Behind the Scenes:
Ensuring Flawless Virtual Events

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InSync Training: Your Source for Blended Learning and Virtual Design and Delivery

InSync Training sets standards for virtual learning, specializing in developing the best training professionals for your organization.

InSync Training is the acknowledged leader in the virtual training design and delivery field – we have been in the business of virtual training delivery since 1999, and are routinely identified as the “go-to” vendor for expertise in this field. InSync provides accredited, comprehensive live and interactive online training solutions, enabling learning and development professionals and organizations to realize the full potential of individual and organizational growth by leveraging the live online environment.

InSync’s curriculum offerings provide its clients with the skills required to become knowledgeable, effective, and dynamic instructional experts in the virtual classroom. We help learning and development professionals understand the world of virtual training, empowering them with the skills to support their organization's growth.

Our passion lies in improving the effectiveness of your live online learning initiatives, allowing your organization to reach its potential.

We work with organizations from all sectors, global corporations in numerous industries (including energy and utilities, financial, government, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, medical devices, oil and gas, software development, and telecommunications).

Our ethos is “Reaching Learners Globally” which we do with our global team based in the USA and Europe.

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Behind the Scenes: Ensuring Flawless Virtual Events

INTRODUCTION

Flawless virtual events don’t just happen – they take careful planning, preparation and practice. In this whitepaper, we will explore what goes into making virtual events flawless and well-received by our audiences time after time.

The first thing to realize is that virtual events are NOT simply plug and play! When you decide that you want to take your training online, you need to be aware that it’s not going to be simply taking your traditional face-to-face content and “plugging it” into the virtual classroom. It’s going to take a lot of work to make the transition a smooth one.

Of course, technologies have made it easier for you to create and schedule an online meeting, but you’re not really ready to go until all of the human elements have been considered.
For instance:

- Is your delivery team skilled enough?
- Have you thought through the actual flow and design of the session?
- Does your audience understand the environment?
- Do you have the proper support in place for the event?

We’ll start out by discussing how to prepare both your virtual learners AND your virtual facilitators for success, then we’ll take a look at common risks in the virtual classroom and how to anticipate and mitigate them. We’ll also examine the role of the producer and how they can really help make your virtual events effortless and memorable. Finally, we’ll discuss how to provide your facilitator/producer team with a script, called a facilitator guide, that will enable them to handle even the most complicated virtual event with ease.

**PREPARING VIRTUAL LEARNERS FOR SUCCESS**

Using today’s virtual classroom technology, it is easy to set up the online meeting and communicate the session details to your group of learners - but then they get reminder after reminder and often end up getting confused. Or they arrive at the session and discover they don’t understand the tools or know how to learn in the virtual classroom.

At InSync Training, we deliver certificate programs for a variety of subjects, including designing and facilitating in the virtual classroom and designing blended learning programs. These certificate programs are usually held once a week, two hours per session, for up to seven weeks. In delivering these programs, we have discovered several best practices that we have found to be effective when communicating with our learners and preparing them for the learning experience.

**Communication**

The key to avoiding confusion is making the instructions for joining the actual live event as easy to read and understand as possible.
Just because you send numerous emails to your learners doesn't mean they will get read or acted upon. Remember, they're used to just showing up at a physical classroom and taking a seat.

You need to set the right expectations for your learners from the start and come up with a communication plan that will make learners sit up and take notice.

We have found that one communication per session with the subject line "Name of Class - Communication 1" is all we need to send. We include links to the next session, reminders of required self-paced work that needs to be completed before the next class, and anything else they need to be successful in the next session.

Of course, you can make it easier for your learners if you have a learning management system or intranet website that hosts all communications, resources and intersession assignments for them. In addition, if you are delivering programs with multiple sessions like we do, this will make communicating with your learners simple.

**Learner Preparedness - Bottom-Up**

There are two very distinct ways for you to tackle learner preparedness - bottom-up and top-down.

Bottom-up learner preparedness looks at the need to educate your learners before they even enter the virtual classroom. By providing effective communication and internal marketing of the programs offered online, you give your learners the information they need to arrive at your live sessions as a willing audience.

For example, virtual classroom sessions are run according to strict online schedules, which the learners expect you to adhere to. If their schedule says the "presentation skills course" runs from 2:30 to 4:00, they will log in at 2:30 (some even earlier) and plan to log off at 4:00, whether you've managed to deliver all of the content or not.

It's important, therefore, to make sure that you give yourself enough time to deliver 100 percent of the training content, AND you need to allow 10-15 minutes at the start of the session for ensuring learners have access to the presentation and audio.

You also need to let your learners know that any listed pre-session work is mandatory, not optional. This way, everyone begins the live session with the same basic knowledge level. In addition, be sure to set out guidelines as to what they will
be expected to do in the live session - engagement and participation should not be optional either!

It's important to also recognize that newcomers to the virtual classroom must actually learn how to be effective virtual classroom learners.

At InSync, we run a 60-minute experience for new learners called "Learn How to Learn Online" as a prerequisite for all of our training courses. This session helps learners to understand the environment, the interaction tools, and the appropriate etiquette for the virtual classroom.

**Environment:** Learners often attend live sessions while sitting at their work desks, leaving themselves open to interruptions from colleagues, background noises and other office distractions.

**Tools:** In live sessions, you can invite your learners to use chat, annotation and hand-raising tools to engage both themselves and others. Remember, you need to teach them how the tools work but also when to use them.

**Etiquette:** Set expectations with your learners for how they will be involved in the session and how their questions will be handled (i.e., instead of just shouting out their question, they should use the hand raise tool or something similar).

If you don't prepare your learners adequately, then you lend yourself to the wrath of the virtual classroom gods by losing and alienating learners.

**Learner Preparedness - Top-Down**

Top-down learner preparedness refers to working with the learners' managers - ensuring that they "buy-in" to the whole idea of giving the learner sufficient time and space to attend the training event.

Often we find that it is the learner's manager that interrupts them and takes them away from the virtual training session. This is not a behavior we would expect from the manager in a face-to-face classroom (unless truly necessary), so why does it happen so often in the virtual classroom?

Perhaps it's the fact that most learners will "attend" the training event at their working desk, leading to the visual assumption that they can be interrupted (they are not really being seen as attending a training event).

We need to enable our learners by providing the right environment in which they can learn effectively in the virtual classroom. Some items to consider:
Behind the Scenes: Ensuring Flawless Virtual Events

- Wired internet access is better than Wi-Fi.
- Provide a quiet office space or room, separate from their usual working space.
- Managers must minimize interruptions.
- The learners need sufficient time to complete all elements of the training - intersession work assignments as well as the live virtual sessions.

Effective communication and learner preparedness are crucial to enabling your learners to be successful in the virtual classroom. It is also important to the success of any virtual event that participants are given the space, time and tools to participate successfully. Keep all of these best practices in mind when considering your next virtual training event.

YOUR VIRTUAL FACILITATORS MUST BE READY, WILLING AND ENABLED

If you are moving a training program from face-to-face classroom to the virtual classroom, be careful. Your regular facilitator may be great in the physical classroom but will probably be inexperienced in the online environment. No matter how long they have been teaching in the "regular" classroom, the virtual classroom is an entirely different setting, requiring a different set of skills.
Your virtual facilitators need to be ready to teach in an appropriate manner in the virtual classroom.

You must make sure that your facilitators are ready, willing and enabled!

**Ready**

Your facilitators need to know how to teach in the virtual classroom - they need to know how the technology works, how the learners are going to interact and how they are going to manage it all. They also need to know how to engage learners to best maximize learning in the virtual classroom.

This also means that your facilitators must be given sufficient time to teach AND prepare to teach. Often, organizations schedule three or more two-hour learning sessions in a day, which in theory sounds very productive.

But the reality is that teaching online is a draining experience, more so than in physical classrooms because you have lost body language and visual cues. Your senses are heightened in this environment and you need to concentrate more. And you have to deal with the technology, the learners and the content - all at the same time!

Combine this with the time needed to prepare to teach (assessing pre-work, practicing delivering the next session, communication with learners, etc.), and you can see that just because the session is two hours long doesn't mean that's all the time that is necessary to teach that two hours of content!

**Willing**

Your facilitators must believe that delivering training in the virtual classroom is as effective as in a face-to-face classroom.

If they don't believe in virtual training, then they will pass on that uneasy feeling to your learners in the live session. Live online learning sessions are not second-best to face-to-face training sessions - you should expect to offer training at an equal or greater level to learners.

Of course, not everything that you teach your learners can be converted to the virtual classroom - you should work under the premise of, "If I can test it online, I can teach it online."
However, if you are able to successfully handle objections and demonstrate a teaching technique in an online session test run, then it can be used in an actual virtual session.

**Enabled**

Your facilitators must receive proper support from your organization.

Does your team have access to the right technology to bring everything together? Have they had time to learn that technology and practiced teaching content in the virtual classroom? Are they fully prepared to facilitate online?

There are many different learning solutions available that can provide easy-to-use online training sessions that can simplify the learning process for both facilitators and learners. Intuitive user interfaces, built-in audio conferencing and streamlined procedures can ease the transition from teaching face-to-face to facilitating in the virtual classroom.

**HOW TO ANTICIPATE AND ALLEVIATE RISK IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM**

The virtual classroom, simply by virtue of having that layer of technology, does bring with it several risks that, as a facilitator and instructional designer, you need to be able to both anticipate and alleviate.

If you know ahead of time what some of these risks are likely to be, you can plan how to approach them in the live session and have contingencies ready to put into action when the need arises.

**Technology Risk**

Clearly, the first risk lies in the technology itself. Will the learner be able to access the training room? Does their computer have the correct operating software and the right plug-ins? Is someone trying to use a mobile device?
The first way that you can anticipate and alleviate this risk is by being prepared ahead of time and taking care of as much of the setup work PRIOR to the actual live event as you can.

Thankfully, most virtual classrooms download the necessary software after you access the session link, so there is no need to have learners install anything themselves beforehand. That being said, we always recommend our learners download the software and test it with their system well before the session starts. This way we can help them with technical issues before the session, which can help keep technical issues from disrupting the class once it starts.

Most internet browsers work whether on PC or Mac, but there are potential conflicts with some web conferencing platforms. The best way to check to make sure that connectivity won’t be an issue is to have a test session with the learners before the live session.

Wired internet connections are preferred, but Wi-Fi is perfectly acceptable, although it can be prone to fluctuations in signal strength. This could cause the web conference to drop learners from the session, resulting in missed content, repeated rejoin attempts and frustrations with the virtual classroom process. The only thing you can do to alleviate this risk is to recommend using a wired internet connection for your learners and make sure they understand the issues that can arise with use of Wi-Fi so they are prepared.

If participants are expecting to connect via mobile devices (BYOD), you need to provide specific instructions and clarify how the virtual classroom works differently on each individual device. You also need to design for the BYOD environment. (To learn more about how to maximize the virtual classroom for mobile users, click here.)

If you are using Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) for the audio portion of your virtual classroom, ensure learners know what equipment they will need by sending out a list of requirements before your session.
The addition of headsets to the classroom means you may have to troubleshoot for learners who can hear but not speak — again, the test session helps with equipment setup for success in the live event.

These challenges should be documented so that you have the ability to quickly offer support during future live sessions.

The second way that you can anticipate and alleviate technology risk is to arrange for access to live technical support during your live session. If you are working with a producer, the producer should be the person managing the relationship between participants and technical support.

The best way to do this is to have technical support telephone numbers available for the virtual classroom vendor that you are using. If there is something going wrong that you can’t troubleshoot prior to class starting, you can refer the learner to the technical support number to connect with someone who can hopefully help them get everything working before class starts.

Alternatively, while you don’t necessarily need to train your IT personnel in the web conferencing solution, the more support options you have, the easier it will be for you and your learners.

Once the live session has started, you need to not only help learners with technical problems but also concentrate on delivering the learning content, so you may need to ask learners to reach out to technical support themselves while you focus on the job at hand.

The third way you can anticipate and alleviate technology risk is to be totally prepared yourself! As a facilitator, you need to “tool up” for your live sessions.

Your ideal toolkit should have a headset for use in virtual classrooms — there is nothing worse than holding a telephone handset for two hours, getting that crick in your neck, while you’re trying to concentrate on delivering a great training program. It’s essential that you have both hands free to work the various notes and materials so that you can deliver 100 percent of the training session.

Ideally, having access to a second computer or second screen allows you to have one showing the presenter view and the other showing the participant view. This allows you to see how your slides are building for the audience, which will help you to pace your delivery accordingly.
It also lends itself as a backup should a computer act up or the laptop batteries drain. (Always have the charger plugged in — it may be silly to remind you, but people forget!)

**Behavioral Risk**

During your sessions, the other type of risk you will encounter is behavioral. These are the risks associated with your learners and their behavior during the session. We always hope everyone will arrive prepared and ready to learn but just in case, you need to have some strategies in place to handle disruptive behavior in the virtual classroom.

Two of the most common ones we see are the “Blamer” and the “Disconnector.”

The Blamer is the learner who claims he or she never received the joining instructions or the pre-work or the participant guide — even though all the other learners in the session did.

It may be the case that this one learner did not get the emails if he or she was added to the session late, so mitigate the risk of this happening by ensuring you have a mechanism for emailing the missing resources immediately. (Having the roster at hand with email addresses helps.)

If you are working with a producer (technical support provider for the live event), he or she can handle that task while you continue with the session.

Addressing the Blamer’s complaints quickly and efficiently helps to avoid derailing the session.

The Disconnector is not the person who actually signs off but the one who mentally checks out from the session — still signed in but unresponsive to questions, whether verbally or in chat. The primary challenge that the Disconnector brings to the virtual classroom is their absenteeism, which can spark other learners to start behaving in the same way.

Your learners’ managers may be partially responsible for this behavior, as the manager is very often the one interrupting your Disconnector, taking him or her away from the session to attend to some other task or activity. (For some tips on getting
management on board see my blog posting, "101 Tips to Motivate the Virtual Learner: Management Mandate.”

To combat the Disconnector, keep engagement and interaction high by setting expectations about attendance and pre-session work and by calling upon learners for their input so they know you are giving them attention. If you have a producer, you can also ask the producer to check to make sure someone hasn’t disappeared by engaging the learner in a private chat.

Try to ensure you’ve connected with every single member of your audience by taking the roster and placing a tick next to the learner’s name when you engage him or her. This allows you to see who has not contributed as much and you can call on them specifically for answers or suggestions to make sure they are not “checking out.”

Both technology risks and behavioral risks are easily alleviated if you’re prepared for them. Planning ahead and communicating with participants about specific technology concerns is critical for success, and working with your producer during the live sessions can minimize the possibility that these risks will derail your program.

WHEN GOOD LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES GO BAD

The virtual classroom can be easy and work flawlessly but sometimes you get learners speaking out, saying they cannot see slides building, the slides are moving slowly or they cannot hear the presenter. Or your learner’s keep getting kicked out of the platform. Or you have one learner who can’t login. The list of things that can go wrong with learning technologies often seems endless but they’re easy to deal with when you’re prepared.

4-Step Disaster Recovery Process

As part of our Expert Synchronous Producer (ESP) certificate course at InSync Training, we discuss and share the “4-Step Disaster Recovery Process,” which addresses how to diagnose problems and minimize anxieties to keep the session going.
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With the exception of power outages, built-in web conferencing platform errors and internet failures, there are no disasters that you cannot tackle using this 4-step process.

**Step 1 – Minimize anxiety**

If participants are experiencing problems, the first step is for you to minimize their anxiety. With your in-depth knowledge of the web conferencing platform, you should be able to understand what the learner is experiencing and what they are seeing — so put them at ease by explaining that these things can and do happen and that you have a resolution.

By staying calm and keeping your voice authoritative and controlled, you can exude an air of confidence that helps to alleviate their anxieties. Don’t panic and don’t blame the technology, just stay calm and carry on. Be like a duck, floating calmly on the surface, but paddling furiously under the water!

If you are working with a producer, let the participants know early in the session to connect with that person for technical support through chat. If something goes wrong with the technology, then the producer can chat with them, get their mobile number and call them to troubleshoot while the facilitator continues on with the session.

**Step 2 – Identify that there is a problem**

This is where you need your detective skills. Learners must explain as best as they can what is happening and what they are seeing (or not seeing).

First, you need to determine if the problem is instructional or technical in nature.

A problem is ‘instructional’ if there isn’t a real technical problem; someone simply doesn’t know the points and clicks needed to complete a task. Perhaps they don’t know how to mute a microphone or activate whiteboard tools. If it’s instructional, provide clarification for the whole group, as more than one of the participants may be confused but only one has spoken out.

A technical problem is one that can’t be solved with simple clarification. For example, a corporate firewall doesn’t allow certain content to be displayed. If it’s technical, you need to drill down and establish whether the problem is affecting just that one learner or the entire group.

Ask your other learners to use the hand raise tool to indicate if they are also experiencing problems, whether they are instructional or technical in nature.
Once you have identified whether the problem exists and whom it is affecting, you can move on to resolving it.

**Step 3 – Get participants up and running**

If you have determined that the problem is technical in nature, you need to do your best to get the participants back up and running as quickly as possible.

If support is available (your producer), have him or her troubleshoot with the affected participants. The producer should phone the participants and walk them through the problem.

If you’re by yourself, ask participants who have the problem to log out and then log back in. Next, ask them to close their browser and click the meeting URL again. Finally, ask them to reboot their computers and rejoin.

If the problem persists, ask them to contact technical support (either their internal IT contact or the web conference provider’s support). Because there are so many permutations of system configurations, virus checkers and firewalls that could be causing the problem, you need cut your losses at this point to keep the learning going.

Remember; don’t sacrifice the majority for the minority. If there is one person who is having all kinds of issues, they need to try again another day. You don’t want to disrupt the entire class and make them sit through all of the gory details of getting just one person functional.

**Step 4 – Determine the next steps**

If the fix works, acknowledge that the participant has re-joined the session and continue.

But if the fix does not work, then you will have to politely dismiss the participant from the session and follow up later with other options: contact technical support, take another session, access a recording or go one on one with a facilitator.

Afterwards, log what went wrong and create a list of common problems, which you can even convert into FAQs to be used within the participant guide.

When participants experience technical difficulties, the technology takes over and learning can stop. Using this 4-Step Disaster Recovery process will help you to deal with almost any technology issue that might come up.
THE ROLE OF THE PRODUCER

As the support person on the delivery team, the producer is an invaluable resource before, during and after a virtual training event. He or she is there to support the facilitator, the participants and the technology.

The producer makes the session run smoothly, troubleshooting technical issues for anyone attending the session, loading polls and even co-facilitating content (which helps change the dynamics with the new voice).

In working with the facilitator, producers can cover all of the technical elements, allowing the facilitator to do what they’re there to do: deliver the session objectives and guide the learners through the session content. A producer can help transform virtual training into trouble-free, fast moving, interactive events that keep learners involved and the facilitator on track. In short, the facilitator can stay focused on content while the producer takes care of everything else.

Often, however, we find companies are dismissive toward the idea of using a facilitator/producer team, viewing it as an additional resource cost.
But, once companies have had their first session collapse because the facilitator did not know what to do when the audio failed or when screens froze, they soon realize that having a producer is a lot like having an insurance policy and then some.

The producer is the safety net that separates a very successful live event from one that's chaotic, unorganized and unprofessional.

Producers have so many tasks that they can take on including:

- Providing technical support for participants.
- Launching polls.
- Keeping time checks with the facilitator.
- Serving as a backup facilitator.

The last one is vital. If the facilitator's audio disconnects or their internet connection drops, then the producer can load slides, take control of the presentation and carry on (or hold the participants while the facilitator reconnects).

It's only when you crash that you are grateful you paid for the insurance, as the policy kicks in and takes the headache away - but with a producer in the virtual classroom, you are looking to avoid the crash in the first place!

The producer also acts as a participant advocate, someone who can restate or rephrase questions, both from the facilitator and the audience, that were possibly a little unclear.

Often, the producer can be the first to volunteer for an activity or be "the plant" who asks the right questions, which can spark the participants into asking questions of their own. The producer can also be used to alert the facilitator to raised hands or questions in the chat.

A great way to secure a producer is to utilize a member of the team who will be teaching the session in the future, thereby familiarizing that person with the flow of the session, the type of questions asked and the live online audience activities.

Try using a producer in your next virtual class. Although you may discover that some courses don't require two people to manage, many will be improved by the second set of hands (and different voice). At the very least, a second person will become familiar with the course content. And, in the best case scenario, having a producer can help you (or your facilitator) feel as comfortable in the virtual classroom as in a traditional one.
USING A FACILITATOR GUIDE TO MANAGE THE VIRTUAL TRAINING SESSION

What really goes on behind the scenes when you go live in a virtual classroom?

How does the facilitator and the producer manage to conduct the session without speaking over one another?

A critical part of any virtual training or blended learning course design is the facilitator guide. (You may call it running notes or a master.) The facilitator guide is a master reference document designed to help the facilitator and the producer to prepare for and deliver the program.

You can embed these in the notes section of your slide deck if you want, but it's vital that you choreograph the session in some way.

Compare it to a stage play where the producer handles the scenery and the technical aspects while the director (the facilitator) leads the actors. The facilitator guide is the script that they perform.

We've seen so many different types of facilitator guides that have worked well that we have concluded there is no right or wrong way to design your facilitator guide. As long as the directions are complete, clear and easy to follow, format really doesn't matter.
At InSync Training we use a three-column format where the first column shows the current slide; the second column shows what the facilitator needs to cover and when; and the third column shows what the producer does and when. Where possible, the facilitator and producer instructions line up within the columns to indicate WHEN instructions should be carried out.

We include all of the facilitation materials for each of the sessions in the program, including:

- Checklists of necessary materials and resources (slides, web page addresses, etc.)
- Presentation scripts and key points.
- Instructions for managing time and discussions.
- Producer guidelines for supporting the facilitator.
It is important to note that the facilitator guide assumes that both the facilitator and the producer are technically proficient with the virtual classroom delivery platform. The guide excludes technical instructions for executing activities in the delivery platform.

It's also important to note that the suggestions in the producer's column are intended to serve as a guideline. The producer should feel free to adjust the suggestions (such as use of a particular tool) to maintain attention or emphasize the facilitator's points.

**CONCLUSION**

As we’ve discussed, preparation and rehearsal is absolutely crucial to ensuring flawless virtual events. Following the tips and best practices in this whitepaper will ensure that you deliver well-run, problem-free virtual events that your learners will enjoy, engage in, and learn from. Their new skills and behaviors will soon have them making a difference in the workplace and your virtual training programs will be considered to be successful!

From an organizational perspective, you will be in a better position to leverage the virtual classroom and its technologies for budgetary savings by reducing travel and hotel expenses. In addition, you will save time for your audience by removing the need for them to step away from their jobs to attend an in-person event.

And, as you become more agile at designing and creating these virtual events, you will be able to reach previously unreachable audiences.

It is your responsibility to ensure that your virtual events run as smoothly as possible and following the tips in this whitepaper can help you to achieve your virtual training goals.
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About The Author – Jennifer Hofmann

Jennifer Hofmann is the president of InSync Training, LLC, a consulting firm that specializes in the design and delivery of virtual and blended learning. Featured in Forbes Most Powerful Women issue (June 16, 2014) as a New England Women Business Leader, she has led InSync Training to the Inc. 5000 as the 10th Fastest Growing Education Company in the US (2013).

Hofmann is a recognized thought leader in the field of synchronous learning. She is the author of The Synchronous Trainer’s Survival Guide: Facilitating Successful Live and Online Courses, Meetings and Events (Pfeiffer, 2003), Live and Online! Tips, Techniques, and Ready-To-Use Activities for the Virtual Classroom (Pfeiffer, 2004), and How To Design For The Live Online Classroom: Creating Great Interactive and Collaborative Training Using Web Conferencing (Brandon Hall, 2005). Additionally, she is a chapter contributor to The Handbook of Blended Learning (Pfeiffer, 2006), The AMA Handbook of E-Learning (The American Management Association, 2003), and The ASTD Handbook for Workplace Learning Professionals (ASTD, 2008 and 2014). She has co-authored, with Dr. Nanette Miner, Tailored Learning: Designing the Blend That Fits (ASTD, 2009), a book focused on taking advantage of distributed technologies to create the best blended training solution possible.


Follow Jennifer Hofmann at her blog, Body Language In The Bandwidth at http://blog.insynctraining.com or on Twitter @InSyncJennifer.
Virtual Classroom Experts Maximize Impact, ROI

InSync Training

Corporate employers invest more than $160 billion annually in employee training. Much of that amount is spent on live virtual-training programs, particularly for workforces spread across the globe.

Not all webinars, however, are created equal.

Jennifer Hofmann, veteran corporate training consultant and a leading expert on virtual learning for over 20 years, says employers pay a high price for subpar training sessions. In fact, the hidden costs for subpar training far exceed the $160 billion employers spend. She founded InSync Training in 1999 to banish boring webinars and help businesses extract significant value from their e-learning platforms and build core competencies for their virtual-learning training teams.

InSync is currently managing Cisco Systems’ 12-week core/sales training program—the Cisco Sales Associate Program (CSAP)—using Cisco’s own TelePresence and WebEx virtual learning tools. For InSync’s broad support of Cisco’s training needs since 2000, the firm was awarded an Excellence in Practice award by ASTD, the world’s largest organization of training and development professionals.

“Just talking to a PowerPoint presentation for an hour doesn’t cut it,” she says. “If you lose participants’ interest and attention, they don’t absorb, process and retain what they hear. Companies see little return on their investment. We set out to change all that.”

Best-Practices Pioneer in a Booming Industry

For the past 15 years, Hofmann and her team have been the standard bearers of the online classroom experience. Today, with new competitors continuing to enter the marketplace, InSync maintains its thought leadership position and enjoys $10 million in annual revenues. In 2013, the firm ranked #741 among the Inc. 5000 and was the #10 fastest-growing education company in the U.S.

“Our business surged in 2008, when companies hit by the recession needed to take advantage of their existing virtual learning technologies,” Hofmann says. “We introduced them to the best practices we’d developed for the virtual classroom, which proved just as engaging and effective as traditional classroom training. Companies that work with us recognize the value of live online-training programs immediately.”

Design, Support and Delivery Worldwide

InSync’s instructional designers and professional facilitators—leveraging deep expertise in virtual-learning technologies, cognitive psychology, sales and leadership training, and other key specialties—support clients’ corporate training needs in a variety of ways.

Traditional “train the trainer”—InSync helps virtual-classroom facilitators connect with students in a whole new way to ensure every training session meets workforce and organizational needs.

Instructional design—InSync has the expertise, reach and resources to provide seamless, end-to-end course creation as well as consulting and assessment in the field.

Facilitators and producers at the ready—InSync’s program facilitators and producers, who deliver both tech support and instructional excellence, help manage and deliver virtual-training sessions that are exciting, impactful and memorable.

“We’re a global organization,” Hofmann says. “We start on Sunday evening, supporting training in China, and we don’t stop until training ends in California on Friday afternoon. We are there wherever and whenever client training takes place.”