



Just-in-Time Learning

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Definition: Just-in-time learning systems deliver training to workers when and where they need it. Rather than sitting through hours of traditional classroom training, users can tap into Web-based tutorials, interactive CD-ROMs and other tools to zero in on just the information they need to solve problems, perform specific tasks or quickly update their skills.



In a rapidly changing business environment where information can quickly become obsolete, staying on top of training can be a mountainous task.

Disclaimer: *The research materials are collated from web based resources.*

Rather than having employees take time away from work to sit through traditional classroom courses, many companies are using technology-based, self-guided tutorials and databases that allow users to focus on "nuggets" of information as needed to perform specific tasks and solve problems as they crop up.

The mind-set of just-in-time learning is: "As soon as I have this little piece (of information), I'm out of here," explains Heinrich Koenen, vice president and dean of The Masie Center, a learning and technology think tank in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Just-in-time learning incorporates Web- and intranet-based applications as well as CD-ROMs, satellite channels and videotapes.

Companies save travel and education costs. And workers like the just-in-time approach because they can train at their own pace, wherever and whenever they like.

Users can customize their training to fit their needs and engage in online collaborative learning communities, where they can exchange experiences and access the latest opinions from around the world.

At Your Fingertips

Electronic learning is big at IBM. Last year, the company saved \$200 million in internal training costs related to traditional training sessions and time away from work, according to Rick Horton, general manager of IBM Global Services' Learning Services group.

IBM provides its 6,000 business partners with 10 satellite channels of partner and product information. The system was set up because IBM partners said they weren't getting information fast enough to sell IBM products, says Horton.

Satellite receivers can be installed at any location, and for \$1,500 per year, users get access to the most recent product-specific news and partner-related announcements. IBM also set up a Web-based application to supplement the satellite system.

Another initiative, called Sales Compass, a Web-based application that gives IBM salespeople the latest information about their customers prior to making sales calls, helps salespeople make effective pitches, says Horton.

Analysts and corporate leaders say electronic learning is mushrooming. According to Framingham, Mass.-based International Data Corp. (IDC), the market topped \$1 billion last year and is expected to grow to \$11.4 billion in 2003.

Cost savings is one factor fueling this growth. Cushing Anderson, an IDC analyst, says one day of classroom training typically costs \$500 to \$1,200, while one day of electronic learning runs from \$100 to \$500.

There are also big savings in increased productivity and efficiency. Online training cuts time by letting users grab only the chunks of information they need from the convenience of their desks.

Just-in-time learning isn't just for in-house training and support. Some companies use it as a customer service tool.

Charles Schwab & Co.'s electronic brokerage unit launched an interactive Web-based learning center in December to provide free investment education to prospective and existing customers.

Although the brokerage expects that a reduction in customer information requests will cut costs, "that wasn't the driver," says Janet Lecuyer, vice president of electronic learning at Schwab's electronic brokerage unit.

Educating customers reduces their fears about investing and "moves them along in making a decision to invest," she explains.

Schwab's online learning center, which offers courses in the fundamentals of investing and will later offer material for more advanced investors, was set up so customers can go through an entire course sequentially or choose only topics of interest.

The learning center was designed to be convenient to use, because customers said they "didn't have time to commit to a specific curriculum," Lecuyer notes. "They wanted to be in control."

Striking a Balance

Just-in-time learning is particularly useful in the IT world, says Anderson.

"IT lends itself to (just-in-time) learning," because this type of training is often very step-based, he says. And IT trainees are more comfortable with online delivery methods than others might be, he adds.

But just-in-time learning has limitations. Most analysts and users say it won't replace classroom instruction altogether.

Sue Goldberg, president of Northeast Training Group Inc. in Chestnut Hill, Mass., says just-in-time learning works only up to a point. Most studies, she explains, indicate that instructor-led training is still the best way to learn.

The idea that just-in-time learning will replace classroom instruction is "baloney," says Anderson. Corporate training, he says, will eventually evolve into a mix of delivery methods.

"You have to offer a range," says Anderson. "The delivery vehicle will always depend on the content."

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