

Game-Based E-Learning Produces Results

By Bryan L. Austin, Chief Game Changer, Game On! Learning

I've had the good fortune to spend most of my career in the corporate training space, primarily working for e-learning solution providers to corporations and government organizations around the world.

One of the biggest challenges of e-learning has been that employees often don't complete the training because they don't find it engaging, relevant, or worth their time. Three of the most vexing questions for talent development professionals when launching training initiatives online are:

1. **If we implement it, will they come?**
2. **Will they complete it?**
3. **Will they apply it?"**

Like many of you, I've been following the learning "gamification" trend. It shows promise, and I'd like to share some of the encouraging training and business results I've found so far. Organizations that have implemented game-based e-learning for negotiation skills, for example, have found some common themes in their results.

MERCK, SHARP & DOHME: Employees were enthusiastic about the training and more motivated to complete it.

Erik Plas, who manages a European business unit for Merck, Sharp & Dohme (MSD), recently implemented a game-based negotiation training

course. This was a new approach for MSD and Plas was pleasantly surprised at the enthusiastic employee feedback. According to Plas, it wasn't unusual to hear comments such as *"I've finished the course, what a shame!"* and *"This is the most entertaining, interesting, and useful course I have done."*

The percentage of MSD employees who completed the training with a strong retention of the concepts was far higher than any previous online training the organization had implemented. Plas believes this is due in large part to the game-based approach.

"The format is innovative and entertaining. The learning is enjoyable as you are immersed in the story and the game hooks you," Plas says. "The course also poses challenges, competition, and enables employees to intervene and direct the story."

SANDOZ: Managers reported that the training increased employee confidence.

Sandoz is the generic pharmaceuticals division of industry giant Novartis. Its employees "embraced their first exposure to game-based learning," says Benefits Manager Francisco de la Calle (who also completed the negotiations game).

Sandoz found that the ability to group employees into cohorts of 20 to 30, and have them play the game against each other over a four- to five-week period, dialed up the focus on the training. The competitive aspect of the game enabled employees to master even the fine points of the negotiation skills in an attempt to score higher than their peers.

Sandoz managers have reported that post-training, employees can more capably use the new skills to improve the quality of relationships with customers, as well as produce better sales results. Rosa Lacunza, director of Human Resources, adds that “it is incredible how perfect this game is and how real in all aspects. It was good and useful.”

KELLOGG: The 90 percent in-course skills application helped ensure that the training had an immediate performance impact.

Susana Gomez, a Human Resources director at Kellogg’s, has become a fan of the game-based e-learning approach. “What I liked most was the methodology. The online experience is like nothing I’ve seen,” Gomez says. “It is enriching training presented in an enjoyable way.” Gomez credits the game-based negotiations training with enabling employees to be much more effective when dealing with both external and internal clients, and with building more positive and productive client relationships.

Interestingly, Gomez gives game-based e-learning the edge over nearly all classroom training. “What I liked about this program is the practical application. The majority of face-to-face training lacks much practical content,” Gomez notes. She added that the ability to have 90 percent of the training time spent on practicing and applying the skills is a huge benefit over classroom training.

The Performance Impact at a Glance

These organizations and many others believe game-based e-learning will play a much more prevalent role in their future talent development

strategies. The common themes found in their game-based e-learning results are that employees:

- Approach the training with a greater level of enthusiasm.
- Are much more motivated to complete the training.
- Apply the skills more diligently during the training, driven by their competitive desire to outperform their colleagues in the game.
- Complete the training with a much higher level of confidence in their new skills.
- Are more likely to apply the new skills successfully on the job.

If only we could generate these results from all of the programs we roll out in our talent development functions. We'd all be heroes!

I'm excited by the potential of game-based e-learning and the role it can play in helping to increase the effectiveness of our talent development initiatives. Please share your game-based learning stories and results with me via e-mail: bryan@gameonlearning.com—I'd love to hear about them!

Bryan L. Austin is the chief game changer at Game On! Learning (www.gameonlearning.com). Throughout his 25-year career with organizations such as NETg, SkillSoft, and Kaplan, Austin has dedicated himself to helping organizations develop high-performing employees through innovative learning solutions. The fusion of technology and learning has always captivated Austin. He has found it fascinating to be a part of the evolution of corporate learning and development. He has seen multimedia training evolve from audio/videotape/workbook packages, to PC- and LAN-delivered training, to the sophisticated e-learning solutions of today.

