WHITEPAPER

The Best Way to Deliver Sales Training

Delivery Methods to Optimize Success



Sales Readiness Group

ABSTRACT

There is an ongoing, evolving debate about the best way to deliver sales training programs. At the center of this debate is the ongoing tension among traditional instructor-led classroom training (ILT), virtual instructor-led training (VILT), and self-paced eLearning (eLearning).

The truth of the matter is that all three of these delivery methods can be effective ways to help training participants understand, apply, and adopt new selling skills. The real key is designing a program that has clear objectives, executive sponsorship, relevancy, and sustainability.

This whitepaper explains the advantages and limitations of each delivery method so that you can design a program that can achieve your goals, and fit within your budget.

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INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING (ILT):

Sales organizations have traditionally trained their sales teams in-person using a multi-day training format. Training participants can glean best practices or lessons-learned from expert instructors, share experiences with peers, and participate in face-to-face role-plays.

Personalizing the training experience is easy in ILT. In the classroom, instructors are empowered to deviate or augment content to make the class more relevant. This can occur before the training takes place or happen on the fly based on feedback from the participants. However, physically putting sales teams in a room for an extended period of time does have a number of drawbacks. Chief among these are the impact of travel costs and classroom time on budget, employee productivity – and sales goals.

Given the geographically dispersed makeup of a typical sales force, travel will almost certainly be required, which equates to both a substantial expense, as well as a decrease in the time that salespeople are out in the field actually selling. Companies will often try to work around this issue by scheduling sales training around another event, such as an annual meeting. Unfortunately, this is often counter-productive, as an exhausted and overwhelmed salesperson seldom makes for an ideal student.

On the learning side, classroom training can be a challenge for many sales people, both in format and in impact on daily productivity. Sales people are notorious for having short attention spans and find it difficult to be taken out of the field for extended time periods.

In addition, many programs tend to cover too much content, and studies show that learners do not thrive given these aggressive “drink from the fire hose” approaches.

ILT Advantages & Limitations	
Advantages: • Face time with experts • Team-building with peers • In-person role-plays	**Limitations:** • Travel costs • Significant time out of the field • Information overload

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VIRTUAL INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING (VILT)

Virtual instructor-led training has grown in popularity. VILT combines many of the strengths of instructor-led training and is typically less expensive and more convenient for participants.

In live virtual classrooms, participants have the ability to interact with the facilitator and each other both telephonically and using standard online interactions (e.g., chat, polling, white boarding, breakout rooms, etc.) that are available in most virtual classroom training platforms.

Like a traditional classroom setting, the instructor is there to answer questions as they arise, offering students immediate clarity on content. This approach offers both two-way communication and live feedback, allowing the instructor to tailor the content based on the learners' development needs and questions. For sales training, it is critical to keep the level of engagement and interaction high. As such, VILT class sizes should be limited to 10 - 12 participants. This is in contrast to product trainings, which are typically information-based sessions and, as such, can accommodate a much large audience.

In terms of convenience, participants can take courses from home, at the office or on the road, avoiding any break in productivity. VILT courses can be scheduled as a series of weekly or bi-weekly training sessions (typically 2 – 3 hours per session) allowing participants to remain engaged in the sales training and still attend to their day-to-day sales responsibilities.

VILT also eliminates the travel burden associated with in-person training. Participants take courses from where they are and expert trainers don't need to be flown in and accommodated during the course of the training. This make training especially convenient for distributed sales organizations.

In order to maximize its effectiveness, VILT courses must be specifically designed for the unique characteristics of the virtual environment. Effectively designed VILT content offers participants frequent interaction and collaboration opportunities using chat, polling, discussions, exercises, and role-plays. This helps keep learners engaged and contributing.

VILT Advantages & Limitations	
Advantages: • Live facilitation • Interaction with peers • Role-plays	Limitations: • Lack of face-to-face interaction • Requires specialized instructional-design to ensure engagement

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ELEARNING

Elearning (i.e., self-paced training) is effective for certain types of training and offers unparalleled convenience. With this style of training, workers can fit training in when it works best for them, avoiding valuable peak sales hours during the day. While the economics and convenience of eLearning are compelling, its effectiveness for improving sales skills is questionable. Traditionally, self-paced training has been best suited topics where the content is static and/or data-driven (e.g. compliance, technical training).

On the other hand, training certain soft skills like sales skills requires live instructors so that trainees can practice their new skills, receive feedback and coaching, ask questions, and interact with peers. More recently, however, eLearning has played a greater role in selling skills programs.

While participant engagement and skills application are far better addressed in classrooms (live or virtual), eLearning can serve as a great sales training primer to help participants understand key skills and concepts and come to training better prepared to apply these skills.

Elearning is also proving a great way to reinforce training because it can be delivered as short (2-3 minute) modules that allow for on-demand access on laptops, tablets, and mobile devices.

eLearning Advantages & Limitations	
Advantages: • Easily accessible • Convenient • Sales primer and reinforcement	Limitations: • Limited effectiveness for soft skills • No interaction with facilitator or peers

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SUMMARY

The following chart provides a summary of how the above listed training delivery methods can be used to form a blended training program that results in sustainable skills improvement.

Program Component	ILT	VILT	eLearning
Pre-training primer		✓	✓
Skills training workshop	✓	✓	
Post-training reinforcement	✓	✓	✓

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Norman Behar is a proven sales leader with over 25 years of CEO and senior sales management experience. He is recognized as a thought leader in the sales training industry, and has worked with clients in a wide range of industries including financial services, healthcare, technology, manufacturing, and distribution. Norman's whitepapers and blog posts are frequently featured in leading sales enablement publications. Previously, Norman served as President and CEO of Catapult, Inc., a leading provider of personal computer training services, where he oversaw the Company's operations and managed its growth and expansion into more than 20 major markets across the United States. Under Norman's leadership, revenues increased significantly and the company was sold to IBM. Norman received his B.A. from the University of Washington, where he graduated Summa Cum Laude.

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David Jacoby has extensive experience developing and implementing innovative sales training and sales leadership development solutions for clients. Previously, David was a Principal at Linear Partners, a sales consulting firm focused on providing sales effectiveness and development solutions to emerging growth companies. In the past, David has served as Vice President of Business Affairs of Xylo, Inc., where he was responsible for the Company's business development, sales operations, legal affairs and financing activities. David received his J.D. from the Columbia University School of Law, where he was a Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar, and received his B.A. from the University of Washington, where he graduated Summa Cum Laude.

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About Sales Readiness Group

Sales Readiness Group (SRG) is an industry leading sales training company that helps companies develop highly effective sales organizations. Our solutions include comprehensive sales training, sales coaching, and sales management programs that deliver sustainable skills improvement.

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