

VIRTUAL CLASSROOM TRAINING IS BORING!

On the face of it, Virtual Classroom Training (VCT) is a no-brainer isn't it? Training can be delivered in bite-sized chunks to anywhere across the globe. Learners can participate from their own offices or even from home. There are massive savings in travel costs and productivity gains with less time spent out of the office. The materials are easy to develop. They are easy to amend. There are no material distribution costs. Events can even be recorded and viewed later as a refresher, or if new starters need training urgently. *What's not to like about all of that...* Surely VCT is the answer to a Training Manager's prayers.

...And yet, many companies we talk to are disappointed and unhappy with their experiences of using this form of training. Some have even abandoned it altogether.



With the whole array of tools at your disposal – web-safaris, interactive simulation, on-line games and quizzes, virtual role-play, breakout rooms, whiteboard discussion areas, interactive video, audio and text-based chat... plus a whole range of tools yet untapped, but available. Why is the virtual classroom not the place to teach skills?

“We spend the first 15 minutes of each session trying to fix people’s technical problems”, “People don’t give the training priority; they just don’t turn up to the event if something more urgent comes up in the office”. “It’s OK for quick update information but you can’t tackle skills training using VCT”. “There’s no interaction with the learners; people lose interest and are checking e-mails when they should be listening”. “It’s just boring”...

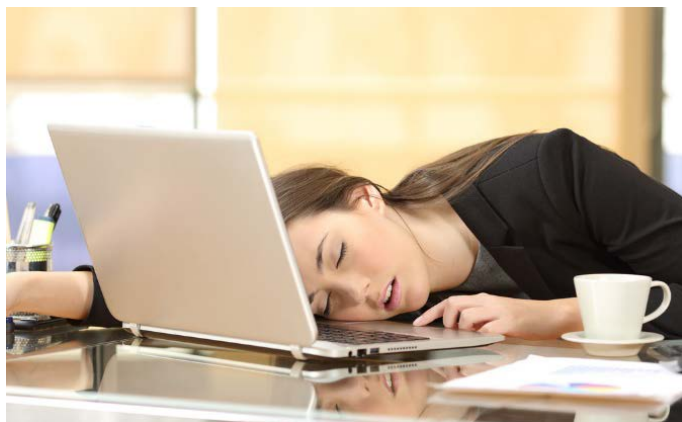
These are the comments we hear - and a whole lot more. All good reasons why the take-up of virtual training just isn't happening for a large number of organisations.

If this sounds like your organisation, then I'm sorry. There is no way I can dress this up. If VCT isn't working for you and is boring, it's because you're not doing it right!

There. I've said it. There's no going back now. I'm sure an army of trolls will be on my case in a flash telling me I don't understand, and that I'm wrong. I don't care! I've been designing courseware for over 25 years and have lived through many, many different technological 'breakthroughs'. Some were good and some were rubbish. But VCT doesn't fall into that latter category and certainly doesn't deserve to be consigned to the bin.

Regarding the technical issues users experience, let me lay it on the line There is no excuse for technological ignorance and incompetence. Millions upon millions of people communicate successfully everyday using tools like SnapChat, What'sApp, Skype and many, many other instantaneous forms of digital communication. Children as young as six or seven master these technologies with ease. I refuse to believe the technology is a serious barrier to using VCT in business.

The first time I used any of these on-line communication tools it was confusing – I had to be shown, I made mistakes. But many of these tools I now use all the time and they are really useful! Some of them I couldn't live without! And that's the key. Make tools useful, make people use them all the time and suddenly the technical issues disappear.



Of course, you need reasonable bandwidth if you are going to enable several audio or video channels. So if you have workers who need training and who live in the middle of desolate moorlands or swamps, then I accept you may have a legitimate issue with what I'm saying. But most organisations don't have that problem!

And let me address the issue of skills training. Adults learn best through self-directed learning, by experimentation, by the application of prior

knowledge and through gaming and play. With the whole array of tools at your disposal – web-safaris, interactive simulation, on-line games and quizzes, polling, virtual role-play, breakout rooms, whiteboard discussion areas, interactive video, audio and text-based chat... plus a whole range of tools yet untapped, but available. Why is the virtual classroom not the place to teach skills? There is, for example, absolutely no reason (other than bandwidth) why I could not have professional actors join a session in different breakout rooms and conduct two or three simultaneous role-plays in a Sales training course in exactly the same way I might do in a 'real' classroom-based event. In fact, it would be even better because I, as the facilitator, could hop in and out of the role plays much more easily.

So, let me come to the central theme of this paper. I don't know how else I can put this. VCT's are boring because we design them that way. I say 'we' because I am as guilty as any other developer. It is not unusual to start a project with the client giving me a list of facilities that cannot be used in the design – e.g. "we don't use breakout rooms because delegates don't understand them", "we don't use web-safaris because it's difficult to get everyone back", "we don't allow trainers to activate the learners' cameras because they don't all have them" and even, recently, I had one client that said "we don't use learners' microphones because for some learner's there is a voice lag that's off-putting".

Well here's the bottom line. Most trainers (I hope) wouldn't consider presenting a one-hour, one-way dialogue supported only by 30 or so PowerPoint slides and calling it 'training'. And if you wouldn't do that in the 'real' world, why on earth would that be OK in the virtual world. VCT technology has moved on. There are a huge number of exciting, engaging and compelling interactions you can design for the virtual classroom and they all work!

Here's my resolution for the remainder of 2017. If a client asks me to design another boring VCT session, and is not prepared to go with inbuilt self-directed learning, gamification and full interactive discussion, I'm going to politely, but firmly turn the contract down. I may starve in 2017 but at least I will do so with a clear conscience.

This article is one in a series of papers “The virtual classroom training design series” that look at different aspects of designing highly interactive and engaging VCT sessions. If you like the article and want to find out more, then please visit:

www.profilelearning.com or e-mail us at profile@profilelearning.com



Profile Learning Solutions offers a wide range of courseware, e-learning and mobile learning services that can help you deliver the very best training to achieve your learning and development goals. In addition to our 'off-the-shelf' courses, we can design and develop training that is tailored to your specific development needs.

WHY NOT GIVE US A CALL TO DISCUSS YOUR TRAINING NEEDS?
+44 (0)1759 388979