem Statement

Conventional, face-to-face training can be very effective. Having a knowledgeable subject-matter expert with solid training skills teach your franchisees all about your products, services, equipment and operational procedures is sure to lead to a well-trained staff. Instructor-led training (ILT) however has two significant limitations:

1. Instructor-led training doesn't scale very well.

2. Any attempt to scale ILT results in an increase in cost.

Any reasonable person in charge of corporate training recognizes that one-on-one training is not economically feasible for a franchise system. In order for conventional ILT to be economically viable, each session must train a relatively large audience. This partially explains why formal academic institutions of higher education are constantly trying to cram more students into their classroom and lecture halls.

The trade-off between one-on-one and group training however is not negligible. The more students participating in a single training session, the less interaction and feedback each student will receive.

Instructors training individuals in a corporate environment typically recommend a classroom size of 8 to 12 people. This optimal number allows them to properly train the individuals, yet justifies the cost of the training session. The 8 to 12 rule of thumb however doesn't always apply in a franchise environment for a few reasons.

First, the average franchise employs somewhere between 10-25 employees. **A store can't send half of its team all at once to a training session.** The business simply wouldn't be able to operate with only half the hands on deck.

Second, the franchise industry faces a very high employee turnover rate with an industry average somewhere between 100% and 300%. And while some operational procedures can be learned along the way, there are some basic skills that each new employee must have before he/she can start contributing. This means that new hire training sessions must take place as soon as someone is hired, not once the group of new hires reaches 8 to 12 people. **Training must be available on demand in any of your franchised locations.**

The Classic Approach

How do franchisors deal with the limitations of instructor-led training? Well, most don't really!

Initial & On-site Training

Most franchises follow the exact same recipe for training their franchisees. First, they train new franchise owners at their headquarters for a 2-6 week period. Then, they provide on-site training and assistance during the store's initial opening. And to top it all off, they provide each store owner with their all-encompassing Operations Manual; a 300-page brick that contains everything a franchisee needs to know to replicate the franchisor's proven business model.

This classic approach is successful as far as transferring knowledge goes but it does have important shortcomings.

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- **Travel and living expenses related to instructor-led training can quickly reach the tens of thousands of dollars** for the franchisee (who needs to travel to corporate headquarters during initial training) or the instructor (who needs to travel to the actual store during on-site training).
- Most of the training is geared towards the store owner and not the employees.
- The schedule is not necessarily convenient, especially if multiple franchises are scheduled to open around the same time and you have a limited number of instructors.

Ongoing & New Hire Training

In order to remain competitive, franchises need to evolve. New products, technology and innovations require that franchisees have ongoing training to keep current with the evolving brand and continue to be competitive in changing markets. And then, there are new hires that require training as well. So who's responsible for training everyone once the initial training session is over and the store is operational?

Well, look at any franchisor's Web site, and they'll have an ongoing training blurb on it that promises to continue supporting franchisees. And to some extent, they do. Some better than others, but most do offer some type of ongoing support.

Generally speaking however, ongoing training is infrequent at best – perhaps once every quarter or even once a year at an annual convention. (We're not referring to corporate memos sent via email, educational posters, or updates to the Operations Manual. We're talking about actual interactive training!) And again, this support is usually geared towards the franchise owner, not the managers and employees.

Most franchisors adopt a *laissez faire* attitude towards ongoing and new hire training and instead prefer to decentralize this activity and leave the task to the individual franchise owners. In an industry with a 100% to 300% employee turnover rate, in 4 to 12 months time, the majority of the store's staff will not have participated in your initial on-site training session. How will the new hires perform? Will they be able to replicate your proven business model, or will they run your franchise just like any of your competitors' business?

The Recommended Approach

Leveraging the Internet to train your franchisees make sense on many levels. **Not only does an online Corporate University allow you to scale, it allows you to scale cost-effectively!** While McDonald's multi-million dollar facility enabled them to train 80,000 managers over a 45-year period, a Corporate University hosted over the Internet allows you to train the same number of people concurrently.

An online Corporate University additionally grants franchisors more control over their training program. By centralizing the content, you are able to control the consistency of the information being taught, regardless of who's learning; franchise owners, managers, or regular employees.

When I was a kid, one of the popular party games was the telephone game. We'd all sit around in a circle. The first person would whisper a few short sentences in the ear of the next person. They would have to repeat it to the person next to them, and so on around the circle. When it got to the last person, they would announce what they heard. It never, ever, came close to the original message, and was usually so distorted that it would evoke laughs from all the players.

Leaving ongoing and new hire training up to your franchisees is like playing the telephone game. At best, the message will be so distorted that the customer experience will vary each time they visit a franchised location. At worst, store owners and managers won't take the appropriate time required to train their employees, and your brand will not only be inconsistent, it will be non-existent.

Training Topics

An online Corporate University can cover any topic that is usually covered in conventional training. Thanks to advancements in multimedia, there truly are no limits.

- Initial site selection and store build-out
- Operating standards and procedures
- Technical operations for providing the service or product
- Merchandising
- Use of store equipment
- Recruitment, retention and management of employees
- Marketing, advertising and public relations
- Financial management and controls
- Administration
- Point of sale systems
- Approved suppliers

Benefits of an Online Corporate University

Over and above the benefits mentioned in the previous section, an effective online Corporate University combined with multimedia online courses contributes to the growth, efficiency and profitability of your franchise system in many ways:

Save Money

Perhaps saving money isn't the most graceful reason for wanting an online Corporate University, but let's be honest, you're running a business! At the end of the day (or should I say "quarter"), your bottom line matters.

Delivering instructor-led training courses can be very expensive. Travel and living expenses usually represent 40% to 60% of overall training costs when instructors and/or students need to travel in order to take a class. **Delivering content via an online Corporate University instantly frees up half of your training budget**, leaving more money for the design and delivery of additional courses.

Deliver Higher Quality Training Programs

Studies have proven time and again that multimedia-rich eLearning courses yield better learning. Richard Mayer, Colvin Clark and other researchers have all concluded that narrated online courses yield an average improvement of 80% over text and graphic courses, and 97.8% over text-only courses typically found in Operation Manuals.

Allow For "Anytime, Anywhere" Learning

People nowadays expect nothing less than anytime, anywhere training. And why wouldn't they? As mentioned earlier, a new hire cannot be productive without some basic skills, and waiting for the next face-to-face New Hire training session is simply not reasonable.

Anytime, anywhere training is advantageous for everyone. Your students expect it, and you should support it.

Remain Competitive

In order to remain competitive, franchises need to evolve. New products, technology and innovations require that franchisees have ongoing training to keep current with the evolving brand and continue to be competitive in changing markets. This ongoing training needs to be disseminated through the entire franchise system quickly. A Corporate University allows you to train everyone concurrently; a feat that cannot be accomplished through conventional training.

Manage Crises

Another significant advantage made possible by an online Corporate University is the ability to manage crises effectively. Think of the 2008 Canadian listeriosis outbreak linked to the Maple Leaf Foods plant in Toronto, Ontario. Certain restaurant franchises offering deli meats to their clientele had to react quickly in order to limit damage to their store brand. Thanks to their online Corporate University, vigilant franchisors were able to quickly develop an action plan in the form of an eLearning course and have every single

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franchisee trained within 48 hours following the report of the outbreak. They were able to teach every manager and staff member how to deal with the crisis before it became a serious threat to their business.

Help Retain Employees

The #1 reason why skilled employees leave companies is because of the unconstructive relationship with their immediate superior. The #2 reason is because they feel their career has come to a standstill and they are no longer learning.

Help retain your employees by giving them a continuous opportunity to learn new skills and further their career. Develop online tests and quizzes or even interactive games to help them measure their performance against newly acquired abilities so they can get an objective, unbiased understanding of their skill level.

While your main goal is to train employees on products, services and operational procedures specific to your franchise, a Corporate University also allows you to offer generic courses to your students. Business skills, technical skills, etc. Although they might not be directly related to your franchise, these generic skills can still help you form a better management team and staff and help retain employees.

Provide a Hub for Knowledge Collection and Dissemination

An online Corporate University is a great place to learn. It's an even better place to teach!

An online Corporate University allows students to interact with each other via chat rooms, discussion boards and video conferencing. It also allows employees to post valuable information in corporate wikis. Furthermore, an online Corporate University lets system administrators grant teacher privileges to selected subject-matter experts who can then become teachers themselves. With your permission, they can develop courses of their own via a simple text or HTML editor all the while receiving gratification from being a recognized mentor for others.

Allow You to Measure Investments in Learning in Relation to Business Results

An online Corporate University allows you to track who has taken which course and how they performed during the online evaluation. As a result, you can measure the overall investment in time and money in relation to business results.

An HR department for example could easily measure the reduction in sexual harassment complaints following the mandatory participation of every employee in a Sexual Harassment Awareness course.

Deciding whether or not to further invest in certain areas or to make courses mandatory is now a science, not a guessing game.

Be Perceived as a Company That Invests In Its People

Having a first-class online Corporate University with current, multimedia-rich courses goes a long way to convincing your franchisees and their employees that your company invests in its most important resource; its people. This small investment could do more for your business than any career fair, marketing campaign or internal employee motivation initiative.

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Shorten Classroom Sessions and Overall Training

Studies clearly demonstrate that people learn best when training sessions are 17 minutes or less. The short attention span of most people does not allow them to remain attentive for hours at a time. Not to mention that most people don't have hours to spare on any given day.

Conventional ILT doesn't lend itself very well to short sessions given the logistics around it, especially when the class is in a remote location. But online training certainly does. Students love short online courses in the format of articles and videos. Why not get a little creative and produce slide-casts that your students can download to their Blackberry or iPhone and listen to on the way to or from work?

Track Participation & Performance

One of the major advantages of an online Corporate University over other delivery channels, say simply posting online courses on your Intranet, is that an online Corporate University allows instructors and managers to track who took what course and how well they performed. It also allows you to issue certificates of achievements to students who meet certain criteria and generate reports cards on a per franchise and per employee basis. If you believe in the old adage that *you can't manage what you can't measure*, then an online Corporate University is a definite must.

Eliminate Logistical Problems

If you've ever tried to organize a training session with even as few as a dozen people, you know how difficult it can be. Students are too busy to attend. Instructors are not readily available. Classrooms are already booked - that is, if you have a classroom! And that's only with a dozen students. Imagine when you need to deliver a specific course company-wide!

Given the anytime, anywhere nature of an online Corporate University, you don't have to worry about logistics anymore.

Characteristics of Adult Students

Although an online Corporate University provides many advantages to a franchisor, you should understand that the Internet is strictly a medium to transfer knowledge. **In order for your training program to be successful, you must observe basic principles of learning** and make sure that all of the elements required for learning to take place are present in your courses, regardless of the delivery medium.

For the most part, your employees will be adults. Although the age difference of your students is likely to vary, research shows that adults have some common characteristics regardless of age when it comes to learning:

- **Adult students have a purpose for their learning.** They are not learning just for learning's sake. Adults have a specific reason for learning a new skill. They are motivated to learn by changes in their situations and learn best when new skills apply in practical ways and/or are relevant to their job.
- **Adult students tend to be problem-centered rather than subject-centered.** They learn best through practical applications of what they have learned. Your eLearning modules should be problem-centered. For examples, an eLearning module on the topic of human resources should not be called "Employee Management" but rather "How to Deal with Difficult Employees".
- **Adult students like to know why things are done in a certain way.** They need to understand the concepts before they will take the risk of using them.
- **Adult students need to feel respected.** Stay away from *cheesy* training props and aids geared towards children and teens. For example, if you choose to use avatars, don't use fictional characters. Use 3D avatars that look like real individuals. (This principle applies even if your employees are indeed teenagers. They are not in school. They are in a work environment.)
- **Adult students exhibit a variety of learning styles.** There is no one right way of learning. They learn in different ways at different times and for different reasons. That being said, you might need to integrate different teaching styles in your overall training program. Our recommendation is to first try a common approach to training and follow each module with a brief evaluation. If the student has trouble successfully completing the evaluation, don't simply ask him to re-take the same course. Instead, present the information using a different training methodology. For example, if you are teaching the student how to use a commercial oven, you could initially use voice-overs along with a picture of the oven to illustrate how to operate it. Then, using the same picture, ask the student to complete certain use cases by using the computer mouse to click on certain controls. If the student cannot complete the use cases, you can perhaps present a short video of a person using the oven in a day-to-day scenario.
- **Adult students have work and life experience.** Past experiences affect how the student learns and are the foundation for current learning. Try to call upon and integrate these rich work and life experiences into the learning environment.
- **Adult students want to control their career.** They want to self-direct and manage their personal learning. They see instructors and systems merely as tools to help them reach their goals. Break down long training programs into a series of short modules and give them navigational tools so they can easily find topics that are of interest to them.

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- **Adult students learn best in nonthreatening environments.** They might be intimidated to try something new for the first time in front of a larger group. Self-paced online training allows them to learn new skills in privacy. Once they've completed the online evaluation and feel confident they have learned the right skills, they will feel more confident demonstrating their newly acquired skills in front of their manager, supervisor, or fellow employees.
- **Adult students like to reflect on what they have just learned.** This facilitates the integration and application of new knowledge and skills. That's why shorter training modules and the ability to pause, rewind and skip modules is essential.
- **Adult students will continue learning as long as they achieve satisfaction,** especially in the sense of making progress toward their personal learning goals. Develop evaluation tools along with your presentation-style training program and provide ample feedback to your students, whether they have passed or failed.
- **Adult students also view the learning process as a social process.** Use eLearning 2.0 and social networking tools such as chat rooms, discussion forums, corporate wikis and Web conferences to support their socialization needs. (These needs will also be met during the ILT portion of your training program and on the job, assuming this person works alongside other co-workers.)

The 5 Phases of a Franchisor's Training Program

Instructor-led training has its weaknesses, but it also has its place in franchisee training. **A training program solely based on online training is probably just as weak (or strong) as a training program strictly based on face-to-face training.**

The following sub-sections describe how to best apply the eLearning concepts and principles described herein to your training program. They also explain how an online Corporate University co-exists with instructor-led training.

A franchisor's training program generally consists of 5 distinct phases or sub-programs:

- Initial Training
- On-site Training
- New Hire Training
- Ongoing Training
- Ad Hoc Training

Initial Training

Every franchisor we've come across provides initial training to new franchise owners. This training grants them the knowledge and skills required to duplicate the franchisor's proven business model and to provide a consistent customer experience.

Generally speaking, initial training is provided at the franchisor's corporate headquarters. It may last anywhere from a few weeks to a few months, depending on the complexity of the franchise in question and is generally open to the franchisee only. In some cases, the invitation may be extended to key personnel such as managers.

In the past, franchisees were typically sent a copy of the Operations Manual ahead of time and asked to review it prior to traveling to corporate headquarters for the formal instructor-led training sessions. Nowadays, **innovative franchisors looking for a more effective way to train new franchisees are incorporating online training prior to the initial training.** At least one of the world's largest franchisors actually has a clause in their franchise agreement stating that ***new franchisees are required to complete a specific list of online courses on the University of [name withheld] prior to attending the Franchisee Training course at our headquarters.*** If the online training is not successfully completed, the applicant's franchise license is immediately terminated or that franchisee must repeat the online training until all of the necessary skills are learned.

Preceding the initial training phase with online training presents many advantages for both the franchisor and franchisee:

- It saves money for all parties by shortening the duration of the classroom sessions, thereby reducing instructor salaries and living expenses.
- It increases knowledge transfer by as much as 97.8% when compared to the Operations Manual and other text-only printed courses.
- It enables anytime, anywhere learning.
- It lets franchisees learn at their own pace and convenience.
- It allows you to measure the return on investments in your Corporate University by comparing the performance of students who successfully completed the online courses to those who haven't.
- It increases the perception that you are truly leading-edge and invest in your most important resource: your people.

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Generally speaking, new franchise owners are very motivated and want to succeed. So why limit them? **Give new franchisees access to your online Corporate University. You'll notice a significant difference in their readiness when they show up at your corporate headquarters.** They'll be prepared and ready to go.

Introducing your Corporate University early in the process also helps you promote online training. You want your Corporate University to be the tool of choice for your store owners to train their employees. As such, owners should become familiar with your Corporate University as soon as possible. If they understand the value a Corporate University brings, they will be more likely to encourage their management team and students to use it.

On-Site Training

On-site training usually starts a few days or weeks before the store officially opens (depending on the complexity of running the business) and generally lasts until the trainer is confident that the franchisee can run the business autonomously. The idea here is to apply the skills learned during the initial training at the franchised location.

During this phase, the instructor provides various scenarios that allow the franchisee and his employees to operate the business as though there were real customers. The instructor observes the team and provides comments as appropriate. Once the store actually opens, the instructor continues to evaluate and provide feedback to the team until every kink is worked out and the business operates according to the franchisor's standards.

Because managers and employees are typically not invited to the initial training phase conducted at the corporate headquarters, **it is important to precede the on-site training phase with online training.** A solid eLearning program at this point in the process:

- Prepares managers and employees ahead of time, ensuring they are ready and productive when the instructor shows up.
- Shortens on-site sessions and overall training duration.
- Eliminates logistical problems caused by employees who can't make every single ILT session due to conflicts.
- Allows students to learn at their own pace, anytime, anywhere.

Much like the initial training phase, the online training should for the most part be a predecessor to the actual on-site sessions. Once the instructor shows up on-site, the team should practice their skills on real people and equipment as much as possible.

New Hire Training

As the title implies, New Hire training is for all new employees that are not yet familiar with the franchise's products, services, equipment or operational procedures.

Anyone who's run a small business knows that training new hires is very demanding and time-intensive. This is especially true in the franchise industry where the employee turnover rate typically ranges between 100% and 300%.

It takes time for new hires to become productive. They must first become educated about the products, services, equipment and operational procedures of the company. **Having managers or experienced employees train new hires diverts productive people away from their job, temporarily diminishing their productivity.** In addition to reducing the contribution of experienced employees, new hires may

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even have negative contributions. For example, if a new hire misuses and breaks a piece of equipment, someone else will have to step in and fix it.

Online training enables new hires to study by themselves, without the presence of an instructor or another employee (a process called “asynchronous learning”). By learning online at their own pace, new hires are not diverting experienced workers away. And given that eLearning is typically twice as efficient as conventional training, new hires learn faster and will start contributing much sooner.

New Hire training, like any other training program, should be interactive and include evaluation tools. It's not enough to present information to the student. Not only is one-way training boring, it's not nearly as effective as interactive training. **You can certainly get away with some online presentations à la Microsoft® PowerPoint®, but such presentations should at the very least be converted to multimedia animation with voice-overs using tools such as Dual Code's slide-casting service.** Generally speaking however, you should supplement your slide-casts with activities, assignments and online evaluations to verify that your students have effectively met the learning objectives of the online course.

With advancements in multimedia, new hire training could completely be done online. That being said, adult students view learning as a social process. Use eLearning 2.0 and social networking tools such as chat rooms, discussion forums, corporate wikis and Web conferences to support their socialization needs. Continue to include some form of ILT or mentoring in your new hire training program, even if it's strictly to make the new employee feel part of the team.

Ongoing Training

In order to remain competitive, franchises need to evolve. Great franchisors don't stop at providing initial training to franchisees and new hires. They provide ongoing training and support designed to continue to develop the skills of the franchisee and his staff for the duration of the franchise agreement.

Ongoing training updates franchisees and their staff on new products, services and system wide enhancements. The goal is to ensure that the franchise system is consistent as a whole and continues to be competitive as industries change and evolve.

Successful franchisors put heavy emphasis on ongoing training. **The quality and thoroughness of ongoing training often has a correlation to the quality of the franchise system.**

Since ongoing training needs to be applied across the entire franchise system, face-to-face training is once again not economically possible. Leverage your online Corporate University. Dedicate a section to *new and improved* methods and procedures. Communicate with employees using blogs or your Corporate University's built-in emailing capability and let them know when a new course, or a revision to an existing course, is available.

Ad Hoc Training

Every once in a while, a franchise system comes across an uncontrollable circumstance where every single employee in the system must complete a training course. Government rules and regulations for example might require tomorrow that everyone in the food industry be certified in a new government-approved Food Health and Safety course.

The franchisor itself might voluntarily decide to impose new operational procedures on all franchisees. Think of the 2008 Canadian listeriosis outbreak linked to the Maple Leaf Foods plant in Toronto, Ontario. Certain restaurant franchises offering deli meats to their clientele had to react quickly in order to limit

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damage to their store brand. Thanks to an online Corporate University, you are now able to quickly develop an action plan in the form of an eLearning course and have every single franchisee trained within days. You can ensure that the crisis is dealt with in a proven, consistent manner across the entire franchise system.

Additional Best Practices

The following sections describe additional best practices that should be applied to your online training program.

Shorten Your Modules

Most experts recommend that online training modules geared towards adult learners last no longer than 15-20 minutes. This is a rule of thumb. In reality, modules can be as short as 5 minutes and as long as 30 minutes, but if you are exceeding the 30 minute limit, you risk losing students halfway through the module.

Keep in mind that a module is a unit that is part of a larger course. If you have a course focusing on human resources practices for example, you could have the following modules:

- How to pre-screen candidates (Duration: 15 minutes)
- How to interview candidates (Duration: 17 minutes)
- How to train new employees (Duration: 9 minutes)
- How to deal with difficult employees (Duration: 20 minutes)
- How to motivate employees (Duration: 16 minutes)
- How to reward strong performers (Duration: 14 minutes)
- How to prepare employees for a promotion (Duration: 11 minutes)
- How to terminate employees (Duration: 19 minutes)
- TOTAL: 121 minutes

As you can see, this course is over two hours long, but by making each module 20 minutes or less, your employees can more easily focus on a topic of their choice. They can easily identify and select a problem-centric module, go through it during down-time at work (or a quiet evening at home) and then go on with the rest of their day. They don't feel the need to sit down in front of a computer for 2 hours straight to learn about this and that when all they want to do is learn how to reward an employee that's been performing really well recently.

Get Creative

Your online training courses need not be a Web-based reproduction of your face-to-face courses. Slidecasts can certainly be effective, but why not get a little creative?

- Launch a corporate blog to cover enhancements and innovations in your franchise system and attract readers by covering other topics of interest. Perhaps some of your employees are training for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. Why not mention it there?
- Deliver material in HTML 5 format so that your employees can download it onto their Blackberry or iPhone.
- Build crossword puzzles with questions related to the history of the franchise system.
- Give teacher privileges to your best employees and let them develop their own courses using your Corporate University's built-in HTML and quiz editors.

Provide On-Site Access

One of the major benefits of online training is that it enables students to learn anytime, anywhere, including from home on evenings and weekends. That being said, **franchises that strictly rely on**

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employees to learn from home haven't been as successful as those who setup a learning station on site.

Some students might not have Internet access from home. Others may not be motivated enough to learn after regular work hours. Whatever the case may be, our experience has shown us that offering access to your online Corporate University from work increases usage and performance.

Sharable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM)

SCORM, which stands for *Sharable Content Object Reference Model*, is a collection of standards and specifications for Web-based training. It defines communication between the course and the platform it's running on (e.g. your Corporate University).

This white paper will not go into the details of SCORM. You can easily find more information on the topic by visiting other online resources such as Wikipedia. We will mention however that by archiving your eLearning content as SCORM packages (or a *Package Interchange File* or *PIF* to be technically exact), you'll gain many benefits.

Most Corporate Universities have built-in capabilities that allow you to track progress of students taking a SCORM compliant online course. By deploying a SCORM package in Dual Code's Corporate University for example, a student can easily see which units were started, completed, passed or failed. Each module in the table of contents will be preceded by an icon representative of the status:

- A green checkmark means the module was successfully completed
- A blue question mark means the module was started but not completed
- A red cross means the student has failed the evaluation

By packaging your courses as PIF files, you will also be able to easily switch platform vendors should you become unhappy with your current solution. Deploying SCORM packages on a SCORM-compliant Corporate University is as easy as uploading a ZIP file and clicking on a button. Should your Corporate University or vendor/provider no longer meet your needs, you can easily switch to one of their competitors.

This white paper started out by referencing a quote which we believe is absolutely critical for any franchisor to understand. So important that we feel we must repeat it here:

Training is the foundation of a strong franchise system. Successful franchising is all about duplication and consistency. A brand is strongest when the customer has the same experience each time they visit a franchised location, no matter what time of day or which location. The only way that brand consistency can be accomplished is through training.

- Canadian Franchise Association

Leaving new hire and ongoing training up to your franchisees is like playing the telephone game.

At best, the message will be so distorted that the customer experience will vary each time they visit a franchised location. At worst, store owners and managers won't take the appropriate time to train their employees, and your brand will not only be inconsistent, it will be non-existent.

An online Corporate University allows you to control the consistency of the information being taught. It also provides you with many other benefits:

- Save money
- Deliver higher quality training programs
- Enable anytime, anywhere learning
- Remain competitive
- Manage crises
- Help retain employees
- Provide a hub for knowledge collection and dissemination
- Allow you to measure investments in learning in relation to business results
- Be perceived as a company that invests in its people
- Shorten classroom sessions and overall training
- Track participation and progress
- Eliminate logistical problems

One question remains. How much does a Corporate University cost?

A Corporate University needs not be expensive. **Dual Code, a leading developer of eLearning solutions designed specifically for franchise systems, develops and hosts Corporate Universities for a low monthly fee.** And because Dual Code's solution is hosted, it alleviates your burden of purchasing, installing, configuring and maintaining the hardware equipment or software application.

The Corporate University however only represents a portion of the overall cost of your online training program. In order to truly calculate the investment required to successfully launch an eLearning program, you must also factor in the cost of designing and developing your online courses. And that cost can vary tremendously.

If your training material already exists, you've won half the battle. One-third to one-half of the cost of developing online courses is in the instructional design and development of the raw material.

Assuming your material is in Microsoft® PowerPoint® or Apple® Keynote® format, **Dual Code's Corporate University solution allows you to transform your slides to multimedia online courses, complete with voice-overs.** Such courses are presentation-style only however. While they do an excellent job of presenting the information to your students, they lack in terms of interactivity. As

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mentioned earlier, you should complement your slide-casts with activities, assignments and online evaluations to increase knowledge transfer and verify that your students have effectively met the learning objectives of the online course. Such additional learning elements can vary anywhere from \$500 to \$5,000 per course, and even more in the case of interactive, multimedia games.

More important than price is the system's ability to support standard eLearning formats. The last thing you want is to be locked in a vendor-specific solution. **Whatever Corporate University package you choose, make sure it is SCORM compliant and that the vendor will allow you to deploy courses that you've developed yourself or purchased from a third party.** By doing so, you'll be able to shop around for off-the-shelf eLearning courses, develop your own courses, or have a third-party develop them for you. Should you become dissatisfied with your Corporate University solution at a later time, you will also be able to move your SCORM compliant courses to another vendor's platform at any time.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is eLearning as good as face-to-face training?

A meta-analysis of more than 300 studies comparing eLearning to conventional, face-to-face training clearly indicates that eLearning is as effective as instructor-led training, each method having its own advantages¹.

After hundreds of media comparison studies, we've learned that it's not the delivery media that enables learning; it's how any given delivery technology supports human learning processes. If two lessons include all of the elements needed for learning, learning will occur whether the lesson is offered digitally or in a classroom. For example, if an eLearning module is interactive and based on sound instructional design principles such as the dual coding theory, while a comparison face-to-face lesson is not, learning will be more easily achieved in the eLearning version. And vice versa.

1. Bernard, R. M., P. C. Abrami, Y. Lou, E. Borokhovski, A. Wade, L. Wozney, P. A. Wallet, M. Fixet, and B. Huang. 2004. "How does distance education compare with classroom instruction? A meta-analysis of the empirical literature." *Review of Educational Research* 74(3): 379–439.

2. How do we know if our students are ready for eLearning?

If your students use email on a regular basis and feel comfortable surfing the Web, watching videos on YouTube or posting messages on Facebook, then they are definitely ready for eLearning.

3. Our students aren't very motivated to learn. Will eLearning increase their motivation?

Most people aren't motivated to learn because they don't see the immediate need to learn. This is typical of training sessions scheduled way before (or after) the student needs to complete the task in question. Because your Corporate University enables just-in-time learning, students tend to be much more motivated to learn.

Also, students are sometimes too busy putting out fires and dealing with their day-to-day job. The anytime, anywhere nature of your Corporate University allows your students to learn at their convenience, which increases attendance and course completion.

Online courses created by Dual Code also tend to be more interactive than instructor-led classes. Let's be honest. An instructor can only interact with so many students at any given time. An eLearning session on the other hand is able to interact with an unlimited number of students. It's effectively a one-on-one training session between a computer and an individual.

4. What happens when our students have questions?

Corporate Universities now have synchronous tools such as private chat rooms or Web conferencing that allow you to interact with your students in real time. By publishing the pre-scheduled hours for the chat room or Web conference, say Monday to Friday between 2pm and 3pm, you're allowing your students an opportunity to interact with subject-matter experts from your head office at their convenience. And of course, your students can always ask questions to their co-workers or managers.

5. How does eLearning save us money?

A Corporate University saves you money in many ways by:

- Eliminating travel and living expenses for your students or instructors
- Eliminating the need for training facilities and equipment
- Reducing the need for instructors
- Eliminating printing costs of training manuals
- Enabling off-hours learning
- Increasing employee productivity.

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For more details on these points and other ideas on how eLearning saves organizations money, please visit <http://elearning-ottawa.org/2009/04/14/top-7-ways-elearning-saves-money.aspx>.

6. I understand that eLearning saves us money, but doesn't it also cost more upfront?

It is rare to find organizations that have truly calculated what all of their face-to-face training efforts cost. If they did, they would look favorably upon the economics of eLearning. True, the upfront development costs of a first-class eLearning program are higher than instructor-led training, but they are recouped many times via much lower delivery costs.

7. What is the difference between synchronous and asynchronous eLearning?

Many eLearning vendors use the term synchronous and asynchronous when describing their offering. Synchronous means that an instructor is present when the course is delivered, even though the course might be delivered remotely over the Internet. Asynchronous means that the instructor does not need to be present, thereby allowing students to learn anytime, at their convenience.

About the Author

Dual Code Inc., headquartered in Ottawa, Canada, is a leading developer of eLearning solutions. We design, develop and host Corporate Universities and eLearning courses for franchise systems and retail chains that understand the value of a well-trained workforce.

Our award-winning Corporate University solution combined with our multimedia online courses provide value to our clients by:

- Saving them thousands of dollars by reducing the cost required to deliver courses
- Enabling anytime, anywhere learning, thereby accommodating people's busy schedules and remote locations
- Reducing the length of classroom workshops and making information more readily available
- Positioning the agency as cutting edge in its use of technology

To remain a leader in the eLearning industry, Dual Code has assembled a team of skilled individuals experienced in all aspects of eLearning, including:

- Professional instructional designers who ensure every course we deliver leverages eLearning best practices such as the dual coding theory.
- Graphic designers who design original graphics and technical illustrations to give your courses a professional look.
- Multimedia experts who pride themselves in delivering interactive, attention-grabbing courses designed for your target audience.
- Creative and technical writers who can transform your raw course material to crystal-clear instructions and engaging scripts.
- Professional voice-over artists who can clearly communicate the course content to your students.
- Seasoned project managers who guarantee projects are delivered on time, within budget and according to your needs.

Our commitment to innovation and customer service is unparalleled. We recognize that our success is highly dependent on our ability to continually innovate and provide our clients with user-friendly, leading-edge eLearning solutions. **Dual Code operates on the business principle that we are only successful if our clients are successful.**

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