

WHITE PAPER

Interactive Virtual Classroom Training

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There are many benefits to e-learning. It is more affordable than traditional classroom training, it ensures consistency in the delivery of content, courses can be accessed at the trainee's convenience and it eliminates travel and training facility costs. Despite these advantages, e-learning does not always impress the people who really matter: learners. According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development, when asked to rank training solutions based on preference, less than 10 percent of those surveyed placed teacher-less e-learning or web-based in their top three.

The industry has responded to this feedback by developing Virtual Classroom Training (VCT) with remote teachers. At its inception, lack of bandwidth and a limited understanding around which VCT strategies would prove most effective led some providers to deliver dull, unimaginative training that was little better than watching a video. Today, VCT has evolved into an engaging and efficient solution. Studies find VCT delivers the knowledge-transfer benefits of traditional instructor-led training and the cost benefits of e-learning.

A NUMBER OF ELEMENTS CAN BE INCORPORATED INTO VCT, INCLUDING:

- **PowerPoint presentations**
- **Images and videos**
- **Desktop sharing**
- **Video or text chatting**
- **Polls**
- **Q&A sessions**

AS VCT INCREASES IN POPULARITY, COURSE DESIGNERS HAVE FOUND NEW WAYS TO IMPROVE THE PROGRAMS. SOME RECENT ADDITIONS INCLUDE:

- Higher camera frame rate giving higher clarity to the trainer cam
- Q&A pod supporting questions that can be delegated to various experts through moderated chat
- Increased breakout room stability, allowing more control by facilitator and debrief requirements
- Portable webcams that allow instructors to move around and demonstrate procedures in real time
- Role-plays or tests after the scheduled training session is complete to determine the program's effectiveness

We have found that VCT is largely age-neutral. Because of the presence of live tutors, studies suggest it does not alienate "baby boomer" generations who are more used to traditional chalk and talk presentations. Younger employees see the interactivity as part of their everyday life and are very comfortable engaging with their peers in a virtual environment. In general, we are finding increasing levels of acceptance as learners of all ages become more accustomed to virtual learning.

Raytheon Professional Services uses VCT across a range of customers. Its Leadership and Management courses are now accredited by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM).

Raytheon was the first provider in the UK to launch a recognized business administration apprenticeship that is delivered via a VCT and collaborative learning approach. Graduates gain qualifications at fully work-based learning that is integrated into the day-to-day activities of the apprentices' job.

Overall, this second generation VCT is proving to be invaluable for both business leaders and participants alike. Training delivered through this medium now forms a significant part of our blended learning strategy.

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR WHEN IMPLEMENTING VCT

It is fairly simple for training managers and/or learning executives to build a compelling business case that supports the implementation of this innovative learning tool. Although virtual classroom training provides significant cost savings, there are a few technical requirements, cultural and just plain pragmatic challenges to address when considering implementing VCT into your learning strategy. Adding another learning media tool to your learning arsenal increases flexibility, but also calls for stronger governance and close examination when deciding which media type best fits your training needs. The key is determining the right balance of blended learning solutions to employ with an eye toward organizational needs and scarce resources. While one aim is to simulate a classroom environment, the major challenge of learning professionals is to identify which training content makes sense to develop, deploy and deliver via VCT. Instead of viewing VCT as a learning media replacement, it is important that organizations understand that VCT is a key addition, complementing traditional delivery types. Establishing clear VCT guidelines lays the groundwork for the design and development of the learning content lifecycle process and helps ensure alignment to business goals.

This brings us to deployment service. Translation, localization and proofreading of VCT courseware require many manual changes and reassembly. A VCT content unit can multiply into 10 or 20 versions for different languages and countries. Therefore, it is essential to have a diligent version control cycle in place to avoid costly divergence of messages and content. More complex virtual classroom training solutions have dedicated studios that include a wide array of features and the latest hardware and software. These fully equipped studios may include studio lighting, soundproofed walls, multiple monitors to audio and video software and sometimes even professional video-editing stations. Global organizations often build several of these studios in key employee population areas. Placing studios in close proximity to the potential instructor and subject matter expert populations around the globe reduces travel costs to facilitate virtual sessions. The number of studios and their associated hardware and software requirements may drive VCT implementation costs and ongoing IT network requirements. However, organizations with low in-country presence may reconsider using full-fledged solution by taking advantage of an alternative approach. Setting up several basic studios that solely include technical necessities for VCT reduces complexity and

cost as well as ensures access to the virtual learning environment, benefiting your dispersed learning. One consideration that raises concern among training managers and learning executives is ensuring the quality of training delivery when implementing VCT. It implies a change in learning culture. The VCT instructor has multiple responsibilities; conducting presentations to a virtual audience; moderating class activities; and operating different applications simultaneously. Trainers must master the skills to ensure highly engaging sessions that convey a meaningful learning message via the Web. Organizations should consider a transition period, where VCT instructors and participants have time to adjust to the virtual classroom approach before the full scope of the solution applies. The best way to do this is to upskill trainers on the adequate usage of this technology with a dedicated program that includes all the features of the platform and the general techniques for instructing people in virtual environments. The participants will learn quickly how to use the platform if the instructors know how to introduce and how to lead the sessions. For participants to become familiar with the tool, it makes sense to have VCT demos available and short guides about “How to VCT”.

About Raytheon Professional Services

Raytheon Professional Services is a global leader in learning solutions and services. RPS helps businesses meet their critical objectives by designing, implementing and managing efficient and effective training solutions that improve the performance of their global workforce.

Raytheon Company, with 2012 sales of \$24 billion and 68,000 employees worldwide, is a technology and innovation leader specializing in defense, security and civil markets throughout the world. With a history of innovation spanning 91 years, Raytheon provides state-of-the-art electronics, mission systems integration and other capabilities in the areas of sensing; effects; and command, control, communications and intelligence systems; as well as a broad range of mission support services. Raytheon is headquartered in Waltham, Mass. For more about Raytheon, visit us at www.raytheon.com and follow us on Twitter @raytheon.