Remote learning – the future of training? - Webinars

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With the current need for social distancing restrictions created by the Corvid 19 Pandemic, physically attending a training seminar is probably not going to be possible for some time. An already established method for remote learning is the webinar. Do webinars have any advantages over traditional seminars hosted at a venue? What are the best practices when delivering a webinar? But how effective are they? And what is the future for webinars?

What are the benefits of webinars over traditional venue based seminars?

1) Webinars can easily be delivered remotely to large groups of people. As there are no constraints to delegate numbers due to size of venue webinars can be offered to a much larger audience than would otherwise be possible. Given a bit of thought over the timing of the seminar it can be opened up to delegates from all over the world. Also it is very easy to upscale numbers at short notice if demand increases.

2) There are a number of cost benefits. For example there are none of the usual overheads involved in hiring a venue, or providing catering for delegates. From a delegates perspective webinars offer the opportunity to participate in a wider variety of seminars, at lower cost, as there are no additional travel costs. The webinar provider can pass on some of their cost savings onto the delegates and charge a lower price for the webinar.

3) Q & A sessions and group discussions very easy to run at the end of each session. The chat facility in video conferencing application, can actually facilitate this Q & A, as some people find it less intimidating to ask a question via chat rather than in person. It also allows questions to be stockpiled throughout a webinar and addressed at the end.

4) Additional materials, slides etc. can be shown on screen to delegates. As training materials can be transferred within video conferencing applications, for break out study groups, materials can be shared and completed work instantly transferred back to the host and the wider group.

5) Sessions can be recorded, enabling additional digital assets can be created without the need for video production kit / personnel. This also allows copies of the webinar to be provided to delegates. Communication via the chat facility can also be saved to provide a log of for example Q&As.

What is best practice for webinar delivery?

1) Pacing the webinar. Most people have a reduced attention span when watching via a screen. Pacing a webinar well is essential. Splitting it

into smaller chunks of learning time with plenty of breaks. Following each section by some form of delegate participation, a Q&A or workshop for example, all help to maintain delegates attention.

2) Using more visual assets. As the person delivering the presentation is not actually present in the room it is harder for them to maintain the delegates attention. A good set of visual assets such as a slide presentation helps counter this. Building into slides features such as highlights to draw attention to key points, as slides cannot be physically pointed at, is also a good idea.

3) Using a spotter. Delivering a webinar with a someone else who can monitor delegates questions and also alert the presenter that they have misinterpreted a question is a good idea. It also helps alleviate some of the pressure on the speaker.

4) Having a co-presenter for the webinar. A co-presenter can offer an alternative perspective, act as a spotter (See above), and help hold the audiences attention better. Just hearing an alternative voice throughout the webinar, helps to keep the audience more focused on what is being said.

Webinars are a great medium for delivering training and offer numerous advantages over more traditional classroom based seminars. Given the current lockdown conditions and probable continuation of social distancing over the next few months, more people will sign up for and experience online webinars / seminars increasing their popularity. A change in peoples mind set, created by a greater use of remote communication in general, is will to lead to a wider acceptance of remote learning in general. Webinars and online seminars are set to play a huge role in the future of training.