

## *Learning Expertise Helps Virgin Media Improve the Quality of External Training*



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**James Iles**

Head of Employee Learning  
at Virgin Media

### Client Background

One of the UK’s leading entertainment and communications companies, Virgin Media provides fibre optic broadband, digital TV, phone and mobile services to millions of customers. It directly employs around 13,000 people, including installers, technicians, retail staff, business analysts and customer contact teams.

To meet the learning and development needs of such a diverse group of employees, Virgin Media supplements its own internal provision with external training. The company’s in-house Talent and Development team delivers programmes such as management and leadership development, core inductions, new product training, behavioural skills training and apprentice development. Other training throughout the UK - including senior leadership development, management, niche, technical and specialist training - is sourced, managed, administered and evaluated by KnowledgePool.

“We used to deal directly with multiple training providers,” said James Iles, Head of Employee Learning for Virgin Media. “Now, all external training provision is booked through KnowledgePool. With their understanding of the market, their sourcing expertise, their operational model and the way they work in partnership with us, we’ve been able to improve the quality of the training we provide and at the same time make considerable savings.”

### Meeting Training Needs

In total, around 8,000 delegate days of training are provided each year, via KnowledgePool, including classroom-based training, bespoke e-learning projects and online learning.

Virgin Media’s Talent and Development business partners work with each division of the organisation to analyse training needs. When a training requirement arises that can’t be met internally, the business partners will scope it out and brief KnowledgePool on the aims and objectives.

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“When you have wide-ranging needs for external training you need to keep up with who the main suppliers are, for every area, and it can be challenging to secure the best deals,” said James Iles. “You have to avoid being bogged down by the nitty-gritty, particularly if you’re engaging with the market time and time again, trying to find the best course and then trying to administer the training and evaluate the outcomes. KnowledgePool help manage all of that. They’re experts in learning and are close to all of the main players in the training market. They’re also independent, not tied to specific providers, and their knowledge of where relevant expertise can be sourced is very valuable. Because they work with other large organisations, they can negotiate favourable terms with individual suppliers. That’s their core business. As a result, we get the very best training in each area at the very best prices.”

For any given training need, KnowledgePool will provide a shortlist of relevant and capable vendors. It also supervises the tender process and manages the proposals. Virgin Media then makes the final decision on which vendor is chosen.

“The choice of the final training solution is down to us,” said James Iles. “Having KnowledgePool help manage the procurement process frees up our time, enabling us to concentrate on business-critical activities.”

In addition, KnowledgePool provides a telephone helpdesk service. Its training advisors - who answer as ‘Virgin Media training support’ - help individual employees, who have created a business case and gained approval for training, to quickly and easily find the right course for their needs.

### Value for Money

KnowledgePool typically saves Virgin Media around 40% off the price of technical training and 28% off other training courses. In the last year, this resulted in substantial savings on course fees alone.

“We also make significant savings in our time and our administration,” said James Iles. “For example, we used to raise around 1,800 purchase orders per year for external training. We now have monthly consolidated billing that’s automatically sent to each of our five cost centres, so there’s no need to raise individual purchase orders. The cost centres check and sign-off the amounts. Simply by consolidating the invoicing of our external training courses, KnowledgePool saves us a substantial sum each year.”

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### Developing the Relationship

KnowledgePool first provided a managed learning service for NTL in 2002. After the formation of Virgin Media in 2007 - when NTL, Telewest and Virgin Mobile were brought together - all external training delivery gradually migrated to KnowledgePool.

“As a business that has grown and matured over the past few years, we now put even greater emphasis on the quality of our training interventions and on their outcomes, rather than simply sourcing training at the cheapest price,” said James Iles. “Cost savings are obviously important for any organisation but our relationship with KnowledgePool gives us much more than that. They’ve taken the time to understand our business and our values. They bring us top quality training and they support us throughout the whole training life cycle.”

### Evaluation

All training that is provided is evaluated by KnowledgePool. Feedback is collected on aspects such as the effectiveness of the training, the quality of the trainer and the management of the event.

“We get a lot of management information which gives us full visibility of our training,” said James Iles.

To monitor and keep track of the external training activity - and to maintain a successful working relationship - KnowledgePool has initiated a series of performance review sessions, including weekly service review calls, quarterly reviews of company-wide activity and annual service review meetings.

Internally, Virgin Media uses the ‘Net Promoter Score’ metric to measure the external customer experience it delivers by ascertaining the customer’s likelihood of recommending Virgin Media’s products and services to friends and family. A similar concept has now been introduced into the evaluation of its internal training, to ascertain how many delegates would recommend a particular course to their colleagues. KnowledgePool is currently changing its course evaluation process to enable external training programmes to be assessed in the same way.

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### Achieving Success

As it strives to grow its business and earn the ongoing loyalty of its customers, Virgin Media recognises the importance and value of effective employee development.

“We have the strength of the Virgin brand and pride ourselves on industry-leading products, but the success of our company is ultimately built upon the passion and skills of our people,” said James Iles. “Developing our people, and making the most of their talent, is therefore a critical business factor for us. Our partnership with KnowledgePool plays a key role in helping us to achieve this aim.”

“Any one of a number of outsourced training providers can provide courses for your employees but for us, it was really important that KnowledgePool understood what we are about and what we’re trying to achieve. KnowledgePool have helped us to think about new suppliers and services and they’ve also supported us in rationalising our administrative processes and costs. We have an excellent relationship with them and it is great to have such trust in an outsourced partner.”

**Jill Youds**, Executive Director of Resourcing for Talent, Development and People Operations at Virgin Media