

Is Your Organization Ready for Online Learning?

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Use this check list to find out:

[] **Is your leadership willing to explore this innovative approach?** You will need the support of your organization's leaders to obtain the funding, technology, staffing, and other resources necessary to begin and maintain any new approach to education. If your leaders aren't already on the bandwagon, FutureU can help you open the discussion, and then work with you to develop and present bottom-line justifications to win leadership support.



[] **Is your competition already taking advantage of this new option on the corporate training menu?** Although most new ideas take time to gain wide acceptance, some --online learning, for example--take off like a rocket. If your organization hasn't yet made the leap, you may not be alone, but we predict you soon will be.

At FutureU , we recently completed a research project on Internet-based training with one of our corporate clients and got a hint at just how many organizations *are* embracing online learning. In fact, 60 percent of the 127 individuals we surveyed from 67 corporations were either close to or already engaged in skills-based training on the Internet. The other 40 percent were already using, or thinking about using, Internet delivery for their management development training. If other organizations in your industry are already using this new delivery method, you may be ready to embrace online learning whether you realize it or not, by virtue of your commitment to competitiveness.

[] **Is your workforce ready to buy in?** A feasibility study may be the way to find out. FutureU can help you identify key personnel, give them a brief introduction to your plan, find out how they feel, and help them articulate their concerns and hopes. The very process of engaging them is often enough to secure their support. If it doesn't do the job, you will have discovered where the resistance lies and how best to address it.

[] **Is your workforce prepared to commit the time?** The amount of development time will depend on your technology needs, the sophistication of your current training programs, the interest and comfort level of your leadership and workforce, and other factors. Once FutureU begins providing content for your workplace training, depending on the content and format of the course, participants will need to spend between one and 15 hours per week on their learning, for as much as six weeks per course.

[] **Does your workforce have the literacy level and writing skills needed to contribute in a meaningful way to online dialogue?** Sure, cyberspace has pictures and sound, but it is primarily a world of written communication. Online learning for adults is mostly a matter of interaction via the written word, and online classes consist mostly of "living letters" written back and forth among students and facilitators. Is your workforce up to it?

The answer may dismay you. The U.S. Department of Education has concluded that 47 percent of American adults can perform only the most rudimentary tasks that involve reading, writing, and speaking English. In other words, nearly half the population from which the workforce is drawn cannot even write a brief letter about a billing error, let alone carry on a serious correspondence about professional issues.

Chances are, the executives and managers destined for your online learning program can at least read and write, and yet, how effective *is* their written communication? And how eager are they to find out?

At FutureU , we have worked closely with countless executives and managers who have had serious difficulty making themselves understood on the written page. Some lack basic writing skills. Some are fluent in another language, but not English. Others simply suffer from writer's block. Some *think* they communicate well on the page or screen but really don't.

If your people lack the confidence and/or the skills to communicate effectively in writing, you may want to begin by letting us help you assess the literacy level and writing skills of your workforce. Then let us help you ease your way into online learning with opportunities designed to improve your team's written communication through participation in FutureU's online classrooms and application of what they learn there to their letters, reports, and memos. We are prepared to offer a range of solutions, from individual coaching and editing to workshops delivered in person or on line.

[] **Do you and your team have a rudimentary understanding of how online learning works?** You may want to launch your relationship with FutureU by asking us to provide you and your staff with a *Tech Tutorial*--a basic introduction to the equipment and procedures involved in online education. Or, you and your group may be ready for an introductory hands-on course to *Make the Most of Learning Online*. We can provide you with standard versions of both presentations, or we can tailor an introduction to your specifications.

[] **Have other technology initiatives met with success and support inside your organization?** If not, find out everything you can about what went wrong. If other initiatives are underway right now, find out how they are going. Use past and present successes as your template when you put forth your own proposal. If your organization hasn't engaged in a technology initiative in a while, that may be another good reason to begin with an internal feasibility study that will help put the topic on the table.

[] **Do you have the necessary technology in place?** What you need will depend on the learning processes you want to support. For example, if you conclude that your workforce will learn best with full-motion interactive video conferencing, you will want to make a substantially different investment in technology than if you can meet your needs with a simple, text-based, asynchronous learning classroom. Remember, determine your needs first, then choose the technology to support those needs, never the other way around.

[] **Have you identified one or more priorities for learning?** You have to start somewhere. Let us help you assess where the need is greatest.

[] **Are you prepared to commit the necessary startup resources?** Organizations that rush to utilize technology for training almost always encounter a larger up-front investment of time and dollars than anticipated, as well as a longer payback cycle than normally used in corporate planning. Let the FutureU team help you evaluate how online learning fits into your organization's plans for available time and money--before you start committing your valuable resources to a major new undertaking.

[] **Are you willing to wait for long-term results?** Online learning takes time to develop and pay off. Although morale may see positive results right away (because people tend to perk up at the first signs of any effort to improve their work life), your organization will nonetheless face a learning curve and substantial start-up costs. Don't expect online learning to "save" the company, certainly not right away. Done right, however, an investment in online learning *can* lead to a *long-term* increase in productivity, a more creative approach to group problem-solving and decision-making, enhanced communications, and a greater sense of teamwork.

[] **Is your environment conducive to learning itself?** Before you invest in a whole new delivery method, take a good look at your current training activities and your organization's general attitude toward learning. Is lifelong learning an explicit value? Do people feel safe to express opinions, explore assumptions, test new ideas, and pursue their own personal growth? Is the organization committed to innovation and openness? If so, online learning will make a valuable addition to your menu of training options, and the FutureU team can help your workforce make the most of it. If your environment isn't yet conducive to learning, we can help you through the transformation to create a competitive learning organization for the 21st century.

What if we're just not ready for online learning? Long before FutureU started offering services related to online learning, we were helping organizations develop and execute learning programs for leadership development and business skills in traditional classroom settings. We can help you create a learning organization irrespective of delivery methods, and then work with you when the time comes to add technology-mediated learning to your menu.

The FutureU team can help you realistically assess your training program and identify your organization's unique needs for change. We can help you articulate and present your ideas, engage your leadership and workforce, decide how best to upgrade your technology within your budget, and plan and execute a training program that will help your people not just to acquire more information but to produce the results they want from everything they do.

How do we begin? Once you're ready to introduce online learning to your workforce, FutureU can offer you both off-the-shelf and custom training programs, as well as a wide range of consulting services to get you started and maximize your efforts. Let us help you bring this new learning option to your organization and make the most of all it has to offer.

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