How to Scale Your Training Organization to Meet Growing Demand for Learning

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As more and more organizations are building e-learning internally, training departments and e-learning development teams often find it difficult to meet the growing demand for good e-learning courses, both inside and outside of the organization. Project teams often find themselves stretched and sometimes even without the resources needed to successfully meet required deadlines and budgets.

There are stages of change through which the training organization often moves before finding lasting solutions that grow predictably and steadily with the demand. This white paper discusses how a combination of methodologies, tools, and technologies empowers the training organization to effectively scale by eventually enabling e-learning development through the organization.
Growing Demands for Learning Require Flexible Adaptation

Phase 1: The Sole Developer of Small Team

As solutions, e-learning and m-learning often enter an organization through someone who sees the advantages that “always-on” training can bring and they become the champion in implementing these efforts from the bottom-up. They also enter sometimes with someone who is tasked with the responsibility from the top-down. Either way, the first phase usually involves a lot of research, experimenting and internal selling.

Finally, after the applause that follows the successful rollout of the first pilot course dies down and the parts of the organization affected by the pilot see the benefits of these e-learning and m-learning courses, more requests come in. The success breeds demand, which in turn puts pressure on the initiator to figure out how to handle those requests.

To illustrate, let’s suppose Sue Brown is a training supervisor in a division of a large truck manufacturing company. Sue is mostly in charge of coordinating instructor-led training for employees, but because of recent budget cuts Sue decides it is time to explore the idea of self-paced interactive courses and assessments as a substitution for the live training.

Phase 2: Efforts to Expand the Core Team

Most individuals and teams, faced with initial growing demand, attempt to grow their team of e-learning developers to accommodate that demand. Logic suggests that once they’ve had success a certain way, to grow to meet demand means simply doing more of what made the success possible in the first place.

Sue and her manager decide they will make all of their trainers “learning developers.” With the help of Rapid Intake rapid authoring tools (purchased with funds they will save by not holding the instructor-led training), and free training from Rapid Intake, they all learn how to use the tools in short order, and they are quickly building more of the same kind of e-learning and m-learning that was shown to be successful in the first place.

One challenge in this phase is making sure everyone has the tools they need to do the job. Most authoring software is licensed by user, so each person building courses needs a license. Rapid Intake’s unlimited user model can help facilitate this transition financially and technically.

Because Sue’s Rapid Intake solution includes unlimited user licensing, Sue and her manager can get as many people involved as needed. Sue and her team use Rapid Intake’s collaborative online course authoring solution to work effectively with team members in remote locations. Subject matter experts (SMEs) are able to log in from any location and provide feedback through the integrated course feedback collection and management system.

Now, instead of building one course at a time with one person, they are working as a team on several projects. Some are involved on some projects and some on another. Each team is working with SMEs on each project, similar to how Sue worked with the SME on the first project.

They are able to duplicate Sue’s initial success on multiple projects. Word spreads throughout the organization and Sue’s manager is asked to help other division training teams become more e-learning and m-learning capable. She asks Sue to head this up. Sue spends a lot of her time helping those in her team and other training teams learn the tools and project planning required to successfully deliver online and mobile courses.

In most organizations, as with Sue, this first success at scaling in turn fuels more demand, encouraging further expansion. This works for a while, but with each expansion and more adoption throughout the organization, demand continues to pour in. It soon becomes apparent they cannot continue to scale this way.

Soon Sue’s training team cannot keep up with the demands for online and mobile training courses. They realize they don’t have the resources themselves, so they ask for approval to hire additional instructional designers and developers. Because their successes have helped improve performance and cut some costs, they are given approval to hire a few more people.

With this additional staff trained, they now seem to be able to keep up with demand and even begin proactively advertising their capabilities inside the organization. This encourages demand and ensuing success, which in turn creates even more demand. Sue’s manager keeps going back to upper management for approval for more staff.

Eventually, even with so much demand, the cost of staffing the training and development teams is getting to be so high that upper management starts to complain and begins to push back, saying their team will just have to do more with less.
Sue and her manager pass this along to the rest of the team, asking them to put in more hours, find new efficiencies and so on. This works for a few months, but demand continues to rise and it soon becomes apparent that they cannot meet all of the organization’s needs with their current model.

Phase 3: Scaling by Coaching, Facilitating, and Empowering SMEs

When experienced learning development teams are faced with increasing demand and simultaneous budget cuts, out of the pressure of necessity, many often come to the same question and conclusion:

“Why are we still building courses by trying to learn what the SMEs know and putting it together, when if they had the tools, they could do it themselves? We waste a lot of time in the process trying to become partial clones of the SMEs in order to build the training effectively. It seems the solution is to give the tools to the SMEs and have them build the training themselves.”

Sue and her manager start putting the tools in the hands of some of the SMEs in an effort to meet demand. They recognize that there are going to be challenges because most SMEs do not have instructional design expertise and sometimes just don’t communicate well.

Sue pilots the plan with some SMEs by having them attend Rapid Intake’s free learning development training. In just a couple of hours, the SMEs feel confident they can build online and mobile courses. Sue wants to make sure they create effective e-learning and m-learning, so she uses the Rapid Intake SMEmatch™ course templates to pre-populate effective course designs for several different types of training.

The SMEs start building courses. Although they are often in remote locations, the SMEs are using the collaborative capabilities of Rapid Intake’s eLearning Studio. Sue logs in real-time and reviews at every step how the SMEs are organizing and fleshing out their content. She makes recommendations on types of template-based interactions that can be added, even restructuring some of the content herself.

Sue uses the built-in course review feedback management system to both review and comment on the SMEs work as well as receive final feedback from other extended project team members such as the legal and marketing departments that need to provide input on the courses.

In this role, Sue is acting as a coach or facilitator rather than primary learning developer. She empowers and guides the SME to a successful conclusion using real-time collaborative technology as well as pre-built course templates to help ensure consistency and instructional soundness.

Phase 4: The Fully Evolved, Finely-Tuned Hybrid Team

One of the challenges in empowering SMEs will be to get buy-off from the SME and the SME’s organization that they should be doing the development themselves. One way to get this buy-off is like anything else: start at the top. When your upper management puts the pressure on you to scale, go to them with a SME-based proposal and explain the inefficiencies of learning development where someone else besides the SME is building the training.

Teams that evolve to empower SMEs learn that, while it is an effective way to scale, not all needs are met this way. Either a SME just isn’t available or they realize with certain SMEs it will take more time to help them build courses than to build it themselves. They naturally begin handling both tasks: being a resource for SME-based learning development and being a resource for primary learning development where it makes sense.

Sue is eventually promoted to Director of Learning Development and oversees coaching and facilitation throughout the entire organization. She leads the effort to bring together standards and guidelines and acts as a primary consultant and leader to every training team and helps ensure each team evolves successfully.

Alternatives to Scaling Internally: Outsourcing and Offshoring

Some organizations choose definitively not to scale internally, but rather use outside resources to scale.

Outsourcing – It Costs a Lot But You Can Get Good Results

If you choose to have your courses developed entirely by a third party, make sure you choose a vendor that uses the same technology you do so that you can update and maintain the course once it is delivered.

If possible, choose a technology like Rapid Intake that allows you to see live online work in progress so you can monitor and give feedback as needed through a managed environment.
Offshoring – Choose Technology

One large pharmaceutical company that is a Rapid Intake customer has hundreds of learning developers inside their organization, but they also have hundreds in India. By using Rapid Intake’s collaborative capabilities, they can more easily build and review courses together, maintaining a higher level of team integration with their offshore resources.

One Rapid Intake customer that sends some learning development work offshore reported that the built-in course review capabilities of Rapid Intake “works so great because they are about 14 hours ahead of us, so they build content while we sleep, then we review content while they sleep… there’s no downtime!”

The collaborative online environment with built-in review capabilities are an obvious advantage in these situations over a desktop solution.

Rapid Intake Is Designed to Grow with Your Organization

eLearning Studio™

Built on Rapid Intake’s flexible Flash and XML platform, eLearning Studio™ (formerly Unison™) is a cloud-based solution that allows designers and subject matter experts (SMEs) to collaboratively manage media, storyboard, develop, review, and publish e-learning courses without having to know Flash. Novice users and content owners work in the WYSIWYG visual layout environment, convert PowerPoint presentations, or fill out easy form-based templates to create interactive learning activities and courses. Advanced users create reusable custom templates by accessing the Flash source code (.fla) SDK. Output is SCORM compliant and works on PC and Mac browsers, as well as most touchscreen mobile devices.

mLearning Studio™

Rapid Intake’s mLearning Studio™ is a cloud-based solution that is so easy to use anyone can build mobile learning in a matter of minutes, then choose to publish to both HTML5 for mobile browsers and Flash for desktop browsers at the same time. Upload images, audio, and video and they are converted to the right format. Add interactive quizzes and activities through easy form-based templates. Publish with cross-platform support for Apple iOS, Android, and BlackBerry touchscreen devices. All output is SCORM conformant, allowing learners to launch from any SCORM LMS (Learning Management System). Course authors can create mobile learning faster with the ground-breaking mLearning Studio.

Who Uses Rapid Intake?

Rapid Intake is used by organizations large and small, from individual consultants to Fortune 500 companies and educational institutions. A few notable customers include Merck, Costco, Sun Microsystems, Petsmart, Denny’s, Adventist Healthcare, Federated Insurance, and Baker Hughes.

Why is Rapid eLearning Development so Important?

While instructional designers have been pushing for effective course creation for years, business drivers have often constrained the quality. Using traditional web-design tools (such as Adobe Flash and Dreamweaver) has resulted in extended timelines and enormous costs.

To understand how these changes have impacted the industry, we need to consider the adoption of e-learning and m-learning as concepts – as potential solutions aimed at narrowing gaps in human performance.

Upload media assets into your Rapid Intake media manager, including audio files, images, videos, externally-built swfs and interactions, pdfs and other documents

Collaboratively build courses with your team in the cloud. Add quizzes, tests, games, simulations, and supporting media content using pre-built interactive reusable learning objects, or page templates.

Test courses online with your team using the fully integrated REVIEW™ module, then deploy courses to any SCORM LMS or generic web server to be accessed by your learners.

This platform is a standard of practices, tools, and technologies upon which all our products are built.
Rapid Intake users report development cycles 60% shorter than when using Captivate or Articulate.

The Rapid Intake Learning Development Platform enables designers and subject matter experts (SMEs) to quickly and easily create Flash-based interactive courses that include quizzes, tests, games, and simulations – at a fraction of the cost of traditional rapid authoring tools. Novice users and content owners simply fill out form-based reusable learning objects (page templates) to create interactive, Flash and HTML5-based course content. Advanced users can create custom, interactive reusable Flash-based page templates by accessing the Flash source code (.fla). The platform can also integrate content from any other authoring tool that outputs to Flash, including Articulate and Captivate. All output is SCORM compliant, rich-media compatible, and works on PC and Mac browsers, as well as the most popular smart phones tablets.

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this article, or would like more information, please contact a product consultant:

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