

## **Is eLearning On Your Restaurant's Training Menu?**

By: Robert Duprey

Increasingly intense competition, high customer expectations and retaining quality employees are challenges almost every restaurateur faces. One of the best ways to address these challenges is through consistent delivery and assessment of an employee training program.

Unfortunately, time and scheduling constraints and high employee turnover all present challenges and obstacles to delivering training effectively and consistently.

### **What about interactive training using a computer (eLearning)?**

Using a computer to deliver training is obviously not a new concept, and there have been many ways to describe it in recent years...

- online learning
- distance learning
- technology-based training
- web-based training
- computer-based training (generally thought of as learning from a CD-ROM)

"eLearning is essentially the computer-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. Content is delivered via the internet, intranet/extranet, or standalone computer." (source wikipedia)

### **But the restaurant business is all about people, not technology- right?**

Whilst there are increasing numbers of success stories, eLearning has yet to catch on in the Restaurant Industry to the extent it has in other sectors like Finance and IT. One argument is that the restaurant business is a people business. Very true, but a large percentage of 'people' that make up your restaurant staff belong to the 'Nintendo Generation'. They do not want to learn from an authority figure standing in front of them. They are comfortable in front of a PC, and want to explore and progress at their own pace. They want to do this at a time that suits them, in an environment they are comfortable with. This is a tough audience to capture, and the training experience has to be engaging, fast, colorful, player driven, challenging and fun.

Another argument is that you can't use a computer to teach 'people skills', it must be experienced firsthand. Well that is also true, to a point. eLearning should never totally replace practical live training experience, especially for customer facing roles. But a well written eLearning course can deliver the theory behind your service philosophy along with procedure and policy in an interesting and engaging format. This approach is ideal for ensuring a base level of understanding for a group of employees with varying knowledge and skill levels, before they interact with your customers or a live training

event. One example is to deliver a customer care and service policy orientation via eLearning, then practice what is learned with a group in a live role play session.

### **eLearning can help you overcome major training challenges**

**No training department?** If you are an independently owned or single unit operator that does not have the time, money or expertise to deliver training courses, eLearning will deliver the training for you, effectively and consistently.

**Multiple locations?** If you are a multi-unit chain or franchise with geographically dispersed employees, you can use a network to deliver the training everywhere at the same time.

**High turnover or seasonal staffing?** The Restaurant industry has had an issue with high turnover for a long time. So why should you spend time and money on training when employees are going to leave anyway? This argument can lead to a vicious cycle of poor performance and customer service, then job dissatisfaction which leads to higher turnover. With eLearning you can provide just in time training to new employees, or refresher training to existing employees as and when required, whilst actually reducing training costs. The more people you train, the lower the per head training costs.

**Short on Time?** What about scheduling and logistics, do you ever find this to be an obstacle to training delivery? eLearning is available to meet the demands of a 24/7 business. Employees can be trained as and when required, new hires can be trained the day they start. With eLearning, you can deliver training 'Just in Time', so your employees can learn in 'bite size chunks', eliminating the need to be away from work for extended periods.

Studies have shown that training time can be reduced 30-70% compared to traditional training methods, whilst eliminating the typical costs incurred paying for the time, travel and associated with training courses.

### **How eLearning works**

Instead of attending training sessions, reading manuals, or watching a video, your employees interact with a course on a computer.

A simple type in registers each trainee and allows you to monitor training progress. Games, interactive reviews and exercises help to reinforce topics in a fun and interesting way.

Pre and post assessments automatically test, score and records training results, saving the time and space associated with paper based records.

### **Sounds great, but does it really work?**

To measure effectiveness, trainees can take an online pre and post course assessment. The programs automatically assess and record scores as the test is taken, eliminating the need to spend additional time testing, grading, and compiling results by hand. Reports and records can be generated from data stored on the PC, or accessed from remote sites, eliminating the time and space required for paper based records. Another benefit of a pre-assessment is that based on the results, the course can be customized to deliver only the information that is required for each individual. So, a new-hire that has already worked in hospitality and understands the topic can progress quickly or opt out of some material, saving time and getting them on the job faster.

**"Good teaching is good teaching, no matter how it's done."**

The old adage still rings true, and eLearning brings with it new opportunities for the Restaurant industry to educate and motivate your workforce.

In almost every area eLearning is well suited to support the dynamics of the Restaurant industry. It is delivered in a format that a large proportion of your 'audience' will be comfortable with. The courses are available 24/7, so new employees can learn before, after or between shifts. Information can be changed and updated quickly, to accommodate new policies or product and service offerings. Updates can be communicated instantly to a wide geographic base, from a central source.

In following articles we will look at ...

- Ways to measure eLearning Return on Investment
- Elements of a great eLearning course
- eLearning trends for the future

Robert Duprey has over 22 years management and training experience in the Restaurant and Hotel industry, and 5 years experience developing blended eLearning solutions for the IT, Finance and Retail industry. He founded Lexington Interactive to provide eLearning specifically for the Restaurant & Hotel Industry. The company is developing a catalog of interactive hotel and restaurant training courses for the video game generation. Contact Robert at: [robertduprey@lexingtoninteractive.com](mailto:robertduprey@lexingtoninteractive.com)  
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