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## With Attention Being Paid to Digital Learning, How Can Companies Promote and Raise Awareness of Training Opportunities?

### Abstract

[Excerpt] Raising awareness around the availability of learning initiatives is a challenge commonly faced by many organizations. Over 164 billion dollars is spent on training and development annually . This represents a cost of nearly \$1200 per employee and over 39 percent of training hours are spent on eLearning and other virtual training activities . It is crucial to make sure the dollars spent on training are not squandered. The upswing of this being a relatively common problem is that there are established best practices for marketing learning content. According to an article published in T+D Magazine, “to develop a learning program and just assume that learners will show up is like throwing a party without sending invitations” . Internal marketing and promotion are essential to raising awareness and participation around learning opportunities and will ensure that trainings are successful and well received.

### Keywords

digital learning, training, HR, Human Resources, learning programs, marketing, promotion, LMS

### Comments

#### Suggested Citation

Proctor, J. (2017). *With attention being paid to digital learning, how can companies promote and raise awareness of training opportunities?* Retrieved [insert date] from Cornell University, ILR School site: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/student/183>

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## Executive Summary

### Research Question

With attention being paid to digital learning and learning management system trainings, how can companies promote and raise awareness of available internal training and development opportunities?

### Background and Context

Raising awareness around the availability of learning initiatives is a challenge commonly faced by many organizations. Over 164 billion dollars is spent on training and development annually<sup>1</sup>. This represents a cost of nearly \$1200 per employee and over 39 percent of training hours are spent on eLearning and other virtual training activities<sup>2</sup>. It is crucial to make sure the dollars spent on training are not squandered. The upswing of this being a relatively common problem is that there are established best practices for marketing learning content. According to an article published in T+D Magazine, “to develop a learning program and just assume that learners will show up is like throwing a party without sending invitations”<sup>3</sup>. Internal marketing and promotion are essential to raising awareness and participation around learning opportunities and will ensure that trainings are successful and well received.

### Best Practices for Marketing and Promoting Learning Offerings

- **Involve Supervisors in the Process:** The value of involving supervisors in the process of promoting learning opportunities is well documented and accepted as a best practice in raising awareness of training opportunities. The most robust description of how this should be done appeared in a CAHRS Working Group hosted by JP Morgan.
  - **Create Managerial Awareness:** Leaders should be made aware of their unit’s utilization of various offerings relative to the utilization of other units<sup>4</sup>.
  - **Sell the Value:** Train managers on the value of learning offerings. Hosting an online workshop can help managers understand the trainings and promote them in an informed manner<sup>5</sup>.
  - **Encourage Managerial Promotion:** Managers should be taught to promote learning and development and conduct discussions around it. This will allow learning to cascade down throughout the organization<sup>6</sup>.
- **Use a Blend of Traditional and Non-Traditional Marketing:** Emails and online advertisements such as banner advertisements on the company intranet can be used to raise awareness of certain trainings available within the LMS. Links to trainings can also be included in related corporate communications. A CAHRS Working Group member suggests, for instance, including a link to a finance training at the end of a communication about an upcoming investor call<sup>7</sup>. Non-traditional and fun marketing approaches have proven to be effective as well. This can include using food and branded items as giveaways to reward or incentivize participation in learning activities.
- **Build Internal Communities to Foster Learning:** While marketing approaches are effective at raising awareness, they may not be as effective at raising engagement and interest. To engage learners and gain their participation, companies should consider building communities and networks. This can be done by leveraging collaboration platforms such as Jive<sup>8</sup>. Collaboration platforms can allow knowledge of learning opportunities to be spread via virtual word of mouth. These platforms can also prove themselves valuable to management by allowing them to garner information as to which trainings employees see as valuable and useful.

- **Clearly Articulate Alignment Between Trainings and Work:** Employees often detect a misalignment between trainings they take and work they do<sup>9</sup>, this can lead to the information being taught in the exercises not being implemented in daily work, and reluctance to participate in future offerings. However, if there is an alignment between the training and the duties of those being trained, it creates a personal incentive for the group targeted. To effectively communicate the importance of the learning in reaching business objectives, the practical difference made by the training must be researched. Employees are resistant to spend time on elective training they do not see as useful in reaching their goals.

### What are companies doing?

- **BG Group:** BG Group was committed to providing a broad swathe of learning opportunities to its more than 5000 employees that were located throughout more than 20 countries. However, they wanted to ensure that their employees were not overwhelmed by the volume of options presented by their robust offerings. To prevent their employees from becoming overwhelmed and demotivated by the volume of learning options, they offered personalized recommendations, like what is given by Amazon to shoppers, as to what courses their employees may find most useful<sup>10</sup>. BG Group was also focused on increasing participation and adoption of eLearning offerings through fun and engaging activities. For example, the BG Group L&D staff gave cupcakes with barcoded wrappers to learners that could be scanned with a smartphone to access the learning management system<sup>11</sup>. BG Group also held workshops to explain what was offered and how to access learning platforms<sup>12</sup>. An internal social media platform was also leveraged to allow employees to share experiences and courses they found to be useful<sup>13</sup>. The campaign almost immediately yielded favorable results, with almost 100% increase in user logins in the first month and triple the overall use of various digital learning options.
- **Lexmark:** Lexmark was facing issues around their internal LMS not seeing high utilization, largely due to employees not being aware of the available learning opportunities<sup>14</sup>. To raise awareness of available online learning options and increase utilization of the available options, Lexmark collaborated with their employee communication department<sup>15</sup>. Together they created an integrated marketing plan that focused on providing a platform for the users of the learning management system to share their learning stories. Their intent was to create a simple, but effective way to relay the effectiveness of participating in optional training modules contained within their LMS. The platform was a success and Lexmark experienced increased participation in their eLearning offerings.

### Conclusion

To raise awareness and engagement around LMS offerings, companies must involve supervisors of groups to which trainings are targeted. There is also a consistent theme present in most of the available research that says that the value of the offerings must be clearly communicated to both managers and employees. This value can be communicated in a top down manner through traditional internal marketing initiatives such as email reminders and online banner advertisements, and it can be facilitated through word of mouth via collaboration platforms. Companies such as Lexmark and BG Group have successfully raised the awareness of their offerings by taking actions to actively engage their employees while also giving them avenues to communicate which trainings they found most useful to their fellow employees.

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