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Bringing Learning Online for Call Center Workers



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The call center is one of the most important points of contact between a company and its customers. Ineffective call center operations can affect customer retention and loyalty, not to mention an organization's ability to fulfill whatever need that prompted the customer to call in the first place.

Further, call centers must continually execute need fulfillment in a way that leaves the customer satisfied with the experience and willing to continue patronizing the organization. Ineffective call center-agent training can jeopardize all that.

Internet provider T-Online, part of Deutsche Telekom, offers about 14 million European customers online content and media services – nearly 200 different products – and call center operations are an integral part of its business. Recently, T-Online chose to implement simulation-based e-learning in order to flesh out its product and systems training, using Kaplan IT Learning's STT Trainer software.

“We figured out that there is something missing, and that something is the know-how,” said Bernd Wiest, e-learning manager, T-Online. “Our regular modules are quick in development, but they only tell people the why and the what: Why am I doing this training? Why am I learning this product, and what does it consist of? What can I do with it? Things like that. STT calls this type of training ‘page-turner training.’ The real, simulation-exercise part of the training was missing, and this was something we added last year.”





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T-Online has about 4,000 call center agents to train, and it has found success with a blended learning approach that incorporates classroom and e-learning components, complete with exams.

Most training is technical IT product- or systems-related and must be available at any time because T-Online offers customer support 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“The idea behind the whole training was to provide as quick as possible and as cheap and standardized as possible a training for everybody who is on the customer care lines,” Wiest said. “One of the good results is, not only that we save around 30 percent of our training time now, the activity is still the same. It’s as effective as the regular classroom training.

“We’ve saved a lot of time, which means saving a lot of money because in the customer care business, you have to pay the people for learning, and this makes it really interesting for us to do systems and product training that is as effective as regular classroom-based training, and the people are able to do their calls afterward within the same time. Calling time for the agents should stay the same or go down. We’ve saved time, and people are more confident on the telephone because they know they can look it up if there’s something missing, or if they’ve forgotten something.”





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The convenience of readily accessible online refresher lessons has been a boon to T-Online call center training. Wiest said traditional training development time takes about 30 to 40 hours for one blended training hour, yet it must be done only once, which comes in handy when project delays occur.

“If we’re training people – and we did that before like on a project schedule – if the project is finished, and the launch deadline is coming up, we start with the training two weeks before launch starts. If some problems happen with regular classroom training, we would have to retrain people, and now we have the possibility to tell them, ‘Look it up again.’ They go through it pretty quick, and it works really good for them. One program we had two or three delays, and it was no problem to keep the people informed about everything and give them the opportunity to start with the new training again. That was a really interesting benefit for us too because nobody expected it.” In addition to the time- and cost-saving benefits of using simulations in a classroom environment, T-Online now has the capability to test following training.

“If you’re doing a two-hour training, no matter if it’s product or systems training, people have to do a test, and up to the beginning of this year, we did it with a regular multiple-choice test,” Wiest said. “Now with simulations, we’re doing the real check (test), and the score is written back to the learning management system with the SCORM (Shareable Content Object Reference Model) interface, which gives us the opportunity to show the trainer the complete list of who passed and who failed the test. We have pretty high measurement here because in the call center business, there’s a standard called COPC (Customer Operations Performance Center Inc.), and it says that if you go on to do high-quality customer care calls, you have to reach at least 70 percent in the tests after the training. If you’re somewhere between 70 and 80 percent, you need to be retrained, get coaching or a refresher. This was something we added last year, and it proves that it’s really worth it. It fits perfectly into the whole learning landscape of T-Online.”



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