

Web-based Training: a Dynamic, Efficient Solution



Bob McMichael

By Bob McMichael

Guest Editorial

As our company worked to develop numerous technical documentation projects for a major client, we found ourselves facing recurring issues. The information we needed from our client to produce good work was constantly changing. Our primary developers who telecommute were finding it hard to stay in the loop on these changes. Additionally, the classroom training we provided for our developers was too extensive and cumbersome to keep pace with the dynamic reality of these projects. After evaluating a number of solutions, we decided that an internal Web-based training program was the answer.

Web-based training offered ongoing, flexible training to our information developers, allowing them to quickly respond to changing client needs and requirements. This streamlining and standardizing of the development process also allowed us to meet our client's needs, produce high-quality work, and stay within budget. Web-based training gave us a quick, efficient, and accessible way for our technical writers to learn how to produce documentation governed by very specific style and content rules.

We applied our company's expertise in producing hardware-related Web-based training

and user documentation to our own internal Web-based training project. Our team focused on content design and process analysis.

We chose a modular design for the training, allowing us to easily update the content with frequent changes in development procedures. By deploying the training on our intranet, our developers (including our telecommuters) could take the training when it suited their schedules. The modular nature also allowed them to complete the training in segments if they didn't have time to do it in one sitting.

Our Web-based training also:

- Centralizes development information (developers previously would have to search high and low for the most current source material, applications, graphics, style guides, etc.)

- Standardizes and refines development processes, which increases consistency in the deliverables. Standard procedures also save time and reduce errors caused by inconsistent formatting. The training teaches other standardization methods, such as:

- How to obtain all of the necessary tools

- How to bill development time

- How to keep issues lists, developer's logs, and file status sheets

- Produces a full set of .pdf instructions for each lesson, which allows the student to print the instructions and follow them while devel-

oping their training document. The end product of the .pdf instructions is a complete training manual to refer to in the future if necessary.

- Provides an intuitive table of contents to let experienced writers go directly to lessons for a refresher, allowing the training to double as a reference resource.

Web-based training was an ideal solution for our internal training needs. Both large and small companies are using Web-based training programs to create more efficient training processes and to keep remote employees connected. Companies without the in-house development expertise can work with a consulting firm to quickly build a Web-based training to suit their needs. This unique training method increases learner retention, saves time and money associated with training costs, and provides flexible, dynamic solutions to communicate information.

Formerly a professor of American Music and Culture at Stanford University, Bob McMichael is an information developer at the Boise, Idaho office of S&T Consulting, a division of Sakson & Taylor. In addition to writing Web-based training programs, he has published articles ranging from jazz history to sturgeon fishing. For more information on S&T Consulting's Web-based training solutions, visit www.sakson.com or e-mail us at info@sakson.com.

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