



# Five Steps To Make Learning A Success In 2009



## **Executive Summary**

2009 will be a difficult year in both the private and public sectors. In tough economic times there will more pressure than ever to perform – from individual employees through to the enterprise as a whole.

It is at times like this that the Learning and Development (L&D) department can play a vital role, because L&D provides the fastest, surest route to improved employee performance and such improvements are quickly seen organisationally. Imagine the effect on your organisation if production increased by 5% for no extra cost in the first half of the year. Or smarter working practices cut operational costs by 10%. Or sales teams made their targets without any assistance.

Such changes need not be confined to one group of employees. Using technological support, Learning and Development can now reach further through the enterprise than ever before. It is no longer necessary, for example, to pull vital, customer-facing staff away from their duties for lengthy classroom courses and it is even possible to extend training outside the enterprise to include partners and customers.

Any improvements in the performance of existing employees and partners go straight to bottom line, but they can only happen with the smart application of technology. In comparison with classroom delivery, a technology-supported approach to learning reduces costs and enables a wider reach, faster. In short, technology enables you to take already existing, locally used, learning materials and knowledge and put it to work throughout your organisation.

This sort of effectiveness requires the L&D department to work closely with the executive and with management. Through effective collaboration, 2009 could be the year in which L&D adds value to the organisation just when it needs it. This white paper describes how.

## **Learning and Development in 2009**

As the developed economies move into recession in early 2009, many Learning and Development (L&D) professionals are concerned. They fear that training budgets – and possibly headcount and entire departments – may be cut.

But this tough economic environment also presents the perfect opportunity to shine.

In 2009, companies will be aiming to cut costs while still promoting products and services to generate revenue. Non-profit and governmental organisations will likely face budget freezes.

One thing won't change. Whether in the public or private sector, organisations will still have targets to meet.

It will be a difficult year of being asked to do more with less. In these demanding circumstances, however, L&D can still thrive. This is because well-targeted learning is often the quickest and most effective way to have a direct effect on employee performance – exactly what executives will be demanding.

This training is not the regular, ongoing training which happens in every organisation. Because it is largely invisible to senior management, this 'background' training is often seen as a cost to be cut when budgets have to be trimmed.

In 2009, the success of the L&D department will depend on delivering additional training that produces a demonstrable effect on organisational performance. How can you get budget for this? By showing that, with the right technology, you can work quickly and – crucially – cost effectively. Don't be mistaken. Cost will be a crucial issue in 2009 for everyone, and L&D will be no exception. Well-priced technological learning support is going to be a very attractive alternative to classroom-based programmes.

This white paper describes how to identify the key initiatives in your organisation which can be made more effective through Learning and Development, and then describes how to deliver that L&D. This is an area in which CERTPOINT Systems has specialized, both in the US and in Europe, and in this paper we draw on success stories where training departments have created a direct impact on performance. From this experience, CERTPOINT has produced a five-step approach to planning for learning success in 2009:

*Step 1: Find where L&D adds value*

*Step 2: Focus on speed*

*Step 3: Find the right tools*

*Step 4: Reach up*

*Step 5: Reach out*

## Step 1: Find where L&D adds value

2009 will see a sharp focus on organisational effectiveness and performance. How can L&D get involved in this and prove its value? The best opportunities are when your organisation has a performance-focused initiative such as:

- Launching a new product or service
- Improving internal efficiencies
- Improving the value of working with partner organisations

Unlike background training – the benefits of which are long-term and often unappreciated elsewhere in the organisation – training to support such initiatives has an immediate and noticeable positive impact. That's good for the business, and good for you.

How do you find these initiatives? You ask.

Ideally you shouldn't have to ask, but unfortunately L&D is all too often the last to hear about major initiatives. The good news is that this is not a matter of deliberate exclusion. It is usually simply that the people involved are too busy to think about L&D on top of everything else.

The other good news: most high level people now understand the importance of skills. They know their people's ability and knowledge are crucial to their success. They just don't know what to do about it.

You will need to speak to a range of people. Once you have established the key initiative to support, decide how L&D can best be of use – not alone, but in collaboration with the people who will implement the initiative. Run a kick-off meeting with key stakeholders to understand which parts of the business objectives rely on skills and knowledge. Once that is established, you're on home ground: express these needs in terms of learning solutions and work out how you can deliver them quickly and effectively, in line with the rest of the initiative.

The needs may not be immediately quantifiable, but that does not make them any less business critical.

Toyota Motor Europe (TME) aims to bind autonomous dealerships into a community across Europe, strengthening TME's corporate image and brand awareness. The programme to make this happen is supported by implementation of a learning management system and the net effect is that customer satisfaction is improving because retailers have access to time sensitive information faster.

This programme won an award for its effectiveness, but it would never have been approved without that vital link to a company-critical initiative

## Step 2: Focus on speed

Making an impact fast is vital for L&D in 2009. Producing effective learning quickly means that your organisation harvests the benefits faster. It also means that L&D is recognised for its value sooner.

There won't be time to wait in 2009, so expect to deliver great learning in a matter of weeks, and to show impact in a few months.

Unless you are already delivering training to these timescales, this pressure will call for a new approach:

Old Approach	New Approach
<b>Classroom delivery the default for most training</b>	<b>The classroom used for what it does best: provide personal contact and inspiration. Elearning and web 2.0 tools used for everything else</b>
<b>Lengthy, systematic instructional design process</b>	<b>Streamlined production of elearning based on good-looking templates, ideally using marketing department input</b>
<b>Learning uses a mixture of different content, delivered on different systems.</b>	<b>Learning content to support initiatives has a strong central content, delivered and produced in one system.</b>
<b>Elearning production and delivery takes place on a huge, centrally-controlled Learning Management System (LMS) that takes six-figure sums to purchase and six months plus to implement.</b>	<b>Elearning is produced and tracked on an agile, central system and is up and running in weeks.</b>
<b>Learning team devotes its time to internal processes and management of the L&amp;D department.</b>	<b>Administration is a given. L&amp;D focuses on delivery to increase business value.</b>

Often the daunting nature of change, or the sheer scale of work required, can reduce the speed of learning deployment. Don't let it. In 2009, once any learning programme is officially sanctioned, each day extra spent deploying it is one more day without the benefits the training can bring.

For example, when US rental company Aaron Rents needed to rationalise training across 1,500 outlets to support the training of its customer-facing staff, it saw any delay as potentially threatening to revenues. The result: a focus on implementation that led to an LMS being designed and deployed within three weeks.

Not all benefits are monetary. For one international not-for profit organisation it was essential that all their field inspectors world-wide were seen to be fully up-to-speed on verification compliance, rapidly. Supporting such a sensitive initiative at the speed they required could only be done with the support of a learning management system.

In both these cases, the only way to implement the L&D initiative was with technological support. If you want speed, that's almost inevitable. The right learning system makes technology a crucial supporting tool, enabling you to make the impact you should.

### **Step 3: Find the right tools**

Technology is a must for learning in 2009 – without it you won't be able to meet those organisational learning goals rapidly enough. But that does not mean investing in a slew of independent technologies that will take you until the summer to understand and integrate.

Instead, look for tools that enable you to design, develop and deploy learning effectively, without absorbing all your time in administration.

#### *Design*

Design for rapid learning impact means a focus on utility. That doesn't mean plain-looking or badly-designed content. It means using template cleverly to produce a unified look for your content, rather than spending hours individually designing each module and page.

#### *Develop*

And don't re-invent the wheel in development, either. For the sake of rapid implementation, you'll want to be able to re-use materials you've previously created, whatever they are: from electronic quizzes, to classroom courses to Flash content.

This approach leaves you time to focus on the other steps in the process. In particular, you'll want to dwell on steps 4 and 5: 'reaching up' and 'reaching out', where you ensure the effectiveness of your learning programme.

#### *Deploy*

'Reaching out' is essential to your learning programme's success. If you are working on a core initiative, it is almost certainly going to revolve around training the people who have the most impact on organisational effectiveness: those who do the daily work of providing a service, or selling a product. Very often these people are geographically dispersed, they may be in locations with poor IT support, and – frequently – they may not actually work for your organisation, but be partners. For all these reasons it is crucial not to rely on anything that can only be reached behind your organisational firewall. Any learning system will have to be browser based.

### ***Beyond the centre with web 2.0***

Not all learning content, however, needs to be centrally developed and deployed. Indeed the more involvement individuals have in their own learning, the more effective it is. With so many learners now comfortable with sharing and contributing online, make the most of this by building their content into the learning experience.

Delegates are most familiar with web 2.0 tools such as wikis and blogs, and collaborative tools such as Microsoft's SharePoint. If you are already fully stretched technically and don't have the time to develop and deploy a wiki and a series of user blogs, the answer is simple: find a system that provides these tools ready-integrated.

CERTPOINT systems offer blogs, wikis and integration with SharePoint to support online learning and collaboration. 2009 will see further interest in such technologies as travel budgets are trimmed, but people still need to exchange experiences with others facing similar work issues and understand how others are applying what they learned on the job.

Sophisticated learning technology is not just for Blackberry-totting office workers. Power tool manufacturer Black & Decker uses CERTPOINT as part of its internal learning programme, which has reduced employees' classroom training time from 80 percent to 20 percent. Black & Decker uses the system to train its global sales force and value chain partners, supporting over 7,000 employees and more than 60 products with just 4 L&D employees, and netting \$2.4 million in savings during the first year of use.

Those sorts of numbers will be very attractive in 2009 – so, too, will the ability to do what Black and Decker does: use rapid design tools and learning object to get quality content out quickly to over hundreds of sales people world wide.

### ***Administer***

Administering the business of training can take up a lot of time. But time spent on administration is dead time as far as the rest of the organisation is concerned. It does not support the organisational initiative you identified in Step 1.

*Time is tight anyway, and you will not be given any more in 2009 to patch together different systems to meet your goals, so if you are looking to purchase an learning support system, ensure it has the range of functionality you need out of the box, controlled by a straight-forward, effective interface.*

All administration tools that save you time are important. One area, though, is particularly important.

Managers and executives will expect reports on activity and attainment, so accurate reporting becomes vital not only to keep your activity on track, but also to demonstrate your competence. You cannot waste time going back to your systems vendor to ask for new reports, or edits to existing reports. Instead, look for:

- A good set of standard reports
- The ability to design and save your own reports
- The ability to export data to Microsoft Excel and create your own reports and charts.

Getting control of reporting will enable you to work faster, cut costs and produce exactly what you need.

### *Keep your eyes on the prize*

Administering training delivery can suck up a lot of your available time. Don't let it. In 2009, more than ever before, Voltaire's words hold true: 'the perfect is the enemy of the good'. When implementing any learning tools, seeking perfection will mean you never get started. Instead, seek two conditions when sourcing your learning tools.

First, look for systems which supply at least 80% of your needs 'out of the box'. Your understanding of your organisation's need will change as you pilot a system, so don't waste time with extensive up front configuration.

Second, look for systems which give you the power to configure them. Continually asking a supplier to alter a system is expensive and – worse – time-consuming when you need to be focused. Instead, get a system that puts the power in your hands.

CERTPOINT technology enables customers to design their own portal look and feel. The system has embedded functionality that allows organizations to tailor the learning portal to their needs and make changes on the fly. When global engineering company John Crane decided to enhance its existing learning provision to employees across its many locations world-wide, it chose CERTPOINT. This enabled John Crane to quickly create, configure and brand its e-learning platform, and to rapidly create learning content in different languages using the built-in authoring tool.

## **Step 4: Reach up**

2009 will see a sharp focus on organisational effectiveness and performance. How can L&D get involved in this and prove its value? The best opportunities are when your organisation has a performance-focused initiative such as:

The first of the five steps to learning success in 2009 is to identify key initiatives. Once you have identified your initiative, however, don't cut off communication and retreat back behind the L&D department doors. Instead, it is crucially important to maintain contact with those delivering the initiative, and others high in your organisation.

This is in part a matter of good PR for the L&D department – you need to make your successes known. Mostly, however, it is about keeping the learning on track, and discovering which parts of your L&D work are successful, and which require changes.

It is also very likely that the priorities of the people that you are working with will change. If that happens, you need to know about it as soon as possible, so that you can change your learning programme.

To keep yourself connected, consider the following:

- Become part of regular planning meetings for the initiative. If you aren't invited, suggest strongly that you should be!
- Supply clear reports on the progress of your learning programme – but keep them short and to the point. A single page report of key metrics and issues every week is more likely to be effective than something the size of a telephone directory every month.
- Whenever you are talking with the rest of the business, leave the language of L&D behind you. Focus on sales, not web 2.0 tools, on client satisfaction rather than elearning. The alternative: being considered a learning geek and labelled irrelevant.

Talking business language is important, and showing results is essential. Black and Decker was able to demonstrate a 63 percent boost in sales based on a result from a controlled e-learning pilot study. Such studies show the value L&D can bring to sales and marketing activities.

## **Step 5: Reach out**

The worst thing any learning and development department can do in 2009 is assume that if you build it, your learners will come.

They won't, and it's unlikely that you'll have the luxury of a second attempt.

2009 is all about rapid impact on performance. In most organisations this means increasing the effectiveness of those on the front line: the people daily providing a service, or selling a product.

Usually these people are widely dispersed geographically. In many cases they are not even employed by your organisation, but by partners. In all cases they are already very busy. To have any effect, it is essential for the L&D programme not only to reach them, but also to make them feel involved and ready to participate.

At the same time, time is short – so how do you grab their attention and make this work, fast?

The best approach is to be systematic, not to leave the process of learning adoption to chance. So, as well as reaching up to the higher echelons in the organisation, reach out to your learners, and understand – through them and their managers – what will bring them to your learning programme, and how to shape that learning to make it most effective.

CERTPOINT Systems has developed a learning adoption methodology (LAM) which it incorporates in all implementations. The LAM enables organisations to identify the factors that will trigger user adoption of learning. Starting with a facilitated change management and adoption workshop, the LAM feeds into system specification and content design and creation to ensure that things are – where possible – done right from the start. This ensures as little time as possible is wasted.

The LAM also suggests a series of short pilots to gather immediate feedback from potential users. Then, after full deployment, the LAM continues with key user groups providing valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the learning programme and suggesting areas for further improvement.

2009 could well be a tough year. But it is also a year of great opportunity. This is the moment for the learning and development department to show its worth.

## **About CERTPOINT Systems Inc**

CERTPOINT Systems provides an all-in-one software suite to manage talent, deliver knowledge, and track business results. Global leaders like Toyota, Honda, and Black & Decker use CERTPOINT's technology to arm their employees and partners with the knowledge they need to win and retain customers. Founded in 1996, CERTPOINT Systems is used by more than 1,000 businesses in over 35 countries and languages to deliver knowledge beyond the organization deep into sales and service channels.

CERTPOINTVLS™ is a global learning technology solution that puts talent and knowledge to work throughout the organization and extended enterprise to increase and measure performance on the job for stronger business results. The suite integrates Learning Management (LMS), Content Management, Competency Management, web 2.0 capabilities and Collaboration into a seamless learning system for creating, managing, delivering and tracking all online learning activities.

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