Customer training and blended learning:

A perfect match

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Introduction

Done well, customer training brings big benefits to your business.

Done badly and customer training can fail dramatically. If you adopt an awkward or inaccessible approach, don't get the balance of content right, or fail to accommodate the day-to-day demands your customers are juggling, you risk making more harm than good.

If you get client training wrong, at best your customers will stay with you, but won't get the maximum benefit from their investment in you. At worst, they'll become disillusioned and frustrated, and take their business elsewhere.

So, how can you elevate your customer training program to ensure it resonates with all of your clients and provide a positive ROI? A blended learning approach could well be the answer.

In this ebook, we explore the merits of using a blended learning approach when training customers. We look at ways to incorporate it into your strategy. We delve deeper into the important role that technology plays. And we pinpoint how to measure success. Of course, no approach is 100% challenge-free. Which is why we'll also take a look at some of the challenges of blended learning.

But first, back to basics. What do we mean when we refer to "blended learning"?

Let's take a look.

What is blended learning?

The concept underpinning *blended learning* takes its roots from the open education movement (OEM) that emerged in the US in the late 1960s, early 1970s. The OEM was founded on the belief that training (its resources, experiences, and opportunities) should be universally accessible and not limited to a certain privileged group of participants.

The advent of digital technology and the development of online and distance learning that followed decades later took this ambition and transformed it into the formal blended learning approach we see today.

As its name suggests, the mixing together of different components to produce one unified whole is what distinguishes the blended learning approach. But what that final blend looks like in practice differs from setting to setting. It's informed by each organization's learning outcomes. And also influenced by the technology available and the digital capabilities of both instructors and learners.

Often referred to as hybrid learning, there's no one-size-fits-all model to blended learning.

The traditional model focuses on blended learning as a **combination of both online and offline training.** In practice, that might mean hosting in-person, classroom-based sessions. And then reinforcing learning through online interactivity (social media-style discussion groups or training videos, for example).

Or, the other way around. So-called **"flipped learning"** is where individuals can access resources and information online before they attend an in-person session. This gives participants the chance to do their own research. And identify areas of uncertainty that can be raised in the face-to-face sessions that follow. Flipped learning also encourages the sharing of information and challenges through personal learning networks (PLNs).

"Self-blended" training is another branch of the traditional blended learning model. Here, participants supplement face-to-face learning with their own choice of additional online courses or materials.

But this traditional model of blending online and offline learning is no longer the default approach. With technologies continuing to evolve and companies adopting a more global business model, in-person training sessions are becoming less common. To solve the challenge of reaching customers wherever they're based, a **digital-only form of blended learning** has emerged.

Instead of combining online with offline training, the "blended" element consists of **mixing live or synchronous digital training with self-paced or asynchronous eLearning.** Webinars or video conferences where attendees all join sessions at the same time are good examples of synchronous

training. Self-paced online learning modules, pre-recorded video demonstrations, discussion boards, and forums all offer asynchronous training opportunities.

Of course, some customer training may benefit from a hands-on approach and there are undoubted benefits to this if practicalities allow. Not least the opportunity to meet customers in person.

Using blended learning strategies to successfully support customer training means adopting a flexible approach. Consider context, capabilities, and content, and then use the strengths of each of the different components available to support all three.

Chapter 1.
Let's recap this chapter:

Blended learning uses different training methods and techniques to create an integrated program of learning. The traditional view of blended learning is that it's a combination of online and offline components. But more common these days is a combination of live (or synchronous) and asynchronous (or self-paced) elements.

Chapter 2.

Seven reasons to invest in customer training

Customer training demands an "all or nothing" approach. A half-hearted or poorly planned customer education program can damage your business. Which is why you need to put the effort in. But designing and delivering an *engaging customer training program* requires an ongoing commitment. And it takes time, resources, and money. So, is it worth the investment?

Following are seven reasons we can answer that question with a confident "Yes."

Some of the *customer training benefits* listed below will directly and relatively quickly impact your bottom line. Others are more slow-burners. But all of them are powerful and demonstrate a good ROI.

1. Customer satisfaction

The more your customers know about your product or service (particularly how it can make their jobs easier), the more they'll get out of it. And the more they'll use it.

Showing your clients how to benefit from their investment by modeling best practices, providing quick tips, and sharing news of new features leads to higher levels of user experience. Which, in turn, raises satisfaction rates.
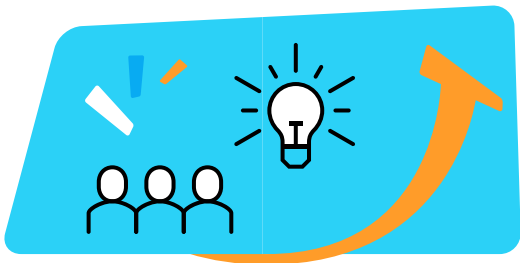
2. Customer retention (low churn rate)

It costs more to get a new customer than it does to keep hold of an existing one. You've worked hard to win new customers. A good **_client training program_** will help you keep hold of them.

Going above and beyond to offer something that falls outside the terms of your contract is a great way of showing your customers you value their business and want them to succeed. And a great way of growing customer loyalty.

Customer training is a prime example of that. It's a gesture that demonstrates respect and appreciation for the people using your product or service. Not all organizations provide customer training. Fewer businesses do it well. Advocating customer enablement is your chance to stand out and keep hold of your most valuable assets: your customers.

3. New referrals

Independent, third-party endorsements promote your business more powerfully than a paid campaign ever can. Why? Because, with nothing to gain from them, a customer's word-of-mouth recommendations are seen as indisputably honest and impartial. They're also free!

Here's where your clients come in.

Loyal customers are great marketers. And if you grow their loyalty by investing in their training, they're sure to shout about it. But it doesn't stop there. With your customers acting as brand ambassadors, new business referrals are bound to follow.

4. Higher product spend

Customer training supports upselling in two ways. By educating clients about your product or service, they'll appreciate its full value and understand its potential. Which means when it's time to upgrade, they're more likely to stay with you rather than look elsewhere.

This is particularly relevant when it comes to working with scaling businesses. Showing them what your product or service is capable of, will reassure them that you can step up and support them as they grow.

Client training is also a great way of introducing new features without the hard sell. If training is an ongoing organic offering, you can include a session on a new product, feature, or service without it appearing forced or out of place. You can even involve customers in beta testing of your pre-launch product or service as part of your training program. Giving them the chance to preview and even influence its iteration will grow their interest and increase the likelihood of them using it and promoting it to others.

5. Branding boost

By engaging and involving customers in your product or service, your brand benefits, too. Demonstrating an active commitment to external training reflects positively on your company values. It markets your organization as one that invests in people. And one that works hard to support its service users by making sure they're getting the most out of their investment.

It also reflects a high level of confidence, authority, and understanding of the industry you specialize in. All of this, combined, transforms customers into advocates and ambassadors of your brand and your business.

6. Reduces pressure

However comprehensive your customer training program is, your customers will still have questions. But they should have a lot fewer questions. Customer training provides a **proactive approach to customer support,** rather than a reactive one. It takes topics, tasks, and tools your users will encounter and gently guides them towards a higher level of understanding and capability.

And by doing so, you can drastically reduce the volume of queries your customer service team has to handle.

TIP: *Analyze your customer support log. And design part of your training program around common questions or challenges your customer support team has to answer.*

7. Increased revenue

We've outlined six big benefits to investing in customer training. What do you get when you add all of the above together? Number seven: Higher profits and lower costs.

Chapter 2.
Let's recap this chapter:

Investing in customer training comes with a number of different benefits. Some of these will directly and relatively quickly impact your bottom line. Higher product spend, better customer retention rates, more third-party referrals, and a reduction in customer support queries, are all examples of these.

Others, like the boost to your branding and a growth in customer satisfaction, are more slow-burners. But all of them are powerful and demonstrate a good ROI.

Chapter 3.
Blended learning vs. traditional customer training

Training customers isn't a new concept. But most companies have evolved their approach over recent years. But why change? What was wrong with the traditional methods most companies used to support customer enablement?

Here we look at how organizations used to manage customer training. And find out what challenges or limitations prompted them to change direction.

1. Onboarding then nothing

Traditional method:

Customer education programs used to be associated with onboarding. Just onboarding. Clients would be offered training at the very start of their relationship with you. And then...nothing.

When the concept of customer training was just emerging, the many benefits of investing in it weren't as widely known or accepted as they are today. As a result, it lacked full support from the C-Suite. And this meant a watered-down and half-hearted approach.

Challenge:

When customer training is viewed as a tick box exercise rather than an ongoing commitment, there's no point putting effort or the time in. And no infrastructure in place to support any other approach.

Rationale:

Your customer's needs evolve over time. The questions and requirements they have three months or a year after joining you will have changed. And so will your product or service. Without a phased and ongoing training program, there's no way you can address or preempt these. Or, introduce and upsell new products, features, or services.

Up-to-date approach:

When a customer first signs up for your service, you should offer them training right away as part of their onboarding. But this should be reinforced by an ongoing commitment to supporting education and enlightenment.

2. Too much too soon

Traditional method:

In the early days, customer training was organized like a birthday. A whole heap of training gifts (of all shapes and sizes) would arrive on the same day, in the same delivery, straight to your new customer's door.

Challenge:

When you've taken on a new customer the temptation to lavish them with information, training documentation, and product or service manuals is strong. Of course, you're pleased to have them join you. And you want to show them that. But showering them with too much training, too soon, can have a negative effect.

Rationale:

Your new customers are at the very start of their learning curve with you. Which puts them in a vulnerable position. Overloading them with data risks alienating them and suggests that your product or service is overly complicated. And requires hours of training before they can use it.

Up-to-date approach:

It's far better to start small and gradually introduce customers to your product or service. Wait until they're familiar with the basics before you make them aware of what

else they can achieve using your product. Repeat main messages. And share quick wins with them, early on. What game-changing feature or tool will appeal to and excite them?

3. Unrealistic expectations

Traditional method:

Manually-led, and hands-on, customer training used to be organized, designed, delivered, assessed, and evaluated solely by L&D teams. Without the help of any technology, other resources, or third-party provision. Technology was seen as expensive and unnecessary.

Challenge:

Managing customer training from start to finish, as well as overseeing all employee-led L&D commitments, puts pressure on individuals. Particularly if you're scaling fast and attracting new customers on a regular and ongoing basis. Not only does the customer training experience suffer, but trainers' mental health and workload do too.
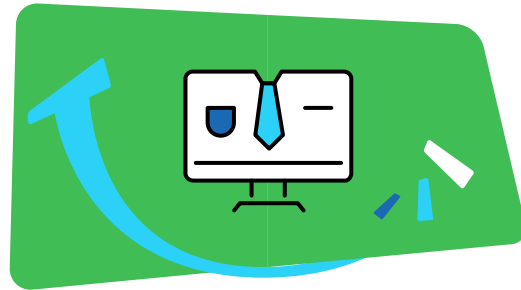
Rationale:

When organizations overload their training teams, morale takes a hit, performance suffers, employees are at risk of burnout, and customers get disillusioned and disengaged. Not investing in additional technology to take the pressure off may save money in the short term. But it can quickly impact your bottom line, driving customers and employees away.

Up-to-date approach:

Technology makes life easier for your customer training team. And provides a better experience for your customers. It's no longer expensive and delivers a high ROI.

Hint: We'll be looking at this in more detail in Chapter 6.

4. Outdated content

Traditional method:

A by-product of the old-fashioned "tick-box" approach to customer training, the traditional approach to managing training content was equally ineffective. Some organizations, considered at the time to be particularly diligent, would review and update training content annually. Or, at best, twice a year. But more commonly, as soon as training material was produced it would fall off the radar. And only updated on an ad-hoc basis when a customer or trainer spotted an inaccuracy.

Challenge:

Stored in long documents or training manuals, customer training content was traditionally presented in formats that were hard to update or enhance. The commitment and resources to regularly audit the information were also non-existent. The result? Stale, outdated, inaccurate, uninspiring, and often misleading training content.

Rationale:

From product or service updates, brand reviews, industry developments, and changing regulations to price changes and customer requirements, your business is evolving all the time. Which means your training content needs to evolve, too. If it's to remain relevant and resonate with your customers, it needs to be refreshed and targeted towards any new or emerging customer pain points.

Up-to-date approach:

Factor regular content reviews into your customer training strategy. Use technology to design and deliver content that's easy to update. And vary your methods of delivery as the content or subject matter changes.

Rationale:

Not all of your customers will be based in the same region. Or, even the same country. They may operate according to different time zones. They may even speak different languages. The chances of getting them all together in the same room at the same time? Probably zero.

Up-to-date approach:

If you can make your customer base and budget work with an in-person training approach, great. But, if not, you need to be practical and pragmatic. And design a training program, using all of the technological capabilities available, that works outside of these boundaries and limitations.

5. No flexibility

Traditional method:

The classroom-based approach still has relevance in today's training ecosystem. But its relevance is narrowing. When customer training first impacted the business world, in-person sessions were the norm. Gathering groups of customers together at the same time, in the same space, went hand-in-hand with the handing out of large user manuals. A rigid approach, it excluded and alienated whole

Challenge:

This face-to-face approach may work for a few of your customers, or for small businesses whose clients are all local. But it's not practical for most modern business models.

Chapter 3.
Let's recap this chapter:

Customer training has evolved over the years. Most companies have left the traditional approach behind in favor of a more progressive, blended learning approach. Why? We identified five reasons:

Focusing on in-person training lacked flexibility and doesn't work in today's global marketplace. A tick-box approach resulted in old, or outdated course content. Without technology (seen as expensive and unnecessary), L&D teams were overloaded. Customers struggled to cope with an overwhelming dump of data. Training wasn't ongoing and was only provided as part of the onboarding process.

13 lucky reasons to use blended learning for customer training

We've touched on a few of the challenges associated with the traditional approach to customer training. But what's the alternative? Can blended learning solve some or all of these obstacles? Well, we've carried out our research. We've also been there and done it. And the answer is, emphatically, yes. Here are 13 _**blended learning benefits**_ we've identified:

1. Better return on investment (ROI)

Moving from in-class customer training to a combination of online methods saves money. Not only does it reduce the costs associated with organizing in-person training, but because the material and content can be reused (with a few tweaks where necessary) it's more efficient and requires less resourcing.

2. Scalable

If you're a global organization or a fast-growing start-up, using a blending learning model will help you roll out customer training on a larger scale. With an emphasis on combining eLearning methods, your training capacity isn't limited. Which means that as your customer base grows, your customer training can keep pace without any adjustments to your strategy or infrastructure.
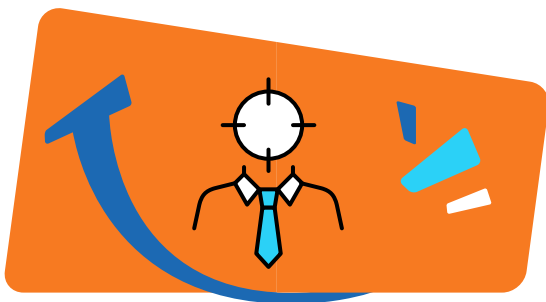
3. Customer-focused

Your customers are busy people. Learning about your product or service won't be their priority—however useful it is to them. So you need to get the balance right and make sure your approach accommodates their day-to-day workload.

Here's where your blended learning model comes into its own. By mixing up formats and

offering self-paced, asynchronous options as well as synchronous methods, your customers can control their own training, dipping in and out whenever it works for them. Microlearning (short snippets of training) is ideal for this. The same goes for recordings of live training sessions such as webinars and video conferences.
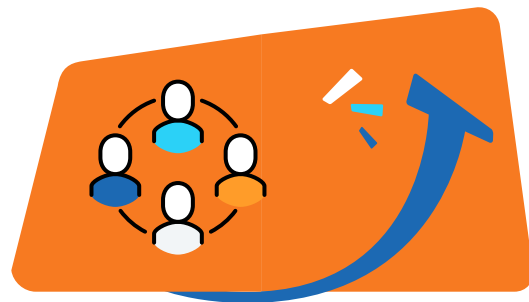
4. Customizable

Your customers are all different. As well as having unique pain points and requirements, their branding and internal structure will vary, too. With blended learning, supported by the right tech, it's easier to create personalized programs to suit your customers' range of requirements.

From making sure each course element has your customer's logo and branding on it to changing the ratio of elements (online and offline, live and asynchronous) to suit, with blended learning all it takes is a few tweaks to create a bespoke approach for each customer.

5. Inclusive

Of course, within your customer groups, you'll have different learning types, too. Not to mention different levels of understanding and expertise. Blended learning caters to this diversity because it offers choice.

With different types of learning equally available, your participants can choose what type of content or format suits them best. And decide how and when they want to interact with the material. Whether it's in a structured, instructor-led environment, self-paced computer-based training, or a combination of both, all of the different learning types are catered for.

6. Interactive

By combining online and offline content, blended learning has the power to create a buzz and a dynamic approach to customer learning.

Using interactivity such as games, videos, tutorials, quizzes, and social media components, it's easier to make learning fun and introduce a level of friendly competition to the training. Which, in turn, leads to higher levels of learner engagement.

7. Networking

Blended learning brings customers together. And presents opportunities for cross-promotion. If you're hosting a webinar, for example, you can set up discussion groups for participants to use afterward. Or, run digital breakout sessions in parallel to your presentation.

This generates a community experience and networking opportunities for both your trainers and your customers. It also raises your profile as a business. By facilitating these discussions, you can elevate your position as an influencer and authority in the space.

8. Accessibility

The more diverse your training program, the more accessible it is. Catering to one generic type of learner by providing one type of learning approach just won't cut it. With the help of the right technology and a blended learning approach, you can design your customer training program with inclusivity in mind.

Personalized learning paths, built-in tools that support tech-driven synchronous learning activities, and asynchronous opportunities that put learners in control are all benefits of blended learning.

9. Global

For global organizations, training customers spanning different countries (or even different states) is challenging. Time differences and travel limitations make in-person sessions almost impossible, while rigid or inflexible digital programs that focus on

one format can be limiting. Blended learning breaks down geographical boundaries by offering training that isn't time or location-dependent.

10. Progressive

With its heavy emphasis on using a mix of digital technologies, blended learning sends out a powerful message about your company's future-focused approach. It marks you out as an organization that caters to a new generation of tech-savvy clients, as well as providing for more traditional learners. And because it's a flexible model it can adapt quickly to reflect new and emerging trends and training tactics.

11. Effective

If you've put the effort into training your customers, you want to make sure that knowledge sticks. Blended learning presents opportunities for your clients to share and discuss what they've learned in informal settings such as discussion groups, message boards, and other social media channels.

Being able to digest, model, and re-configure new knowledge in a community setting boosts retention.

12. Pressure off L&D

With the majority (if not all) of customer training provided online, blended learning takes the administrative pressure off L&D teams. Not only is the logistical headache of arranging multiple in-person training sessions for different customer groups removed. But, with the right tools in place, technology can take care of the management and admin of live, online training sessions, too. And with course content stored digitally, updating and refreshing it is much easier.

13. Pace and timing

Being able to offer a mix of formal and informal training environments and blending live and asynchronous learning give momentum and pace to your customer training program. Learning won't be (or feel) stale and customers will be reminded that your commitment to their training is ongoing.
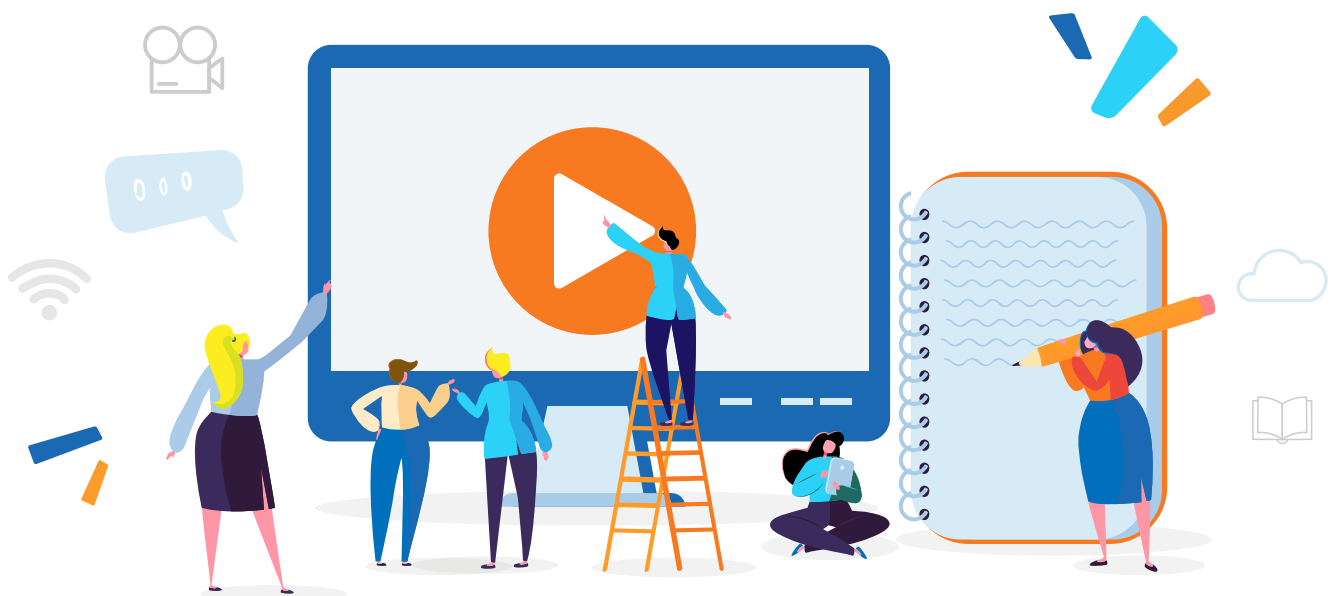
Chapter 4.
Let's recap this chapter:

Blended learning solves many of the challenges associated with traditional customer training. And more. From scalability, reduced costs, and higher knowledge retention to accessibility, inclusivity, interactivity, and networking, the ROI is high.

Chapter 5.

Blended learning strategies to train customers

So far, we've looked at the benefits of blended learning. And we've also explored the importance of customer training. But what does it look like when you bring them both together? How can you apply a blended learning strategy to a customer training program?

Here we explore five customer training techniques and how you might apply them. Pick and choose what works for your business type and your customers to create your blended learning strategy.

On-demand or microlearning

WHAT: Self-paced or on-demand learning puts your customers in control. Using a digital eLearning platform your clients can access small, targeted segments of training as and when it's required.

WHY: Learning happens at the point of individual need. Rather than when trainers can provide it, or when the majority of a large group of customers can attend. Which means, it's more likely to be completed, retained, and applied.

WHEN: This non-linear form of blended learning is a great way to guide customers around your product or service. And works really well as part of your onboarding. Use simple text, combined with graphics and/or how-to videos or demos to provide separate training modules. Theme these around different features, functions, applications, or concepts. Your customers can pick and choose what they study to coincide with the evolving needs of their business.

TIP: *Keep these short (2 to 4 minutes) and focused on one learning intention per module. And make sure to give each lesson a clear and descriptive title or label.*

Live webinars and video conferences

WHAT: Taking place remotely these are online seminars, workshops, or presentations targeted toward larger groups of participants. Instructor-led, depending on the topic, they could be hosted by someone within your organization (an L&D trainer or product manager, for example) or someone in the industry. They happen at a predefined time, so pre-registration may be required or you may decide to keep it open by simply sending a link to join.

WHY: Giving customers (however geographically dispersed they are) the chance to get together in a live environment, even if it's virtual, makes them feel part of a bigger picture. With an expert leading the sessions, individual customers can ask questions and everyone present can benefit from the answers. Which minimizes demand on your customer support teams.

WHEN: Use this approach if you're got a big topic, challenge, or pain point that affects all or most of your customers. The introduction of GDPR and its impact on how your customers use your product or service would be a good example. Or, any

other major industry changes, regulations, or compliance issues. It also works if you've got new features, products, or services to introduce.

TIP: *Schedule far enough in advance to avoid conflicts. But be prepared to record and share your webinars with those who couldn't attend.*

Video streaming

WHAT: Short, YouTube-style, video captures, these are demos that take place in real-time and are delivered by someone with first-hand knowledge of the subject matter or process.

WHY: Highly focused, practical, and presented in a format that's familiar and accessible, video streams are a good way of adding pace and dynamism to your blended learning program.

WHEN: Use them to help customers set up or use a new feature, or as part of their product or service onboarding.

TIP: *Remember to make it clear what your customer will gain from this demo. How will it make their job easier or more effective? What difference will it make to their business?*

In-person training or conferences

WHAT: Similar in style and approach to "classroom-based" learning used in educational institutions, formal, in-person training brings your customers together, physically, in the same room at the same time.

WHY: There's a lot to be said for interaction that takes place organically, away from the screen and without the technical glitches that can sometimes interfere with digital learning.

WHEN: Due to logistical challenges, this probably won't be an approach you'll use frequently as part of your customer training. But once or twice a year, if you have a particularly important or unique training proposition to deliver, it could be feasible.

Maybe you've designed a game-changing feature or are introducing a new package of features and want to create a buzz and some organic PR around it. Or, are changing your pricing structure and need to elevate your training program to remind customers of the high-value return they're getting from you. This approach only works if there's a powerful purpose behind it—for you and your customers. But get the messaging and management right and it can bring big benefits.

TIP: *Apply a blended learning approach before and after your in-person session by encouraging customers to access resources and information online before they attend. And take part in informal post-training online discussions.*

Informal social learning

WHAT: Asynchronous tools such as online chat forums, discussion boards, and blog posts, plus social networking features such as comments, likes, and shares, bring *informal, social learning* to your customer training program.

WHY: Social learning is continuous learning. It's immediate and always accessible, meaning your customers can interact with you, your trainers, and other customers whenever they need to reach out. And it's a familiar way of communicating (particularly to your many Millennial and Gen Z customers).

WHEN: It's a good idea to keep these running and functioning as standard. But you can also create specific groups or threads for admins and users around certain training modules or new product features or courses. A great way of asking questions and sharing best practices, your customers can get immediate support and feedback. And often work out the answer to a question themselves without you even having to get involved.

TIP: *At first view, this form of customer training seems self-sustaining. But you'll still need to be involved. Monitor and manage content and discussions to see where you*

can add value, help clarify, and identify FAQs that may need more formal training follow-up.

With these five specific customer training techniques, you choose what to include in your blended training program, and when. Getting the combination right for each customer helps ***build strong and lasting client relationships*** because it shows thought and personalization.

But what else can you do to support your strategy?
Here are three additional tips to drive success:

1. Reuse content
If you're worried about the volume of content required for a blended learning approach, make the most of what you've already got. If you've got a company video, for example, pull out a short extract that speaks to how your company values customers or customer training. If you've got recordings of in-person training sessions, chop these up into short, individual segments with each one demonstrating a technical component or feature. Presentations or manuals? Extract information and present as short, micro-learning components.

2. Sell your blended learning approach

Get help from your marketing team so you can effectively advertise the value of blended learning in your customer training. Remind your customers that training is available and show how it can benefit them through email and social media campaigns, in-product notifications, and on your customer support page.

3. Curate learning for different groups

Your users will want different things from your training depending on their user type. Segment training for groups such as users, administrators, super users, and IT. And create a package of blended learning components depending on what each group will need and use. Some packages will need everything, others will only require a few one or two different types of blended learning.

Chapter 5.
Let's recap this chapter:

There are a number of training techniques you can use to apply a blended learning strategy to a customer training program. These include on-demand or microlearning, live webinars or video conferences, video streaming, in-person training, and informal social learning. The beauty of blended learning is you can pick and choose what works best for your business type, your customers, and the resources you have available.

Blended learning in action: Useful tools

Without the right tools, your blended learning training can't function. So, what do you need in your toolkit? Here's a round-up of the essentials.

Social learning tools

To make your blended learning training more dynamic and accessible, you'll need to provide social learning channels. Specifically, we're talking about the following:

- **Discussion forums:**
  As well as breaking down barriers of time and location, *discussion forums* appeal to different learning types.

- **Instant messaging apps:**
  These support one-to-one communication between trainers and trainees, as well as smaller group interactions.

- **Social media channels:**
  Your customers are likely to be familiar with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn, for example. So why not make them part of your blended learning training? Share posts, create polls, and invite customers to comment or feedback. You can also use them to promote upcoming training sessions.

- **Blog posts:**
  Share product or service-focused blog posts written by your company's SMEs. And encourage customers to comment. You may even find that your customers want to contribute their own blog posts written

about a key business problem and how using your product or service has helped them solve it.

Webinar or video conferencing platforms

Webinars and video conferences are key to blended learning training because they span both in-person and online training. And, since the global pandemic, their functionality has become both more familiar and more sophisticated.

Whether it's Zoom, MS Teams, or GoToMeeting, most webinar platforms include features such as auto or self-enrolling registration, real-time polling, and virtual breakout rooms. All of which match perfectly with your blended learning model.

Video recording apps

Videos appeal to most learning types. And are one of the most effective (read: engaging) training methods. In a blended learning world, it's important to be able to *create and share your own videos*, quickly and easily. Look for an app that allows you to either record your own video using your webcam, upload an existing video, or download a presentation and add audio to it.

You can even ask customers to co-create video content by making mini-interviews with industry experts or an expert within your own company.

Content sharing platforms

To create effective customer-facing courses, you'll need to be able to upload and share the content you've created. When researching a platform, focus on features that will help you do this efficiently and easily, like drag and drop functionality. Also check whether it integrates with multiple content formats such as PDFs, slides, video, and audio.

Assessment tools and gamification techniques

While you won't want to formally "test" customers as you might do with your employees, it's still valuable to have a way of assessing the effectiveness and impact of your training on them. Whether it's through surveys, polls, quizzes, or light-hearted tests, formative assessment tools and gamification can get you a measure of their learning progress.

Reports

You've invested time and money into your blended learning-inspired customer training course. How can you tell if it's working and delivering your desired ROI? The answer lies in having the ability to generate, schedule, and export reports.

From a general training overview to activity logs, and specific, customized reports with a complete reporting package, you should be able to get a 360 understanding of your training program.

All of the above (and more) in one solution

All of these individual tools can help build a rich and all-encompassing blended learning program for customers. But they need to work together seamlessly and smoothly or your customers simply won't engage with them. If each one requires a different login or offers a different user experience it will take too much effort on your customer's part to become involved. Here's where a *learning management system (LMS)* comes into its own.

Whether it's through its own native apps or third-party integrations (or a combination of both), an LMS brings all of the tools essential to blended learning together under one roof. This way you can build and update course content quickly and easily. And your customers can use it just as easily.

Your customer training materials are accessible and centralized. Built-in gamification devices, reporting tools, social media functionality, and content creation tools (including video and audio production features) are all included. As its course management functionality, such as scheduling and registration. Plus your customers only have to remember one login. And become familiar with one user interface.

Not every *customer training LMS* will work to the same standard and specifications. So, do your research and make sure whatever platform you choose is feature-rich, easy to use, and optimized for mobile.

Chapter 6.
Let's recap this chapter:

Technology is at the heart of today's modern approach to blended learning. And there are many tools, apps, and platforms you can use to bring training to life for your customers. You can source and supply all of these yourself. Or, you can use an LMS that comes complete with its own built-in toolkit.

With everything centralized, only one login to remember, and one interface to become familiar with, using an LMS provides a more seamless and streamlined experience for your customers. It also gives your course creators everything they need to design and deliver a versatile training program.

Chapter 7

The challenges of using blended learning for customer training

In today's digitally-enabled world, blended learning is one of the most accessible and affordable ways of both delivering and accessing customer training. All your customers need is a device (laptop, desktop, or phone) and an internet or wifi connection. And, with the right learning management software and training tools in place, the demand on your trainers and L&D experts is minimal, too.

But there are challenges it's important to be aware of. Here's a rundown of the most common ones, along with some tips and workarounds.

1. Technology

THE CHALLENGE:
Your customers may not all have equal access to their own devices or the ability to access and download material. Similarly, not all organizations have the technical infrastructure in place to support blended learning or the resources available to manage the initial migration from a traditional training approach.

THE SOLUTION:
Not all of your customers will have laptops or desktops, but most of them will have phones. So make sure all of the relevant components of your blended training program are *optimized for mobile.* Remind customers that they can download course content and access it offline, too. And, before you commit to providing blended training, check your own resources and capabilities first. Talk with your tech team to assess capacity and make sure your infrastructure can cope with the extra pressure placed on its bandwidth. And scope out your L&D team to ensure capacity for the launch and ongoing management.

2. Motivation

THE CHALLENGE:
With self-paced learning a large part of blended training, a challenge most organizations face when planning customer enablement is motivation. Unlike your employees and partners who will have formal requirements for completing training, your customers won't. A voluntary exercise, and with the demands of their day-to-day jobs always present, it's often sidelined and overlooked.

THE SOLUTION:
Give your customers reasons to engage. Share success stories. Make training targeted and useful. Make it easy for them to access and engage with the different aspects of your training program. And use marketing and promotion to keep it front of mind.

3. Localization

THE CHALLENGE:
Blended learning breaks down barriers and makes learning global. But sometimes by trying to accommodate everyone, your customer training program loses its intimacy. Language, localized challenges, and regional technical issues may become overlooked with such an all-encompassing approach.

THE SOLUTION:
If your software supports it, adapt the language you use to suit different regions. And pay attention to images, symbols, and icons included in your content to make sure they've culturally appropriate.

Reference your customer's branding, as well as your own, to create a connection and link between both of your organizations. If it makes sense, you can also group together customers from a broader region or who face similar pain points and *deliver custom training to each group.*

4. Isolation

THE CHALLENGE:
With a move away from in-person training sessions, blended learning can make some customers feel as if they've been left on their own "to get on with things".

THE SOLUTION:
Monitor customer interaction and activities. Reach out and connect to individuals or groups who aren't engaging. Start discussions and threads, where relevant, and make sure to use informal social tools alongside more formal methods. Gamification devices are also a good way to bring people together and create a buzz. And, if and when you think you need to, arrange in-person sessions to reignite energies and reconnect.
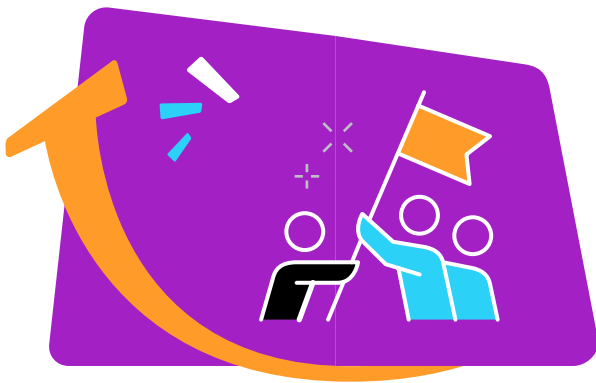
5. Perception

THE CHALLENGE:
There will be some customers who prefer more traditional ways of learning. They may think that unless you're organizing large-scale, in-person training events or conferences, you're not really putting any effort into your customer training. They may see micro or self-paced learning as an easy option. And social media interaction as a fast alternative to more formal methods.

THE SOLUTION:
You need to train your customers on the benefits of blended learning. Explain during your onboarding (or even before they sign up with you) why you use this approach. Share customer success stories and statistics if you have them. Show how you will add value throughout the process. And make sure they see it as an approach targeted to benefit them and not you.

6. Initial outlay

THE CHALLENGE:
In the long-run, blended learning reduces costs and overheads and is less resource-intensive. But getting it off the ground requires an initial one-off investment and the commitment of a range of stakeholders.

THE SOLUTION:
Shop around for a learning platform that offers value for money, combined with the features and support you need. You don't need to buy an expensive platform if you're only going to use a couple of basic features. Likewise, you don't have to commit to an annual plan before you make sure this platform works for you.

Chapter 7.
Let's recap this chapter:

Blended learning has many benefits. But it's not without its challenges. Having the right tech and infrastructure, and the budget and resources to shift over from a traditional approach, are two problems you might face inside your organization.

The others are external challenges you might encounter from your customers. Perception, motivation, feelings of isolation, and a disconnect with the content and the process, are a few examples of these. The good news is, there's a workaround for most of these challenges.

Chapter 8.

Is your blended learning approach to customer training successful?

Remember those customer training benefits we outlined right at the beginning? Now it's time to see if your blended learning approach helped you achieve them.

Here are four ways to measure whether you deliver successful customer training with blended learning:

Gather feedback

A crucial component in any training initiative is gathering feedback. Most LMSs will come with *built-in surveys* you can use to source direct feedback from your customers. Remember to design these so they link to your original goals and learning intentions. But also include questions about the methods of delivery. Did your customers like the blended learning approach? Were there aspects of it that worked better than others?
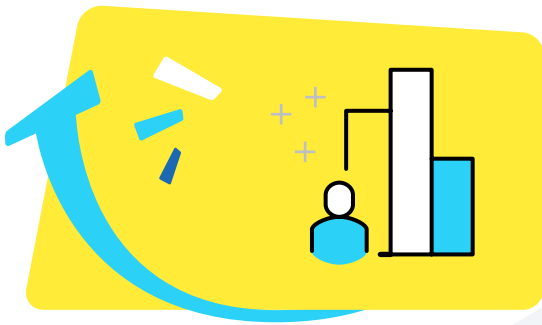
Analyze data

If you use your LMS to manage your customer training it will be rich with data. Data is gold dust because it holds the key to understanding the effectiveness of your enablement program. But gathering and analyzing it manually takes time and a lot of resources.

With an LMS, however, all of that's taken care of. *Built-in reports* give you a clear picture of how your customers used your training and their progress along the way. Specifically:

- See which customers have enrolled in which courses
- Check to see how far your customers have progressed with their courses
- Get a snapshot of the number of users, course completion rates, and groups in training

Track customer success metrics

Outside of the data held in your LMS, there are a number of key indicators that link directly to your program's success. These are your customer success metrics.

Customer satisfaction metrics and your Net Promoter Score are two of the big ones. If your training approach is working, these should go up. Conversely, the number of customer support tickets should go down.

There are other signs that show a good return on your investment and the success of your blended learning training strategy. For example, when and whether customers pay for upgrades and advanced features, renew their licenses, or buy more products from your brand.

Monitor activity

While it's relatively easy to evaluate formal learning, the informal aspects of your training program are less straightforward. But you can still gather valuable insights from them. All of which, combined, will help you make sense of your training.

To measure **levels of engagement,** you can look at the number of threads in a discussion group, for example. Or, the number of comments on a blog post. What videos attracted the most views, shares, and likes? How many questions were submitted during a live webinar or video conference? All of these individual elements tell a powerful story.

Chapter 8.
Let's recap this chapter:

You've invested time and resources into your blended learning customer training strategy. How can you evaluate the impact and establish what your ROI is?

We identified four different methods of measuring success. Using survey and reporting functionality included in your LMS, you can gather feedback and analyze a range of data. Customer satisfaction metrics and Net Promoter Scores are a good way of evaluating customer success. And by monitoring how customers interact across your informal, social learning channels, you can determine levels of engagement.

Conclusion

Blended learning is all about the mix. And by mixing it with customer training you can't go far wrong. A combination of different formal and informal, live and self-paced learning techniques, its flexible model lends itself to most modern businesses. And appeals to a range of different learning types. Busy customers can dip in and out when it suits them. And, if they can't attend live training sessions such as webinars and videoconferences, they can watch the recording.

You need to **get the blend right.** Which means offering a package of training types designed around each customer's unique requirements and business model.

And you need to ensure that your training program **feels blended.** While you may be using a range of different techniques, they all have to feel integrated and part of the same overall training program. Here's where technology comes in. To make blended learning work, you need a rich digital toolkit to deliver training in a variety of different ways. But those online tools all need to work seamlessly together and feel part of the same training experience. If they don't, training becomes disjointed, inaccessible, and disengaging. Using a learning management system eliminates that risk because it has all of the tools you need built into its platform. Plus, a repository of additional apps and tools that can be easily integrated.

Greater than the sum of its parts, the value of blended learning lies in ambition: "to make effective and engaging training as accessible as possible for the largest number of people." Which makes it an obvious choice for customer training.

The LMS designed
for your **success**

TalentLMS is the LMS built for success, enabling organizations to create a culture of continuous learning by delivering training designed with adoption in mind. With an experience that's fully customizable, easy to manage and a joy to use, teams embrace training while feeling right at home.

TalentLMS makes it easy to provide the right training for any team and context while giving expert guidance and support every step of the way. Backed by Epignosis, a global leader in learning technologies, TalentLMS is on a mission to democratize training, serving over 70,000 organizations worldwide.

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