

# Top Ten Strategies to Market Training to Your Workforce

By Gordon L. Johnson

With the emergence of eLearning and our reduced training budgets, we need well conceived training rollouts and marketing strategies that get our programs fully utilized.

In this new age of training, you've probably found it necessary to hone your marketing skills. Marketing and training aren't new to each other. The top training departments in the largest corporations in the world view marketing as an essential ingredient in the success of their training.

Knowing how important marketing is, you might wonder what marketing activities you should focus on. In other words, what works for marketing training? Fortunately, there are some tried and true methods that I've seen working over and over again.

Here are the top ten:

## 10. Communicate "What's In It For Me."

It seems obvious enough, but this requires putting yourself in the customer's shoes and continuing to think the way they do. To do this, you need ongoing communication with your workforce and lots of openness and empathy towards their comments and suggestions. Once you know what they want, focus your marketing message around it. For instance, if certification is a "hot button" for your IT folks, then your communications should focus on this and talk about how your courses will help them get certified.

## 9. Use incentives, rewards, promotions, and recognition.

For this one, I've heard objections like, "We're not going to pay our people to attend training." This is a mental hurdle, and getting past it will open up new worlds of opportunity for designing marketing programs that fill up your classes.

In the days when instructor-led training was king, we spent lots of money sending employees to training in faraway cities. We may not have looked at travel as an incentive to employees, but it's a very big one. For instance, they could fly to San Francisco on the company's dollar, miss work for a couple of days, and enjoy that time away from the office. Big incentive!

How do you replace those incentives with something comparable? You don't have to give away seven-day cruises to get people excited. I've found that something as inexpensive as raffling off a \$200 XBOX every month or giving away duffle bags go a long way.

And don't forget about the importance of recognition. This is often-overlooked. If an entire department passes their compliance test, and they participated in your training, then the department should see their name in lights. It doesn't cost anything and shows everyone how important training is.

## 8. Don't pass up free exposure.

There are lots of unique communications channels in your company that will help get your message out. Examples are bulletin boards, intranets, newsletters, company events, vendor fairs, etc. Sometimes, you just have to ask to be included to get some valuable free exposure.

## 7. Hold lunch-and-learns.

As a training person, using seminars as a marketing tool is a natural extension of your expertise. The added benefit of a seminar is that it's an opportunity to showcase what you do, which gives your customer tangible proof that you know what you're doing.

## 6. Broadcast webinars.

Although webinars and seminars are similar in nature, they are very different in who they attract, how many people they attract, and how they're put together. Webinars tend to get lots of registrations and appeal to people in remote offices and those who are extremely busy. These are people who might never attend a seminar but would sign up for a webinar. Webinars are usually less expensive and require less work on your part, but be prepared for the gotchas, which can easily be overcome, if you're ready for them.

- Make sure you're using dependable webinar software. Nothing's worse than a webinar where the sound goes in and out. I'm not affiliated in any way with Interwise, but have found their service to be the most reliable in the industry.
- Make sure your presenter(s) have used the software, and that they've done a full dress rehearsal. It's OK to have a presenter who has never done a webinar, but make sure you've helped them practice and have worked out the kinks.
- Do multiple webinar reminders the week of the webinar and the day of the webinar. You can't do too many reminders, since low "show rates" are very common with webinars. Expect anywhere from a 40% to 60% show rate.

## 5. Publish an eNewsletter.

It's an email, but it's not as easy to produce as an email. eNewsletters are usually very effective, and are generally perceived as valuable communications by most people. The problem is that they take a lot of time to produce and are hard to consistently publish over time. Here are some tricks to help guarantee your first eNewsletter won't be your last.

- **Don't be overly ambitious:** The eNewsletter highway is paved with eNewsletters that were produced once and never heard from again. Start with a quarterly newsletter, which is pretty realistic. If it works well, you can always increase your frequency to bi-monthly.
- **Get help from your training suppliers:** Training suppliers have a vested interest in making you successful. The good suppliers have the tools, articles, and expertise to help produce and distribute your eNewsletter.
- **Write it yourself:** Newsletters are not difficult if you're doing them yourself. Getting others to write articles and deliver them on time can be like pulling teeth. If you can't manage the eNewsletter yourself, make sure that the person in charge has a vested interest in its success and is willing to commit the time it takes.

## 4 . Send regular emails.

Nobody likes spam. But there's no question that email can generate the biggest bang for the buck. However, it's important to consider the following:

- **Every email needs to add value:** You have to make it clear “What’s in it for them” and provide information that will be perceived as valuable. Otherwise, they’ll call it spam. eNewsletters work well for this.
- **Send the right message to the right person:** Although it’s tempting to send mass emails to everyone in your company, it’s more important that you target the right message to the right person. If you’re offering IT training, send it only to the IT department.
- **Make it easy to opt out:** In each email, give them a way to opt out. If you do this, it nearly always satisfies those people who might have otherwise complained about your email.
- **Plan at least six months in advance:** Put together a simple schedule that contains the content of each email, who you’re sending them to and when they will be sent. This will increase the chance that your emails will actually get done, and that they’ll be sent on a consistent basis.

## 3 . Make it easy to sign up.

A widely known truth in marketing (and sales) is that when you make it easier for your customers to buy, your sales will increase. It’s that simple. It can be very frustrating for consumers to deal with organizations that make it more difficult than it should be. The problem is that the vendor is thinking from *their* perspective, not the perspective of their customers. Step out of *your* shoes for a moment and into your customers’ ways of thinking. This can sometimes be pretty challenging, but you’ll quickly see where you can make improvements that your customers will notice.

## 2 . Create a strong presence on the company intranet.

Getting a course catalog on the intranet is usually the first thing a training department does to market their courses. These days, if it’s not on the web, it’s not as real to customers. So, most people like to see it on the web before they actually talk to a live person or take any sort of action.

Make sure that when you go live, you focus on the above, “**Make it easy to sign up.**” For instance, an employee should be able to register for a course just as easily as if they were buying a book on Amazon.com. If they have to go extra steps to get signed approval from their boss or fax something to you, then you’ll lose half your registrations.

## 1 . Get the endorsement of each level of management.

This may not sound like marketing, but it’s the best possible way to “sell” your classes. Getting executive buy-in means that you convince your company’s leaders to endorse your program, actively promote it ... and possibly even require it.

Let’s say you have a new compliance course that you want all of your employees to take. Rather than sending an email asking them to register, why don’t you have your CEO or another top-level executive email a meeting planner inviting everyone to attend the class. Most sane employees will jump to respond to it ... and attend the training as well. We all know how

important executive buy-in is, but it's critical to place this at the very top of your list. This step might take lots of work and follow-up, but it's worth it.

The good news is that a strong marketing program can pay off big-time for your training programs. The bad news is that it can be challenging. However, if you stick to proven techniques and plan things out well in advance, you can get a return that will elevate your training program to the next level.



Gordon L. Johnson is a marketing consultant for the training industry. He offers marketing solutions for corporate training departments who want to market to their employees and training suppliers who want to grow their business. You can reach him at [gordon@gordjohn.com](mailto:gordon@gordjohn.com) or subscribe to his newsletter at [www.HowToMarketTraining.com](http://www.HowToMarketTraining.com).