

Top 10 Strategies to Market Training to Your Workforce

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With the emergence of eLearning and our reduced training budgets, we need well conceived training rollouts and marketing strategies that get our programs fully utilized.

In this new age of training, you've probably found it necessary to hone your marketing skills. Marketing and training aren't new to each other. The top training departments in the largest corporations in the world view marketing as an essential ingredient in their training success.

Knowing how important marketing is, you might wonder what marketing activities you should focus on. In other words, what marketing works for training? Fortunately, there are some tried and true methods that I've watched work over and over again.

Here are the top ten:

10. **Communicate "What's In It For Me."**

This seems obvious enough, but it requires putting yourself in the customer's shoes and continuing to think the way they do. To do this, you need ongoing communication with your workforce and lots of openness and empathy towards their comments and suggestions. Once you know what they want, focus your marketing message around it. For instance, if certification is a "hot button" for your IT folks, then your communications should focus on it and talk about how your courses will help get them certified.

9. **Use incentives, rewards, promotions, and recognition.**

For this one, I've heard objections like, "We're not going to pay our people to attend training." This is a mental hurdle, and getting past it will open up new worlds of opportunity for designing marketing programs to fill up your classes.

In the days when instructor-led training was king, we spent lots of money sending employees to training in faraway cities. We didn't think of this kind of travel as an incentive, but as it's going away, we're finding out that it's a very big one. Imagine flying to San Francisco on the company's dollar, missing work for a couple of days, and enjoying that time away from the office. Big incentive!

How do you replace travel incentives with something comparable? You don't have to give away seven-day cruises to get people excited. I've found that something as inexpensive as raffling off a \$200 XBOX every month or giving away duffle bags goes a long way.

And don't forget about the importance of recognition. This is often-overlooked. If an entire department passes their compliance test, and they participated in your training, then the department should see their name in lights. It doesn't cost anything and shows everyone the importance of training.

8. Don't pass up free exposure.

There are lots of unique communications channels in your company that will help get your message out. Examples are bulletin boards, intranets, newsletters, company events, and vendor fairs. Sometimes, you just have to ask to be included and you'll get some valuable free exposure.

7. Hold lunch-and-learns.

As a training person, using seminars for marketing is a natural extension of your expertise. The added benefit of a seminar is that it's an opportunity to showcase what you do, which gives your customers tangible proof that you know what you're doing.

6. Broadcast webinars.

Although webinars and seminars are similar in nature, they are very different in who and how many they attract, and how they're managed. Webinars tend to get lots of registrations and appeal to people in remote offices and those who are extremely busy. These are people who might never attend a seminar but would sign up for a webinar. Webinars are usually less expensive to put on and require less work on your part, but be prepared for the gotchas, which you need to be ready for.

- Make sure you're using dependable webinar software. Nothing's worse than a webinar where the sound goes in and out. I'm not affiliated in any way with *Interwise*, but have found their software to be the most reliable in the industry.
- Make sure your presenter(s) have mastered the software, and that they've done a full dress rehearsal. It's OK to have a presenter who has never done a webinar, but make sure they're worked out the kinks with lots of practice.
- Send multiple webinar reminders the week of the webinar and the day of the webinar. You can't send too many reminders, since low "show rates" are very common with webinars. Expect anywhere from 40% to 60% showing up.

5. Publish an eNewsletter.

It's an email, but it's not as easy to produce as most emails. eNewsletters are usually very effective, and are generally perceived as valuable communications by most people. The problem is that they take a lot of time to produce and are hard to publish consistently. Here are some tips to guarantee your first eNewsletter won't be your last.

- Don't be over ambitious: The eNewsletter highway is paved with eNewsletters that were produced once and never heard from again. Start with a quarterly newsletter, which is realistic. If it works well, you can always move to bi-monthly.
- Get help from training suppliers: Your training suppliers have a vested interest in making you successful. Good suppliers have the tools, articles, and expertise to produce and distribute your eNewsletter.
- Do it yourself: Newsletters are not difficult if you're doing them yourself. The hard part is getting others to write articles and deliver them on time. If you can't manage the eNewsletter yourself, make sure that the person you put in charge has a vested interest in its success and is willing to commit the time it takes.

4. Send regular emails.

Nobody likes spam. But there's no question that email can generate the biggest bang for your buck. However, it's important to consider the following:

- **Every email needs to add value:** You have to make it clear what's in it for them and provide information that's perceived as valuable. Otherwise, they'll call it spam. eNewsletters work well for this.
- **Send the right message to the right person:** Although it's tempting to send mass emails to everyone in your company, it's more important that you send the right message to the right person. If you're offering IT training, send it only to the IT department.
- **Make it easy to opt out:** In each email, give a way to opt out. If you do this, it nearly always satisfies people who might have otherwise complained about your email.
- **Plan at least six months in advance:** Put together a simple schedule that contains the content of each email, who you're sending it to and when it will be sent. This increases the chance that your emails will actually get done, and that they'll be sent on a consistent basis.

3. Make it easy to sign up.

A widely known truth in marketing and sales is that customers will buy more if you make it easier for them to make a purchase. It's that simple. It can be very frustrating for consumers to deal with organizations that make it more difficult than it should be. The problem is that the seller is thinking from *their* perspective, not the perspective of their buyer. Step out of *your* shoes for a moment and into your customers' ways of thinking. This can sometimes be pretty challenging, but you'll quickly see where you can make improvements that your customers will notice.

2. Create a strong presence on the company intranet.

Putting a course catalog on their intranet is usually the first thing a training department does to market their courses. These days, if it's not on the web, it's too hard to find. Also, most people like to see it in print on the web before they actually talk to a live person or take any sort of action.

Make sure that when you go live, you focus on the above, "Make it easy to sign up." For instance, an employee should be able to register for a course just as easily as if they were buying a book from Amazon.com. If they have to take extra steps to get approval from their boss or fax something to you, then you'll lose half your registrations.

1. Get the endorsement of each level of management.

This may not sound like marketing, but it's the best possible way to "sell" your classes. Getting management buy-in means that you've convinced your company's leaders to endorse your program, actively promote it ... and possibly even make it a requirement.

Let's say you have a new compliance course that you want all of your employees to take. Rather than sending an email asking them to register, have your CEO or another top executive email a meeting planner inviting the right employees to attend the class. Most sane employees will react quickly to this ... and attend the training as well. We all know how important executive buy-in is, but it's critical to place this at the very top of your marketing list. This step could take lots of work and follow-up, but it's worth the effort.

The good news is that a strong marketing program can pay off big-time for your training programs. The bad news is that it can be pretty challenging. However, if you stick to proven techniques and plan things out well in advance, you can elevate your training program to the next level.

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