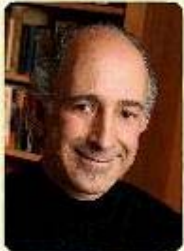


# Online Seminars: An Essential Component of an Integrated Training Mix

By Scott Hornstein of Hornstein Associates



## Reason #1: Time to Market

Online seminars directly address the three major marketing challenges facing every training professional. The first is Time to Market, or how fast can a quality training product be developed and introduced. How quickly can the product be moved from idea to introduction? How fast can you comprehensively respond?

Online seminars allow the organization to concentrate on content, removing the variables (lead time, complexity cost and regionally-limited attendance) associated with place or location. Concentrated effort realizes the quick turnaround potential, which allows you to distribute the information quickly and accurately without regards to geography.

## Reason #2: Create Compelling Competitive Differentiation

The second great marketing challenge is to create compelling competitive differentiation. Said differently, customers ask three questions about any concept, product or organization:

- Who are you?
- Why should I care?
- What's in it for me?

Answers must be immediate and transparent or the customer is gone. Executed with quality, the online seminar is a highly personalized event that clearly, and lastingly, answers all three.

## Reason #3: Agility

The third major area of responsibility of the training executive is maintaining and fueling agility, or the ability to respond to changing market conditions, especially needs. The interactive nature of online seminars serves as a platform for the training organization to:

- Educate
- Listen to the questions, responses and opinions of customers
- Learn

Enhancing agility enables continuous improvement. Let's say that your organization provides technology training. Online seminars might be an important part of your training mix when your client plans to introduce a new release to an existing mission-critical application.

You would be able to quickly provide training to a nationwide customer base, easily customizing the base presentation to provide industry-specific information enabling these customers to get the most out of the new release the fastest. This demonstrates your clients' commitment to the customer base, partnering with them to advance their original return on investment. Feedback during the Q&A section will help to fine tune subsequent presentations and provide the client with important customer opinions.

## Reason #4: Increase Cost-Effectiveness

The reality of the marketplace is that they just aren't making any more resources. Budgets in particular are frozen or shrinking. It is important that we use finite resources more effectively. Often, we turn to voice of customer research to learn first-hand from our customers what they think is effective and where they think we should be concentrating investment.

Online seminars consistently come up a winner. Customers appreciate their:

- Convenience
- Content
- Interactivity

A study by Three Deep Marketing and Marketing Sherpa corroborates our research, finding that 75% of marketing executives prefer participation in web-based presentations and demonstrations.

### **Reason #5: Build Brand**

The definition of brand has changed. Formerly, the term was owned and defined by marketers. Now, customers are in control and they see brand as the sum of all their experiences with a company and its product(s). Online seminars, as part of your integrated learning mix, have the ability not only to present the value (e.g. the course material and contribution to curriculum) but to personalize that value to the customer.

Customer interaction has become a tipping point, bringing unique opportunities. Online seminars thrive on customer interaction. Based on quality of thought, preparation and delivery, the customer receives knowledge from the training, bringing the customer to the next stage in effectiveness. Maximizing the moment of interaction, the training is able to respond immediately and thus personalize the course material to individual concerns and needs, triggering follow-up as required.

That is the best of all training experiences. And the best of all experiences definitely builds brand, for you and your client.

### **Reason #6: Attendance Qualifies Prospects**

Online seminars can be an effective prospecting tool for both you and your client.

One of the few business truths is that not all prospects are created equal. Some are more likely to buy than others. The trick is finding them. Without effective tools to identify a prospect's interest level, we ineffectively invest the same in all prospects.

If we can begin to understand the differences in how interested a prospect is, we can vary our investment to increase return. Said differently, it makes good business sense to invest more in prospects who are more likely to buy.

Attendance is a demonstration of the propensity, or likelihood, of purchase.

### **Reason #7: Multiple Attendees**

Business decisions and processes, whether it is adoption, implementation or upgrade, involve multiple executives. Free from commuting time, online seminars are an easy, cost and time-efficient way to bring high value training to busy line executives. It's also an easy, attractive way to attract other, previously unidentified individuals who have a need to know. This helps incorporate the training into business practice as quickly as possible.

## **Reason #8: Leverage the Customer Lifecycle**

Customers exist within a lifecycle. Customers experience a product or service, such as a computer or software or training, at one point in their lifecycle. Then they return to the work-a-day world and use, or do not use, the principles taught. But as time goes on, everything changes – their environment; their business drivers; their needs.

Value-added training occurs at many different points during the lifecycle to help customers learn how to use a product or service in new and better ways. Online seminars provide cost-efficient ways to nurture the customer relationship by presenting value at key points.

For instance, let's say you are a technology trainer. Professionals may attend an onsite course to establish their basic credentials and know-how. But as soon as the course ends and they return to work, technology advances and the business demands put on them change, the pressures they must deal with migrate. Periodically, or on an on-demand basis, the online seminar offers a way to reach out to distinct groups to discuss:

- Industry-specific case studies
- The road-map for product development
- Short-cuts and more in-depth usage

## **Reason #9: Invest More in Your Best Customers**

Your best investment, and your clients' best investment, is in your best customers. Too often, we, and our clients view the world with short-term glasses, placing the highest value on the newest sales. Who bought yesterday? That's good, but we need new people to buy today.

Not only does this mindset create an endless series of drive-by relationships, it's inefficient. The first sale always costs more than subsequent sales. While we concentrate on slaying dragons and creating new sales out of thin air, customers are looking for long-term value.

Online seminars, as described in this article, can be a visible demonstration of commitment to the customer to provide this long-term value. Moreover, in the words of a very wise man, education now beats support later.

## **Reason #10: Impact of Word of Mouth**

According to BIGresearch, word of mouth exerts the most influence on the purchase decision. No matter whose research you read, word of mouth is always the most powerful medium. Online seminars are a perfect fit with the steps required to influence word of mouth:

- Identify the target audience with the highest potential
- Supply the topic for discussion (which must be value as customers define value)
- Help spread the conversation (online seminars)
- Lead the conversation
- Measure and reward

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