# Self-Paced Learning or Webinars:  When to Use Each

## Introduction

Talent remains a precious commodity for companies today. Even during periods of high unemployment, it may be difficult to find the exact skill sets and accompanying attitude and personality that will fit a specific role. To manage risk, companies lean toward hiring the right person and developing the skill sets later. At the same time, requirements from customers, the marketplace, new technologies and government entities are constantly changing, which means that required skills and capabilities are a moving target.

To cope with these pressures while striving to remain relevant and competitive, companies are investing more in training. In 2012, US training organizations grew their spending by 12%, the highest growth rate in the last eight years, according to [Bersin by Deloitte](#).

## Business Challenges

Beyond the skills gap, there are other challenges facing employers today:

1. **Innovation is hot again:**  Winning companies are learning how to quickly release new products and features that customers want and need. This rapid pace of development and change, pronounced in the high-tech industry, means that companies must frequently train both customers and employees on new software and Web-based processes. Consider leading companies such as Facebook and Salesforce: users continually must keep pace with the latest updates to those applications. Can your company afford for its workforce to miss out on new methods for productivity or the opportunity to deliver better results from new collaboration techniques?

2. **Regulation is on the rise:** Most companies have to comply with standard regulatory training such as safety awareness, sexual harassment awareness and so on. In some industries, such as healthcare and financial services, regulatory pressures continue to grow.  Another pressure is the growing complexity around keeping customer data private and secure, to avoid lawsuits. Companies risk noncompliance and negative publicity if employees don't understand the impact of the ever-changing mandates and rules.

3. **Globalization affects companies in many different ways.** Companies need to learn how to develop products and services to meet their global customer base and how to work more effectively with global partners and suppliers. Manufacturers and distributors need more efficient supply chain and outsourcing practices as global resources become constrained and expensive.

4. **Customers have knowledge.** Customers use the Internet to find out about a company and its products before engaging with a company. They check reviews, discussion boards and compare products with a few clicks of the mouse. They might even know more than your front-line employees do. Employees should be able to answer questions not only about their own products but about how they compare to the competition. Employees need to be social-media savvy and adept at responding to negativity. (See How to Train Your Employees to Handle Social Media)

These above pressures mean that companies must focus on continually honing and growing their talent— intellectual capital is imperative to survive and thrive. However, developing, delivering and tracking training can be a manual and expensive process. As a result, there's been a steady uptick in demand for e-Learning, since it is significantly more affordable and sometimes more effective than classroom training. Global software company Kofax reduced its training costs by 80% when it adopted online learning methods. The e-Learning industry is more than $2 billion and growing, according to Berson by Deloitte.

**Online learning: reviewing the options**

Trainers love online learning technology because it allows them to deliver the same content consistently, across a large distributed audience, for a fraction of the cost of in-person training. "Instead of being limited to how many people I can cram into a training room, I can now deliver hundreds of training courses that trainees can take at their own pace at a time of their choosing," says Andy Wiggins, Retail Sales Manager at Efinancial, an online provider of life insurance policies.

There are two fundamental paths when it comes to moving training online:

**1. Online meeting and collaboration tools.** Services such as WebEx, GoToMeeting or Google Hangouts have become a popular, low-cost alternative to classroom training. These multipurpose services are designed for live, synchronous communications, allowing a speaker at one location to deliver a scheduled training session over the Internet to an unlimited number of users anywhere. This is convenient for distributed and mobile workforces, as trainees can attend from any location instead of having to travel to a classroom. This method can also be cost effective, since it occurs over the Internet and companies pay relatively low subscription

fees and avoid hotel and travel costs. Since many companies use these same tools to hold online meetings, users may be already familiar with them.

**2. On-demand learning platforms.** Cloud-based learning tools, sometimes called eLearning, account for a second option. These platforms are affordable, highly intuitive, and focused specifically on training needs and challenges. Users can access the content whenever it is convenient for them instead of at the specified time; they also can take the course in segments, instead of all at once. The software can engage users and assess knowledge retention during a session, such as through quizzes. Additionally, detailed reporting and analytics help corporate trainers track attendance, completion, information retention and other success metrics. Using an on-demand platform to complement or replace a live online session can deliver greater benefits for companies and the people they train, including employees, customers, partners and resellers.

See an infographic on the two types of learning.

**Online meeting tools play an important role but have gaps.**

When information sharing is most effective as a live session, such as when discussing a company reorganization, post merger processes or a new business line, online meeting platforms are valuable. People can interact and exchange questions during the call. Such tools are also helpful to promote collaboration and discussion after learning about a new technology, for instance. Yet for many other types of trainings particularly those subjects that are tactical and not open to interpretation, using an online meeting platform can have challenges.

**1. Scheduling difficulties.** When setting up a course through a tool such as GoToMeeting, it can take weeks to coordinate work schedules and time zones to arrange a date and time that is most convenient for the majority of participants. A trainer may have to conduct multiple sessions to accommodate more people. This is not an efficient use of the corporate trainer's time, who could instead be working on developing and improving content and assessing results. With an on-demand platform, this problem goes away since the training is made available online at a secure site for individuals to view on their own schedule.

**Course Completion Rate by Number of Slides**

| Number of Slides | Completion Rate |
|---|---|
| 5 | 96% |
| 10 | 90% |
| 25 | 91% |
| 50 | 87% |
| over 50 | 75% |

**2. Long sessions.** Research has shown that users have a hard time staying focused during a course of 60 minutes or more. There's a reason why business forums such as TedTalks are less than 20 minutes and TV sitcom episodes are under 25 minutes. In a live online training
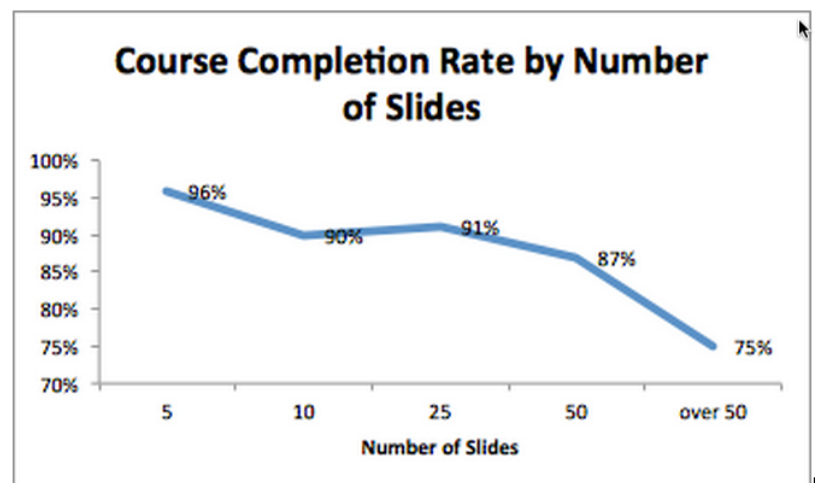
session, attendees may lose focus. Conversely, by using an on-demand learning system, users can pause and replay the content whenever they wish and learn at their own pace. Such programs can also segment content logically into chapters, creating easy break points for the learner and making it simpler to locate and replay sections later.

**3. Incomplete user metrics**. In a physical classroom setting, the instructor can deliver surveys and polls to determine if students are retaining the information. They can also review facial expressions and body language, for nonverbal feedback. Using an online meeting tool, it's difficult to get much if any information on the success of a course. The polls these services offer are general and not targeted to individuals. You might be able to see if someone exited the training but you won't know how much of the information they understood and retained. On-demand training platforms deliver detailed reports including quiz scores, survey reports, time spent in the course and more, to help trainers assess if and how trainees retained the information. Trainers can later correlate these reports with actual on-the-job performance.

**4. One size fits all training.** In a live, online training, users must adapt to the speaker's pace. If the speaker is talking too quickly or they miss an important point, there's no going back. This could be particularly difficult for an individual whose first language is not the same as that of the speaker or if the material is too easy or hard for the learner; they may give up altogether and exit the training.

**5. Online meeting tools are not learning platforms.**  When the content is important enough, using a general-purpose meeting application for delivering a course is not ideal. Such tools lack features such as individual-specific surveys, tracking and ease of administration that bring a higher guarantee of success for learners and the company.

**On-demand learning platforms deliver flexibility, personalization**

A tool such as Mindflash is more suited to deliver basic training on a new sales process or productivity tool, for instance. Such content may need to be replayed and reviewed several times for full comprehension. After employees have completed the course, the company can set up an online meeting like WebEx for a collaborative discussion about the topic and/or to do role playing. Employees get the best of both worlds: a self-paced tutorial for learning the fundamentals and an interactive live venue for sharing feedback and ideas. For a fact-based course, such as educating employees on a new privacy regulation that affects its customers, there may not be a need for a follow-up live session to discuss the content. Trainers simply need to know that users understand the rules, which they can analyze through in-course testing results.

Here are some ways that platforms such as Mindflash help companies deliver more effective online training that is simpler for users and trainers alike:

**1. Simple course development.** One complaint of adopting an eLearning system is that it's difficult to create and update courses, sometimes forcing trainers to start from scratch and learn new tools. Look for a system that makes it simple to import content from existing courses in a variety of file formats, such as PDFs, video or a PowerPoint files. Once the content is imported into the software, trainers simply add voice narration and quizzes to complete the course. Says Scott Zimmer, Senior Manager of CD Capabilities with Unilever Food Solutions, on adopting Mindflash:  "It was the easiest to use for trainers and for our trainees and is completely confidential. We were able to use the content we already had to quickly create on-demand e-learning courses. We now have other departments in our company asking us how they can use the system." More than 64% of Mindflash customers who create their first course do so on the same day that they sign up for the service.

**2. Ease of administration and tracking:** With an eLearning system, the trainer simply adds email addresses into the system or can upload a spreadsheet of trainees. From there, the system automatically invites attendees, tracks acceptance and completion and can send auto reminders for those who haven't completed. Easy to read charts highlight aggregate and individual progress.

**3. Automatic assessments and reports:**  Finding out whether users learned adequately or had difficulty with a section usually requires the trainer to distribute a test and then score the results which is a manual, time-consuming activity. Instead, incorporating surveys and quizzes within the course ensures that feedback is collected and reported in real time.  "We were spending several hours per month creating reports on employee training," says Christine Downey, Sr. Program Coordinator, Wide Format Konica Minolta Business Solutions. "Now the reports we need are prepared automatically, so we can see and respond to results right away. The system is saving us time and we're learning faster as well, which has a measurable impact on business success."

**4. Mobility:**  Employees and customers are not deskbound today, and some may prefer to use their portable devices to take a course while they are away from the office. Advanced eLearning systems have apps for trainees so that people can learn in a way that's most effective for them.

**Unilever improves remote training with an on-demand solution**

Unilever, like many large companies today, has employees spread across many regions and has a significant need for both ad hoc and continuous education training. The logistics of training are a major challenge since courses need to be delivered across North America and must be tailored to meet the needs of specialized teams across sales disciplines such as large retail chains, supermarket, convenience stores and healthcare. The company was holding live meetings over the phone, which were difficult to schedule and hard to track information retention.

"It's important that we ensure that employees not only understand the materials but also retain the information," says Beverly Looney, Unilever's CD Capabilities Training Manager. The top priority for training was that the tool was user-friendly. "I didn't want a complex solution that required an IT degree to be able to use," she says. The company chose Mindflash from competing solutions because it was the easiest for both trainers and trainees to understand. Other factors included that the software is easy for Unilever salespeople to access from the field; they can also go back online, log into the system and review materials at any time. Trainers appreciated that they can change a program even after it has been activated and can copy pieces of one course to create another that is slightly different. One year after moving to Mindflash, Unilever has created 30 courses in the on-demand platform. The company now sends training materials in advance and offers Q&A review sessions, which has resulted in training review calls decreasing from 90 minutes to 30 minutes. Employees also love the new system because it is more convenient.

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**Product engineering reseller uses eLearning to speed and improve learning outcomes**

GoEngineer, a reseller and consultancy in engineering and product design space, faced the dual challenges of a rigorous onboarding and continuous education process and a large percentage of sales reps working remotely. Typically, trainers would create PowerPoint presentations, send them to sales reps and then follow up with a phone call to walk through the slides or conduct an online meeting.  While HR could track attendance through spreadsheets, they didn't have much if any insight into knowledge retention.

After adopting Mindflash, the company can now easily track knowledge retention by individual and also create customized learning plans. Comprehension over a two-week period is 92%. Instead of spending time monitoring and tracking course completions, trainers now focus on addressing individual learning needs through coaching. The result: a more efficient training process and more prepared workers.


**Making the most out of eLearning**

For companies that have never created an online course, it can be daunting, given the choices for including animation, video, graphics, quizzes and more. These tips can help anyone get started on creating an engaging and successful eLearning program.


**1. Keep it brief:** When putting together a course, think short and broadcast TV style with clear, concise language. The longer the course runs, the higher the possibility of user distractions on social media, email, IM or other activities. The most successful courses in terms of content retention and course completion are in the 15-20 minute range. Clearly, some topics will require more content, but you can easily create multiple courses as a series to be completed over a reasonable period of time.


**2. Create variety:** Many trainers will use PowerPoint slides as the basis for a course, but they can be more effective by interspersing short video segments, animated demos, funny quotes, music or powerful graphics to keep people actively engaged in the content. Use technology to your advantage and ensure that your software of choice can easily support many different file and media formats.


**3. Include quizzes:** Not all courses require a test or certification, but quizzes can help provide valuable feedback to the training department. For learners, quizzes offer a useful break in the course and force them to slow down and think about the content they have just viewed. If a user does poorly on the quiz, she might rewind and replay a previous section.

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