

Training Requirements for 2008

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If you think things are getting simpler, you're dead wrong. Complexity is the name of the game. Technology changes, upgrades and improvements are coming fast and furiously.

What with a growing shortage of technical talent--largely due to schools failing to turn out technical grads, engineers, computer-science and IT professionals--companies have to pick up the slack and spend more on training.

Even if technical schools were turning out enough technical grads to meet the demands of the job market, many colleges and universities have yet to keep pace with industrial innovation. In the past, cutting-edge technical innovation was taking place on university campuses. Today, trendsetting companies like Intel, Microsoft, IBM and a handful of aggressive smaller ones are setting the pace.

As the technology changes, so do compliance and security procedures. Naturally, training protocols have to be adjusted accordingly. That's for starters. What training innovations can we look forward to?

According to Sundar Raghavan, Postini's VP of Solutions Marketing, training requirements for 2008 will affect managers and end users differently. The Mountain View, Calif.-based e-mail security, encryption, archiving and management company was just acquired by Google for \$625 million.

Senior executives and managers will design training programs that touch on the following issues:

- Policies that comply with federal, state and industry data retention and deletion compliance requirements.
- Recognition that regulations in the U.S., Europe and Asia vary significantly.
- Data privacy policies will require companies to encrypt e-mail communications that contain private customer communications.
- Knowledge of the changing compliance landscape; new SaaS solutions make implementing and tracking compliance policies easier to manage, for example.
- Re-evaluation of compliance policy needs in order to take advantage of the best solutions.

And end users' training programs will embrace company policies on archiving, encryption and data management, says Raghavan. Companies have to be careful about not deleting information that is subject to litigation or e-discovery.

Raghavan stresses that training programs will be driving home the new federal amendments and civil procedures that were enacted in 2006. "These amendments apply to electronically stored information (ESI)," he says. "They make e-mail, IM and Web communications similar to paper-based evidence in a lawsuit. This means that ESI is discoverable and must be produced to a litigating party in a readable format as part of a joint agreement on evidence."

Additionally, state- and federal-level data privacy laws require companies to encrypt e-mails that contain personal consumer data (Social Security number, telephone number, date of birth) and protect the confidentiality of consumers, says Rahavan.

Technical training perks to lure top candidates

In an increasingly tight job market with demand far outweighing the supply of qualified candidates, many companies are offering hot-prospect candidates extensive training along with other attractive perks, says Sandi Henrikson, regional manager of Sapphire Technologies, a Minneapolis-based staffing firm.

“Some clients are willing to forgo the desired degree associated with a position if the candidate has good, strong experience to draw from, or vice versa,” she observes. “Some clients have even offered their IT pros enticing incentives to pursue technical certifications/degrees, dangling an additional \$5k salary boost upon the successful completion of the training program.”

Henrikson goes on to say that many companies will be using technical training as a retention incentive next year. While the skill shortage varies across the country, the staffing executive says that there is a national shortage of project/program managers and business analysts, .Net, Java, J2EE developers and system administrators.

Strong emphasis on building business skills

The major training focus for 2008 for IT professionals and project managers will be on building business skills, according to Beth Beard, director of technology staffing at FGP Technology, a staffing firm in Greenville, N.C. IT people need to understand that there has to be “a clear ROI on new technology before it can be implemented,” Beard explains. “And that IT should be used to drive business and sales, not just be a function of running an organization.”

Webcasting as a training vehicle

It's no surprise that more companies will be taking advantage of Webcasting as a fast, reliable and cost-efficient training vehicle. Once an experimental tool, today it's ascended to a mainstream, affordable and reliable communication vehicle that is also used for news conferences, annual meetings and PowerPoint presentations.

Los Angeles-based Interactive Video Technologies has been selling Webcasting solutions for seven years. “Over the past decade, many large, global organizations have relied on corporate media departments to do Webcasting to create live training sessions and to communicate internally,” observes Phillip Whalen, IVT's president and CEO. “With the emergence of Web 2.0 tools for just about every kind of workplace task, 2007 was marked by business users trying to take the appeal of consumer-driven video sites and use media to present information in new, unique ways.”

Webcasts take the place of lengthy in-person meetings and provide immediate training, without sacrificing the human connection, which really impacts the way a person receives important information, Whalen explains. “NEC now uses Webcasts to train its dealer network, replacing expensive travel while at the same time having the training available 24/7.”

Now that desktop Webcasting products are available, managers can create training programs on their desktop-- both for topics planned well in advance and for last-minute emergency updates, according to Whalen.

“They can combine PowerPoint slides with video or interactive polls, and they can use self-produced Webcasts to demonstrate a new product or explain something that may have been hard to illustrate through an e-mail or a training manual, or that previously may have required an expensive, face-to-face training session. Slick training materials can easily be produced by simply plugging in a Webcam, narrating some slides, capturing what is on their own screen and e-mailing a link to dozens or even hundreds of their colleagues for viewing.”

And that’s only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Companies have arrived at a “succeed or perish” crossroads. They either deliver better training, or they’ll languish and possibly even perish. Seems like a no-brainer decision. But then again, not all CEOs make smart decisions all the time.