

BCS/IT Training

Connected: the virtual classroom

Allan Pettman, UK Managing Director of Global Knowledge, discusses the benefits of the connected classroom in austere times and its impact on the changing role of the classroom tutor.

The impact of the government's spending cuts will undoubtedly result in a very cost-conscious society. One area where these cuts always have a knock-on effect is training. Whether it's slashed budgets or a varied training structure, the full impact is being felt from one organisation to another.

Training will always be on a company's agenda - even in tighter times organisations know their most valuable commodity is people - but the focus on cost-effective training, like connected classrooms, is becoming more important than ever before.

Family guy

Unsurprisingly, spending cuts are also impacting on family life. As the effects of the recession linger and the pace of life increases, employees are working longer hours in a bid to guarantee job security and retain an income. As such, parental duties are naturally taking priority over training classes as the preferred evening activity of most workers.

This has had a subsequent effect on learning models and the way people train and learn. Flexibility is undoubtedly the key and increasing responsibilities - both at home and in the workplace - mean users are looking for easy ways to build their skill set without clocking up hours of travelling time.

The connected classroom

As a result, the connected classroom, which provides access to a tutor working from a remote classroom location, is being embraced as a viable solution that not only meets business needs, but causes minimal disruption to the delegate. While face-to-face learning is still widely recognised as the most effective and beneficial learning method in the long term, the connected classroom offers many positive incentives that position it well.

For example, it allows the user to select the centre that's most convenient for them - a key business driver for many recession-hit organisations, saving hotel and travel costs while allowing flexibility for the delegate. Companies will be looking for a happy medium, where a good quality course promises a return on investment. This could result in the best of both worlds - connected classrooms, which merge structured lectures with a healthy return on cost and time.

Connected classrooms not only provide a more engaging and interactive learning experience, but they're also more reliable than virtual learning methods such as Webex. They remove the influence of technology and cater for low bandwidth and weak internet connections, which can affect the quality of a course and vary the experience the delegate receives.

In the case of the connected classroom, the connections are managed by the training providers, easing the process and making the relationship more manageable. It means candidates receive a high-definition feel that allows them to see and hear the lecturer in real-time, using smart boarding technology. Doing so limits the extent to which the experience varies between candidates, delivering a more consistent approach than many web technologies allow.

The tutor

But where does this leave the role of the tutor? While it undoubtedly changes the dynamics and requires a greater awareness of the interaction between pupil and tutor, it makes their role no less important. Having said that, it does require a heightened level of trust on the side of the tutor, especially where discipline is concerned.

The ability to manage student expectations and rely on strong governance over lunch breaks and free periods is paramount to its success. In that sense it could be said to favour those with a more naturally extrovert personality. But ultimately it boils down to the ability to establish a style of teaching that engages candidates all over the country as effectively as face-to-face training does.

Bearing this in mind, some will argue that it puts the role of the tutor in jeopardy as connected classrooms require a level of performance that some lecturers don't naturally possess and hence will have to re-train for. They're right in the sense that it holds no place for spoon feeders. But in reality, it's the responsibility of training companies to ensure their instructors and employees have the dynamism and flexibility that's required for such a role.

These are steps that every training company should have in place if they're to meet the individual needs of the delegate and maintain high-quality teaching standards.

In short, the connected classroom is fast becoming an attractive training method. Not only does it reduce costs for the employer in the form of travel expenses, but it also meets the flexibility requirements needed by most delegates to juggle parental duties with expanding work loads.

In addition, the significant time and cost savings generate an ROI for employers, which is central to every business plan in a post-recession economy. If the quality of the experience remains high, there will always be space for the connected classroom in company training budgets and assessment plans.

Contact

Katie Franklin
UK Marketing Manager
Global Knowledge
E: Katie.Franklin@globalknowledge.co.uk
T: 0118 9 123456

www.globalknowledge.co.uk