eLearning Industry

Blended Learning Basics:

How To Find The Best Approach For Your SMB

Introduction

It's hard to deny that blended learning saves time and money. For starters, we can improve the performance of blended programs by reformatting existing content and converting it into training material. This cuts content production expenses. But the key is finding the right solution for your budget and needs. That's where this guide comes in to help you choose the best approach for SMBs.

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The main downsides of conventional classroom learning are cost and time. You have to take trainees away from their desks (or their spot on the sales floor). Then you must pay for their transport and accommodation, all while ignoring the amount of cash they could have earned in the meantime. Online training solves the cost problem and the time-away-from-work problem. But are there any other measures you can take to maximize your training ROI? Here are some blended learning best practices to stretch your budget and improve employee engagement.

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Chapter 1

1. Repurpose Existing Assets To Reduce Costs

By generating your training materials from existing content, you avoid the cost of paying subject matter consultants. [Repurposing content](#) is faster than producing it from scratch, so your L&D team will use up fewer billable hours. The time they save can be used in other revenue-enhancing activities. Your repurposing method will vary, but be sure to pick cost-effective ones. For example, rather than digitizing an entire sales catalog, you could record mini audio clips. They'd describe each item in the catalog. These recordings can be done using a phone or a computer recorder. It doesn't have to be a high-end studio with premium pricing. You could use basic tools and add ambient sound beds from free online libraries.

> **One of the perks of using blended learning software is that you can offer your employees ongoing support remotely. They're able to attend live events or face-to-face sessions from anywhere in the world.**

Chapter 1

2. Encourage BYOD To Cut Expenses

The online segment of blended training could be canned software, open-source code, or a native mobile app. And depending on your software specs, you may have to buy new hardware to accommodate it. So, for instance, you may decide to buy solar-powered tablets for every trainee. If they train on uniform devices, they'll have more equitable training experience. Similarly, you might have to buy new desktop computers, laptops, or even servers to host your training software. Those are unnecessary expenses though. Instead, start from the user. Verify all the computers and mobile devices your staff currently has. Then buy blended learning software that's compatible with those electronics and invite learners to train on their own devices.

> **Which challenges can blended learning help you overcome? Let's look at the top compliance training obstacles that blended learning can break down!**

Follow the bee

3. Survey Employees' Needs For Resource Development

When you're the top boss (or even mid-level line manager), it can be hard to run surveys. Whatever you ask your subordinates, they rarely give honest answers. Instead, they try to gauge the response you expect, then they offer some version of that. In a training scenario though, you want to ensure the training you provide is actually useful (and the money you spend is put to good use). You want to confirm the type of resources they require. One of the most crucial blended learning best practices to improve ROI is gathering feedback and using it to narrow the scope. To get the best replies, craft your questions carefully. Keep them specific but open-ended. Don't ask, "Would you prefer a language course or a coding course?" Or, "How can we train you to offer better skills?" Instead, ask, "If you could learn one skill to make your job easier, what would it be?" Or, "Tell me three things our training course doesn't have that you wish it had, or vice versa." Then you can use the data to personalize your blended learning LMS resources to suit their needs and preferences instead of wasting precious assets on support tools that don't really address the gaps.

4. Tap Into Peer-Based Support

One of the perks of using blended learning software is that you can offer your employees ongoing support remotely. They're able to attend live events or face-to-face sessions from anywhere in the world. However, you can also facilitate knowledge sharing and cut costs by encouraging peer-based feedback and support. For example, employees might participate in social media discussions or group collab projects to apply what they learned during the ILT session. This allows them to broaden their experience and knowledge base without digging into your blended learning budget as you don't have to develop as many resources to bridge the gaps.

5. Use Multimedia Training Techniques

I've already mentioned how audio clips can be used for training. Video is a helpful tool as well, especially for visual learners. They can watch the demo and mimic its actions. And because they're visually oriented, they'll remember more of the information for later use. Video tutorials also make useful additions to reference libraries. An employee can review a previous lesson by speeding through a two-minute video. It's especially helpful for on-the-spot training during a work-based crisis. Video can be recorded on a smartphone or a cheap digital camera. It doesn't have to be a Hollywood production. It just has to be well-scripted and have a suitable soundtrack for emotional reach. This counterintuitive insertion of sentiment nestles it deeper into the corporate learners' psyche because emotion triggers memory. This can help you retain knowledge better.

Chapter 2

7 Secrets To Develop Blended Learning Strategies That Facilitate In-House Knowledge Sharing

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Blended training is considered a corporate lifesaver. It costs a lot less than traditional instructor-led training because you don't have to foot the bill for on-site instructors or travel expenses. But it helps you incorporate some of the face-to-face interaction you lose in online training. Still, in this particular scenario, the emphasis isn't on conventional workshops and seminars. It's about finding ways to share knowledge that already exists with your in-house staff. Let's look at some techniques you can use to achieve this and develop successful [blended learning strategies](#) for your organization.

Chapter 2

1. Effective Framing

Sometimes, the way you present and structure an idea can make all the difference. For example, you like chocolate ice cream. If you're given a choice between vanilla and chocolate, you're happy. But if you're told you can only have chocolate forever, it won't be long before you start to detest it. In the same way, blended learning is all about options. Your introverted trainees, for example, may become reticent if you force them to swap their privacy for ILT. Plus, it allows you to cater to different learning preferences and styles. This means that your team can pick and choose the modalities and delivery methods that work best for them.

> **A good option is online self-assessment. These will help trainees spot their areas of dearth. Trainees may be more open to assessment if surveys are anonymous.**

2. Cooperative Emphasis

Instead, offer it as a form of learning support. Craft your blended sessions in a collaborative style. Avoid hall-based lectures and go for pairs or small groups. These can be facilitated via webcam, ensuring students don't feel crowded or overwhelmed. Also, activities in pairs or trios offer more incentive for every group member to do their part. When the group exceeds six, it's more likely one person will be stuck with all the heavy lifting. Smaller groups demand active involvement. Another blended learning tool at your disposal is social media groups.

3. Peer-Based Coaching

It helps to be aware that training isn't just the activity. It's the culture. As an example, you can buy all the books in the world and build the best-equipped library. But without a reading culture, none of that really matters. So, as you step into the blended learning space, incorporate supportive, collaborative peer training. Foster an environment of cooperation, not toxic competition. Invite peers to identify and share their strengths while shoring up weaknesses using the blended learning LMS. The key to successful peer-based coaching programs is paving the way. Sure, they can be left to their own devices when it comes to arranging meetings or setting goals. But ground rules help them stay on track and reduce the risk of peer conflict.

4. Individual Evaluation

A good option is online self-assessment. These will help trainees spot their areas of dearth. Trainees may be more open to assessment if surveys are anonymous. After all, the idea is to spot skill gaps. Staff members who are especially talented in those areas can be paired with weaker trainees and help them along. Being strong in one task doesn't prevent you from struggling elsewhere. You can in turn be paired with someone to help your weak spot. And because this training is blended, apply learning techniques both offline and on.

Chapter 2

5. Self-Paced Systems

Just because you're working in pairs or small groups doesn't mean you lose autonomy. For example, if you create a buddy-training program, you can have check-ins. The two individuals can still work at their own pace. They're able to send reminders and check-ins throughout the day or week, keeping each other accountable. But once a week or whenever is suitable for both, they should have a sit-down recap. It doesn't have to be tied in to their training pace.

6. Parallel Programs

That caveat is important, because it may push trainees into last-minute training on the night before their recap session. And this will affect the quality of learning and knowledge retention. So instead, make the recap sessions independent of self-study. They can have a joint assignment unrelated to their individual study. If they like, they can ask questions based on covered material. Or they can ask for help in areas where they're stuck. But generally speaking, their joint in-person project calendar stays separate from the rest of their training curriculum.

7. Host Learner-Led Live Events

One of the notable perks of investing in blended learning software is being able to host live events. Namely, live events that are hosted by your top talent to facilitate knowledge sharing. For example, a standout sales employee shares tips on how to negotiate a deal or offer customers tie-in products. The event fulfills the face-to-face component of your blended learning strategy. But you can also pair it with follow-up social media chats or group collab projects. Encourage employees to discuss the topic and how it relates to their job duties or challenges they've overcome.

Chapter 3

5 Compliance Training Challenges That Can Be Overcome With Blended Learning Solutions

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It's always tricky to effectively guarantee compliance. Just because your staff can recite the rules doesn't mean they'll follow those rules. Or even that they understand them or know how to apply them in a practical setting. In theory, blended learning solves this, because they can learn the rules online and execute them offline. But how can you move this principle from the theoretical to the actual? Here are the top compliance training challenges that can be overcome with blended learning solutions.

Chapter 3

1. Application Challenges

You've probably heard high-schoolers (or adults who hated math) complain about algebra and calculus. They demand to know–indignantly–why they've never had the opportunity to use those tortuous lessons in their jobs. Well, if you talk to engineers and physicists, they could probably open pocketbooks with sine and cosine sketches. Similarly, trainees may see certain portions of their compliance training as remote knowledge they'll never use. This makes them lose interest and stop paying attention. Use face-to-face training segments to give practical demos of these compliance principles. Use a live classroom demo to hack into a trainee's email after they ignore the "change your password every week" rule. And be sure to go past exposing embarrassing photos and show them potential corporate consequences.

> **Another challenge that appears in workspaces is unhealthy competition. It frequently leads to corporate sabotage, which hurts everyone in the long run.**

Chapter 3

2. Closed-Off Corporate Training Cultures

Take the example above a step further. Say it's the IT department receiving this training. They change their own passwords religiously to stay one step ahead of the hackers. But in the process of changing theirs, they accidentally change someone else's, locking the person out of their own account. Because your workplace is oppressive, they're too scared to admit their error, so they try to fix it themselves. They break into the said locked account and end up accused of corporate espionage. All because they had no room to ask. Ensure your workspace is open and welcoming, and include lots of troubleshooting in your training. "How to unlock accounts" seems like a crucial IT lesson. But if they can't learn it in a safe space, they could cause millions in data damage by mistake. Blended learning software fosters a more supportive and communicative training culture to eliminate these mishaps.

3. Inadequate Peer Support

Another challenge that appears in workspaces is unhealthy competition. It frequently leads to corporate sabotage, which hurts everyone in the long run. As you train your employees on mission, vision, and culture, entrench their team spirit. Show them ways they can get ahead without necessarily treading on each other's efforts. Use [gamification tactics](), both online and offline, to channel their competitive spirit positively. Just as an example, competitive fundraising for a good cause, as opposed to backstabbing your way to a promotion. Carefully designed group assignments are helpful. The kind where everyone is assigned a role they're good at, rather than letting the overachiever do everything. Online, each team member can do their portion individually, then they can present their assignment in their offline classroom session.

Chapter 3

4. Insufficient Line Management

Your colleagues have mixed skillsets but your boss usually knows more than you–assuming they're a good boss, selected on merit. In these cases, you may need help from your supervisor that your peers can't give. They simply don't have the right "security clearance" to help you. That said, your work environment must be conducive. Staff have to feel comfortable asking superiors for help. They must know who they can ask, and not be made to feel like they're a bother. Assign a management team member (or technical superior) as a lifeline. This person would be welcoming, open, and a good communicator. Give reasonable access to this training leader, both online and off. They can designate "office hours" where they can be sought out. This ensures they're not fielding questions every five minutes. That could interfere with their ability to do their own job, which isn't good for the company or for their individual sanity.

Chapter 3

5. No Safety Nets

Employees often make mistakes on the job due to lack of awareness, not rebellion. They simply didn't know that they were breaching policy because they have no past experience to base it on. No point of reference; just theoretical knowledge they learned during the last ILT session. Blended learning solutions give them the power to apply their knowledge and identify gaps in a safe environment. They can log in to the blended learning LMS and participate in simulations or scenarios. This allows them to learn from their errors so they don't repeat them in the workplace. They can also follow up with supervisors and peers during live events or face-to-face sessions to clarify any confusion. Then there's no excuse for breaking the rules because they have real-world (online) and peer-based support tools to broaden their experience.

5 Tips To Find The Ideal Blended Learning Approach For Your SMB

If you run your small-to-medium business with a limited mindset, your organization will never grow. You need to maintain big-business thinking, at least in terms of ideation and strategy. The only area where you should "think small" is in relation to expenditure. Don't overspend or you'll crash and burn in months. But you should still have big ideas and find creative ways to implement them on a budget. How can you apply this principle to blended training so that you prep your team for future growth and bridge current gaps? Here are some top tips for finding the ideal blended learning approach for your SMB.

Chapter 4

1. Survey Your Team To Identify Personal Preferences

The tricky thing about blended learning is it has no template. But that's also what makes it a flexible training method that's ideal for any business, large or small. It could be a six-month online course with in-person classroom sessions every week. Or it might be a self-study mobile app where students "meet" for a synchronized video call once a month. It may even be a three-month digital tutorial that closes with a three-day outdoor excursion to wrap things up. Talk to your team about the version of blended learning they have in mind. Have them float ideas, then tabulate their options and ask for a vote. Knowing their input genuinely influenced the course piques their interest and gets them invested.

> **The tricky thing about blended learning is it has no template. But that's also what makes it a flexible training method that's ideal for any business, large or small.**

2. Clarify Gaps And Goals That Align With Business Outcomes

Some kinds of training have clear targets. Compliance courses, for instance, may focus on renewing licenses (and ensuring corporate safety). Other training programs have a more generic aim, like offering "career growth" or simply spending the allocated training budget. For your blended training to succeed, be clear on what the endgame is, both for the organization and for individual trainees. Advancement for its own sake is a waste of time, money, and human resources. Plus, trainees won't get much out of it if they're just going through the motions. You should also identify individual skill and performance gaps your employees need to work on, which allows you to choose the best blended learning LMS for their needs. For example, one that supports real-world activities so that they can broaden their experience and bridge interpersonal skill gaps.

3. Determine How Technology Fits Into Your Overall Training Strategy

It's easy to overlook the online portion of blended learning. You might start with an online course and see which elements can be extracted into the real world. Or begin with a traditional course and sniff out bits to digitize. Neither approach is ideal. Instead, you need to weigh both sides against your organization. For example, how smartphone-savvy is your staff? Can you afford a native app? Which training elements can therefore be offered via app? Or do trainees have to come into the office and use shared computers? What's the offline-to-online ratio? Which parts of the course should be simulated, and which ones work better as physical tasks? This data also allows you to determine which support tools to develop to ease the transition. For instance, you need to create tutorials to show employees how to log in to the new LMS and access their personal dashboards or certification paths.

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Chapter 4

4. Verify That You Have The Resources For Face-To-Face Sessions

Continuing that train of thought, what exactly can you afford offline? Can you hire a venue for three days, or is it better to train in-house in smaller batches? Do you want an instructor with a lecture-hall approach, or smaller groups of five or six who do group work in turns? Do you have the budget or time for a two-week workshop, or even a three-day off-desk session? Will your instructors be hired as external consultants, or can you source the talent from among your staff? Based on your budget and available tools, decide—simultaneously—which elements of learning will be online or offline. Work them into a cohesive whole. Keep in mind that blended learning can also involve live events instead of face-to-face courses. These online sessions facilitate collaboration and fulfill the human element of your blended learning approach.

Chapter 4

5. Get The Timing Right To Ensure Uptake And Buy-In

Online portions of any training program are easier. Learners can pick their own times, whether it's their morning jog or their kids' school run. They can squeeze in two-minute sessions in the elevator or five-minute spurts between meetings. Offline lessons require more planning and may have to be synchronized. It's not practical to work with one employee at a time, unless it's a one-on-one feedback session or a paired activity. For group sessions, optimize timing so that everyone is in a relaxed, receptive mood. Otherwise, it just messes everyone's workday. You also need to promote your blended learning software in advance so that everyone knows what to expect. No matter which approach you choose, there is bound to be some reluctance. Especially for employees who are new to tech and aren't ready to hop on the blended learning bandwagon.

Conclusion

Getting blended learning right is a complex activity that involves multiple segments. And when you're running a small-to-medium business, you can't afford pricy mistakes. So, how do you ensure your blended learning LMS and strategy is the right fit for your team and pocket? Identify trainees' learning preferences. Spot the business gaps, not just the personal ones. Define the distinct roles of technology and human elements in your training setup. And ensure your offline sessions are timed right for maximal attention, buy-in, and planning purposes.

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