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**Critical
Components
for a**

**Successful
eLearning
Business**



presented by





eLearning is a Critical Business Strategy

What Nonprofits and Associations Need to Know

You have the content. You have the membership. What you don't have is a successful eLearning program. You're not alone. Just 19.1 percent of associations and nonprofits consider their eLearning "very successful."¹

The problem is that too many nonprofits and associations think that content is king when it comes to eLearning. And while content is certainly important, it is just one piece in the puzzle you must complete if you are to be successful.

Along with content, your organization needs the skills and resources required to develop, promote, sell, distribute, and manage an eLearning program. Only with all of these pieces in place can you create a successful, sustainable eLearning business.

eLearning is an Imperative for Associations

A 2013 survey of 200 associations by the consulting firm Tagoras found that just 1.7 percent did not offer or were not planning to offer eLearning programs in the coming months.¹

No surprise, given the potential of eLearning to, as the US Department of Labor noted, "substantially transform the way learning takes place because of its numerous advantages."²

Such advantages include:

- Greater access to learning because it is available anytime, anywhere
- Scalability to large groups or individuals with little extra cost
- Easily updated content at minimal cost
- Self-paced learning built on the adult learning principle of discovery learning
- Greater interactivity
- Standardized content to ensure all participants receive consistent training

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1. Cobb J, Steele C. *Association Learning + Technology 2014*. Tagoras. 2014.

2. Koller V, Harvey S, Magnotta M. *Technology-Based Learning Strategies*. US Department of Labor. 2008.



eLearning is a Critical Business Strategy

The Tagoras survey found that the associations' driving goals were to deliver cost-effective, convenient, professional development to their members, and to reach more members than possible with face-to-face training.¹

Good goals, but if you're aiming for a successful eLearning initiative, you should also include:

- Membership recruitment and retention
- Training and certification
- Credibility
- Non-dues revenue streams
- Ability to turn intellectual property into compelling and educationally sound eLearning content

Worldwide Market for eLearning



Worldwide **eLearning Market** by 2016

**Ambient Insight Premium Report. 2013.*



Annual worldwide growth rate
over the period 2012-2016



The Four Stages (4-Ds) of eLearning

A successful eLearning business requires that an organization move through a series of stages we like to call Scitent's 4-Ds:

Dream



Many organizations experience underwhelming eLearning success because they don't start off with a meaningful vision. You need to dream big; that's the only way to achieve greatness. **Your dream should be tied to the mission and objectives of your organization and to the needs of your learner community.** Clarity in communicating your dream is essential. You want your entire organization to understand what this eLearning initiative could be if you all pull together to achieve the dream.

Design



This is the nuts-and-bolts portion of your eLearning initiative. It includes incorporating adult learning principles into all programs, providing an intuitive user interface, and ensuring the eLearning is interactive, deliverable on multiple platforms for a highly customized learning experience, and dynamic. It also needs to be tailored for your audience. A lofty vision doesn't mean providing everything to everyone; that's why knowing your audience and designing the content and program to suit that audience is so crucial to success.

Deliver



You have the content ready. Now you have to deliver it to your learners in an environment that is branded to your organization and capable of managing your learners. **This requires a robust learning management system (LMS) that can integrate with other organizations' systems, as well as with your own internal databases.** The Tagoras survey found that only about half of associations were using an LMS system for eLearning.¹

Distribute



The program is set. It's been uploaded to the LMS. Now all you need is the learners. The reality, however, is they will not come just because you built it.

First, you have to drive traffic to the site or promotional pages, encourage registration, and support participation. Marketing and sales are key to a successful eLearning initiative.

Second, you need a way to maximize distribution of courses through training centers, partners or resellers for sustainable revenue.

Can you succeed at the 4-Ds on your own? Or do you need help?

That depends on whether you can deliver on the following 10 critical eLearning components, all of which are critical for success.

1. Cobb J, Steele C. *Association Learning + Technology 2014*. Tagoras. 2014.



10 Critical Components for a Successful eLearning Business

As you work through this list, **ask yourself one question:**

Can we implement these requirements ourselves and still continue to service our mission and meet our goals and promises to our members, or do we need help?

1. A strategic plan.

The Tagoras survey found that less than a quarter of organizations surveyed had a formal, documented, eLearning strategy.¹ Organizations need a program that provides the parent organization, instructors, and partners a seamless way to manage their course inventory, track and monitor learner progress, create rosters for classes, and view both macro-level reports (the utilization of the eLearning courses) and micro-level reports (showing course progress details on a per learner level).

The strategic plan is also a very important communication tool; not only for leadership, but also for others on your team. Having a plan makes it far easier for everyone to understand his or her role in ensuring the success of your eLearning initiative.

Without a strategic plan, you cannot ensure your eLearning initiative is in sync with your organization's mission and leadership goals.

2. Dedicated resources.

It's a rare nonprofit or association that has the bandwidth to take on the more than 50 hours it can take to develop a single hour of highly interactive eLearning itself, or the hundreds of hours required to successfully run an eLearning initiative.

Granted, there have been great improvements in technology and tools for content creation in recent years, but the reality is that implementation simply takes time and effort. The project management related to subject matter experts alone can overwhelm an entire team. Then there are organizational barriers such as unclear areas of responsibility, organizational changes, incompatible technology, and limited human resources.

Indeed, the Tagoras survey found that about half of organizations were dissatisfied with the amount of staff time required to develop eLearning on their own.¹

1. Cobb J, Steele C. *Association Learning + Technology 2014*. Tagoras. 2014.



10 Critical Components for a Successful eLearning Business

The reality is that eLearning is rarely a core mission of a nonprofit or association. It's unlikely you have a large education department and, even if you do have dedicated resources, much of their time and expertise has likely been spent on organizing live meetings and on other mission-critical activities (like fundraising).

Yet time and time again we see organizations trying to tackle their own eLearning programs in the mistaken belief that it will save money since they already have the staff.

That's why it's so important to have full-time instructional designers, marketing specialists, information technology experts, and customer service professionals.

The logistics of developing and managing an eLearning program can quickly overwhelm your staff, resulting in lost opportunities, poor outcomes, and a wounded brand.

3. A profit-focused approach.

Don't undersell yourself; an eLearning program should be a continual revenue stream for your organization, not a loss leader. Yet, too often we see associations and nonprofits offering eLearning to members for free or a nominal charge. This devalues the product (not to mention restricts revenue), and although you may get a high registration rate, you will likely see a low participation rate. When someone pays for something, they perceive it as having greater value than something that is free. Instead, the price should represent the value of education to the learner.

The 2013 Tagoras survey found that more than half (56 percent) of respondents didn't have a formal, documented process for setting prices for their eLearning products, and only 45 percent were satisfied with their current revenue.¹

You have to ask: Why wouldn't 100 percent want a self-sustaining, profitable program?

You need to set a financial goal and commit to meeting it.

4. Customer-focused content.

Too often we see organizations develop eLearning based on what the board or staff thinks the membership needs, or because they already have the content. Instead, it is important to plan eLearning initiatives based on strategically elicited feedback from the membership, as well as a gap analysis of the current environment.

1. Cobb J, Steele C. *Association Learning + Technology 2014*. Tagoras. 2014.



10 Critical Components for a Successful eLearning Business

Feedback provided through surveys not only allows you to strategically gather information, but also engages your membership while enabling you to kick off an awareness campaign for your eLearning initiative.

Without customer-focused content, you are not meeting your customer's needs and you will not get the participation required for success.

5. Technology expertise.

You can't ignore the "E" in eLearning, but neither should it drive the learning experience. The goal is not to impress the learner with fancy graphics and video, but to align the learning experience with the audience. Quite often that means keeping it simple and clean. In other words, just because the program has a "wow" factor doesn't mean it will meet its primary goal of delivering engaging, usable, and meaningful content.

You need the infrastructure and expertise to host the eLearning program and the ability to integrate the platform with your own association management tools. Without this, your learners will experience frustration as they try to access and work through the content. Indeed, the Tagoras survey found that just one in five associations characterized their use of technology as "very successful."¹

You also need to address security, particularly these days when it seems large organizations are getting hacked on a regular basis. How will you ensure that your users' private information is kept safe and that all data is securely encrypted?

This is eLearning. The technology must be smooth and seamless and as safe as downloading a book from Amazon.

6. Instructional design proficiency.

eLearning is much more than just putting content into an LMS and sending out an email to your members. The content must be developed around adult learning principles, engage the learner, and provide documented outcomes. No matter what the content, it must also convey the highest possible quality so as to position your organization as a thought leader in the subject area and maintain your brand. This includes maintaining learner engagement from the introduction to the post-program assessment.

The Tagoras survey, however, found that only about half of associations surveyed used professional instructional designers.¹

The user experience drives satisfaction and future registrations.

1. Cobb J, Steele C. Association Learning + Technology 2014. Tagoras. 2014.



7. Live customer service.

eLearning occurs 24/7—that’s part of its appeal. That means you must have the resources to provide customer support around the clock via email, live chat, and by phone. The goal should always be to provide a seamless, frustration-free experience for the learner and to have 100% resolution of problems experienced by your users.

This is critically important given that every aspect of your eLearning program reflects on your organization as a whole.

No matter how well you meet your other goals, a poor customer service experience sours the member experience just as poor service spoils a diner on a restaurant—no matter how good the food.

8. Deep marketing experience.

Marketing is not just about driving registrants to your program; it’s about conveying your organization’s messaging and mission with every marketing effort. At its core, marketing helps to communicate to your customers the value of the program to their own professional and personal development.

Yet it is clear that organizations, which try to manage marketing themselves have a mediocre track record, reaching just 20 percent of their membership base on average. In fact, less than half of

nonprofits and associations say they are satisfied with their enrollment numbers.¹

A successful eLearning marketing program is an ongoing process with many touch points, one that requires patience and persistence. That’s because potential learners are unlikely to register the first time they click through to the registration. They need to consider the value of the content, compare your program (and price) to others, and find the funds within existing budgets – or incorporate them into future budgets. That means your marketing must “touch” your customers several times through several channels.

Email, SEO, Adwords and digital marketing remain effective options, but social media is also critical, particularly for creating a “buzz” among your own membership. This requires new approaches to marketing, such as content marketing.

Without a robust, integrated marketing campaign, you absolutely will not have a successful eLearning business.

Are You Making These Marketing Mistakes?

The three most common mistakes we see organizations make in their marketing efforts are:

1. Limiting marketing to one or two channels
2. Neglecting to align the marketing approach with the channel
3. Abandoning a marketing approach if it doesn’t elicit an immediate response

1. Cobb J, Steele C. *Association Learning + Technology 2014*. Tagoras. 2014.



9. Data-driven decision making.

A quality eLearning program is a dynamic eLearning program. This requires a real-time dashboard that tracks metrics such as click-throughs on marketing messages, registration, participation, and direct and indirect costs. The dashboard should be updated and consulted on a daily basis so you can quickly refine your approach as needed. For instance, if customer support is receiving numerous calls about registration difficulties, or complaints about the content, you should know and be able to immediately fix the problems. If, on the other hand, you have numerous hits on the website but few registrations, you need a follow-up strategy to engage those visitors who did not register.

Finally, you need to use your analytics: to determine the return on investment (hint: this should be measured not just in terms of dollars, but also in terms of membership gains and retention, and the impact of the program on your credibility and brand); identify new markets; and develop future programming.

Without analytics, you will not know how well you're doing in meeting your goals, or where changes are needed to ensure success.

10. Post-program learner assessment.

Whether you are providing credit, certification, or simply knowledge through your eLearning, you need to provide feedback so learners can assess their own progress. This also provides you with valuable marketing material for future promotions and encourages repeat customers.

eLearning assessments must be more robust than a survey regarding satisfaction with the course. They need to be based on established educational outcome metrics linked to learning objectives, preferably with pre- and post-test results for individuals benchmarked against the program average. This is why an instructional designer is so important.

Can you meet these 10 requirements with your existing resources?

If not, it may be time to look for a trusted partner with the expertise and experience in eLearning, particularly eLearning programs for nonprofits and associations. Otherwise, how will you ensure a successful program that is aligned with your organizational mission and goals?



SCITENT

We help associations, nonprofits, and healthcare organizations build successful eLearning businesses that can reach wide audiences and generate solid revenue for ongoing success. Organizations can tap into our in-house experts in instructional design/courseware development, distribution and LMS technology, marketing, eCommerce, and customer support to help them dream, design, deliver, and/or distribute their eLearning.

Our Services

- Business and Consulting Services
- Strategic eLearning Growth Plan
- Instructional Design/Courseware Development
- eLearning Sales and Marketing
- eLearning Customer Support
- Custom Software Development
- Hosting
- Finance and Accounting Support

Technology

- PROPEL™, Scitent's proprietary distribution technology, drives your business into new markets—comes with a built-in learning management system (LMS) or integrates with your existing LMS.
- SmartLink, an API Interface
- Competency-based Learning/Microlearning Tools
- eCommerce Module
- Online Key Manager, for effective course access and distribution.