The Case for Vendor-Authorized Instructor-Led Training

These days, there are many options vying for the training budgets of organizations. Some compete on cost, others on quality, while others focus on flexibility. There are a few ways to categorize training options:

- Vendor-authorized vs. gray market
- Instructor-led vs. on demand
- Virtual vs. in person
- Public vs. private

We will take a look at each categorization individually, but first let's talk about the value of training in general. Many studies conducted over the years have highlighted the benefits of training and, for that matter, certification, on work productivity.

One of the main groups working in this area is IDC, led by Cushing Anderson, IDC's Program Vice President of Business Consulting and Education. In a recent **guest blog for VMware Education Services**, he wrote about research the IDC conducted, which surveyed 500 IT managers about their recent technology projects. They found that a team who possesses an average skill level — five on a normalized scale of one to ten — can "successfully meet about half of the business and project objectives for a technology implementation project." And when a team is slightly better than average, it can achieve 80 percent of its business and project objectives.

Furthermore, IDC found that a lack of ongoing training can lead an IT organization to lose 60 percent of its capability in just three years, due to changes in staff, technology and processes, as well as insufficient refresher training. As little as 10 hours of ongoing training per year per employee not only helps IT professionals stay current with their responsibilities, but it can also help improve IT performance by 30 to 50 percent.

Another **IDC report** suggests a link between industry certification and increased productivity and efficiency.

Certification: Impact on Performance

Certified IT Professionals	Compared to Those Without Certification
Productivity	90% more productive
Efficiency	60% more efficient
Productivity with Core IT Activities	17% more productive
Reduction of Unplanned Server Downtime	56% reduction

Vendor-Authorized vs. Gray Market Training

Major software and hardware vendors often have a team of curriculum developers who build out training courses on their products. These teams are usually comprised of individuals who are well versed in the ways of pedagogy, and work closely with the internal subject matter experts to build courses that are correct and up to date. While the quality of the course offerings can vary from one vendor to another, these courses are usually considered the gold standard, and as such, are priced accordingly. This, of course, leads to other training organizations building much cheaper alternatives, which is the main selling point of gray-market training — it's cheaper. But the quality and refresh rates will vary greatly from one vendor to another. Sometimes the gray market vendors are more interested in simply "teaching to the test," and create curriculum that is so focused on certification test preparation that they lose sight of the fact that training is also supposed to help people improve at their job.

Instructor-Led Training (ILT) vs. On Demand

Traditional training mirrors what humanity has done for thousands of years: a teacher presents in front of a group of students, describing a complex topic and then allowing for follow-up questions to clarify confusion or delve into further topics of interest. This is familiar and it works pretty well, but it is not perfect for every student. First, it may require all the students to be in one place, (although virtual ILT addresses this concern). The bigger problem is that it requires all students to be engaged at the same time and work at the same pace. These are two major benefits of on-demand training: students can watch videos and work on labs at their own pace and convenience. So, we have a clear winner, right? Not so fast.

The limitation of on-demand training is that it is asynchronous. The instructor may have recorded videos months or even years ago, and they are not readily available for follow-up

questions. The best-of-breed on-demand trainings offer refreshed videos on a timely basis, whenever new features or updates in the product are made, but the results can vary greatly. Some on-demand systems offer web forums where students can ask questions that are then crowd-sourced from a community. While there are benefits to this type of forum, it's hard to judge the level of expertise of those answering. The best-of-breed on-demand programs may offer instructor office hours or even have a pool of instructors who are motivated (i.e. compensated) to answer emailed questions in a timely fashion.

The biggest challenge when it comes to on-demand training is motivation. It requires the student to be diligent in starting and participating all the way through a course. With a traditional ILT course, students often leave work to go to a training center, set up their out-of-office message and aren't expected to be doing their regular job for the duration of the class. This means that learning the topic at hand becomes their sole focus. Alternatively, on-demand training is often the lowest priority in a day full of regular job responsibilities, and it may not even get completed. In a 2019 **Science magazine** article, Justin Reich, Director of MIT's Teaching Systems Lab, analyzed 12.67 million course registrations by 5.63 million students for MIT and Harvard courses taught on edX. He found that the traditional knock against massive open online courses — that people don't complete courses — remained true through 2018, even as edX had taken many steps to try to increase completion rates. Only 3.13 percent of all students completed their courses in the 2017–2018 school year. Although the completion rate was much higher for students who paid for "Verified Courses," it was still only 46 percent. This number pales in comparison to the completion rate for ILT courses, which is generally thought to be in the 90–95 percent range.

In reality, there are many other option besides in-person or virtual ILT and on-demand training. These days, we see live and pre-recorded webinars, podcasts, mobile delivery of courses and more. But when it comes to popularity, the traditional classroom is still at the top. In Brandon Hall Group's study, "**Training Budget Benchmarks and Optimizations for 2017**," they found in-person ILT to be the most prevalent and, in terms of quality, ranked only behind coaching/mentoring.

Training Modalities: Use vs Effectiveness (Average Score 5 Point Scale)

Modality	Use	Effectiveness
In-person instructor led classroom	3.4	3.79
eLearning modules	2.78	3.23
Informal peer-to-peer learning	2.59	3.56

On-the-job exercises	2.78	3.71
Coaching/mentoring	2.48	3.88
Paper-based performance report	2.53	2.85
Online performance report	2.43	3.23
Conference calls	2.28	2.53
Video learning	2.17	2.95
Video synchronous classrooms	2.13	3.0
Industry conference/events	2.07	2.82
Pre-recorded instructor led training	2.03	2.56
Recorded webinars	2.01	2.51
Published books or research	1.83	2.37
Social/collaboration tools	1.83	2.98
Mobile learning delivery	1.70	2.86
Online academic institutions	1.69	2.70
In person academic solutions	1.68	2.95
Games/simulations (in person)	1.83	3.0
Games/simulations (online)	1.48	2.83
Podcasts	1.45	2.39

Virtual vs. In-Person Training

Most people agree that the best learning experience is in-person training. But this often means expensive travel to major cities for public classes, or a minimum number of students to make bringing an instructor on site financially viable. This is why virtual training has steadily grown in popularity as the technology makes it increasingly better. The early days of virtual training were plagued with problems due to bad internet connections, lack of video and unfamiliarity with the tools. Over the past dozen years, ExitCertified has built its iMVP® (Individual Multimedia Video Presence) platform to take advantage of the best technologies, procedures and processes to make its virtual training the very next best thing to in-person. This involves two-way audio and video, with student video usage being highly encouraged, as we have found this to be the best way to replicate the in-person experience. Learn more about iMVP **here**.

Public vs. Private Training

If you only have one or a few students who need a class, it usually makes sense to enroll them in a public training class. In-person classes may require travel, but virtual training can eliminate that. The economics of the training business usually dictate that at some point (usually around eight or more students), it becomes cheaper to have the instructor come to you instead. Or if you have a concentration of employees in one city and a few others that are spread around, you can have a hybrid class where some are in a room with the instructor and others join virtually. In addition to financial savings, the benefit of this kind of dedicated group training is that you can work with the training provider ahead of time to customize the class to fit your business needs. For example, you may be able to trim a five-day class down to a three-day class if there are any topics your organization doesn't need to cover. This kind of customization isn't typically possible with classes on a public schedule.

Conclusion

Whether you're looking for public or private training, your best bet is vendor-authorized ILT, especially if quality is your highest priority. In-person training still has a lot to offer, but people are increasingly looking for more convenient options, such as virtual training — like Exit Certified's iMVP. To accommodate all learning styles, geographies and timelines, a hybrid approach is best. Additionally, bundling ILT training with an on-demand version of the class to refer to later helps increase students' skill retention. Some of ExitCertified's largest clients use low-cost, on-demand options for entry-level offerings, and then offer private onsite group training for more complex or advanced topics. A hybrid of in-person and virtual training can bring a geographically dispersed workforce together for custom training that feels like a traditional classroom. **ExitCertified** is proud to offer authorized courses from over 25 major vendors, and can accommodate all your learning needs — we're here and ready to help you and your organization get started.

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