

The Online Advantage

Why eLearning benefits transportation more than other sectors

Online training provides a variety of benefits regardless of industry sector – increasing training effectiveness, reducing or eliminating associated travel costs, and improving delivery consistency. However, businesses in transportation and related sectors recognize a number of additional benefits as a result of the unique nature of that business.

Let's look at some of the challenges commonly faced by transportation companies (and for these purposes we'll include non-transportation businesses that have private fleets of their own) and see how online training overcomes those challenges, contributing to the bottom line in ways well beyond what other industry sectors typically realize.

ELearning minimizes operational disruption

One of the biggest challenges that transport companies face is keeping the freight (whether that be cargo, parcels or people) moving – if the vehicles aren't rolling, the business isn't making money. In an industry known for low margins, every part of the business has to be focused on keeping drivers moving. Drivers, of course, want to be moving as well, and when they're not moving their time off is precious.

Dan Baker, the renowned transportation speaker and writer, summarized this situation with his famous statement that “drivers want to do three things - get rolling, get paid, and get home”.

Unfortunately, classroom training, the traditional venue for driver improvement programs, flies in the face of these priorities by requiring the company to either pull drivers off the road for training, or, more commonly, attend during off hours. This is a no-win situation. If drivers are off the road then operations suffer. If drivers sacrifice their off time, then their satisfaction level suffers (and participation is weak, as we'll see below). Neither is a workable solution over the long term.

Online training eliminates these sacrifices by allowing drivers to participate in the training when it suits them. That may be during breaks while they're on the road, while they're enjoying time at home, or when they're at the terminal waiting on something else. Whenever it happens, it doesn't come at the expense of activities that move the business forward. This point, on its own, is generally enough to justify the investment and show a significant ROI within the first year.

ELearning minimizes scheduling headaches

Because of the operational requirements noted above, most transportation businesses do classroom training on weekends. Even discounting the long term effect on employee satisfaction, weekend training sessions are difficult to schedule and time consuming to administer.

With practical limits to the number of people that can be taught effectively at one time, multiple sessions are required to reach the entire audience. That can mean weeks or months of sessions to get everyone through, which means logistical and administrative headaches for planning and preparation. Trying to keep track of who attended and who didn't adds additional headaches. The cost of all that planning is appreciable, but adding in the opportunity cost (i.e. the cost of other work that isn't being done while all this is happening), makes it even worse.

On top of that, there are always some new people that start right after the whole process has finished. What to do about them?

Online training removes all of those scheduling issues by providing simple tools for assigning users to the required training, and a variety of online and email reports to track progress. Users can complete the training at their convenience and management always knows who's in progress, completed, or not started. When new hires start, they get added to the system and go through the same program as everyone else, with no additional work required. Instructors can have their weekends back.

ELearning increases participation rates

Even with the most diligent scheduling and planning, participation in training sessions is a challenge for most companies. Rates vary from fleet to fleet – studies show a low of about 20% to a high of 90% attendance, with most fleets reporting average attendance of 50%. With those participation numbers, the true cost of scheduling and delivering classroom training is much higher than budget cost would imply – if only half of the intended audience participates, the actual cost-per-head is twice as much.

Compounding that issue is the fact that the employees that do attend the training sessions are typically those that need it the least. The diligent, attentive workers most likely to attend training are also the ones with the fewest problems requiring ongoing training. The rest of the fleet – those that aren't quite so diligent in their daily operations – are the ones least likely to attend classroom sessions. Incentives for attendance, or discipline for non-attendance, have also been shown to have minimal effect on this segment – they would rather endure the punishment or forego the reward than attend the event.

Online training programs, on the other hand, have been shown to have greater than 98% participation, and in many fleets reach 100% participation regularly. This high level of participation is attributed to 3 main factors:

- **Convenience** – As discussed above, drivers can participate without making other sacrifices so they view it more positively and are more likely to participate
- **Visibility** – Managers can easily see who's participating, so there's nowhere for drivers to hide (the old excuse of "I was there, you just didn't see me" doesn't work online)
- **Lack of fear** – Fear of failure or looking stupid in front of peers is one of the primary reasons drivers skip classroom training and a major stresser for many of those that attend; online, they have the privacy to work through content at their own pace, with no peer pressure

It should be noted that there have been cases where cash incentives have increased the participation rate in classroom courses, however the cost of those incentives is higher than the cost of doing the training online, negating the benefits.

ELearning allows for data measurement and analysis

The final place where online training shows real value over classroom for the transportation industry is data management. A fleet may invest the time and effort into scheduling driver meetings, and paying drivers enough to ensure a high level of participation, but post-training analysis and measurement will still present challenges.

Training is a process, not an event, and in order to derive maximum value out of that process, companies need to understand how effective each training activity was, who did well and who needs extra help, in what areas, and what the logical next steps are. The only way to do that is by keeping detailed records on all training activities and analyzing them after the fact. That can certainly be done with classroom training – by administering tests as part of the training event and tracking participant performance, then storing the data in a centralized system – but very few do. Excel spreadsheets, the main tool for tracking training participation, are fine for keeping attendee lists but not sufficient for ongoing quality improvement programs.

To really affect continuous improvement, training activities need to be tracked in a database where they can be analyzed, compared, and measured over time. Online training solutions, which track all user performance data automatically, make this kind of analysis easy. In fact, these are the only tools that offer that level of data management, as well as the structured and flexible access that facilitates true continuous improvement.