



## Preparing Your Company for E-Learning

By Carrie O'Donnell

Most small companies are built on the expertise and energy of their founders. As a company grows, the founders' vision and best practices can get lost if not carefully documented. Frequently, growing companies are so busy trying to deliver their products and services that they don't develop formal processes for training their growing staff. Mentoring, a common training practice

for small businesses, is time-consuming and costly. An e-learning system can help you overcome this problem by providing reusable and easily updated training modules.

First, you have to capture the content that your employees need to learn. We call this systematizing your success: documenting the processes and philosophies that make you

successful (your company's best practices) and turning them into tools and training for your employees. For example, Impact Planning Group, a Greenwich, CT-based consultancy, specializes in strategic marketing planning. This company carefully documented its approach and process for strategic marketing; then, we helped turn that content into an e-learning lesson.

To begin, you need to conduct an inventory of what you do best. For instance, my

company's success stems from our market development approach and philosophy. We work closely with our clients' customers to simultaneously shape their products and cultivate early adopters. Because most client engagements are "projects," we could purchase project management modules for our employees. But our philosophy is so interwoven into our project process that we have developed training content to help our employees understand what we do best as well as learn how to conduct projects. To accomplish this, we chose to develop guides that show employees how to conduct projects and complete the processes that are integral to our success.

Your guides should capture your company's unique philosophy or approach and walk employees through the process, with appropriate forms, checklists, and tools. To view a good example, check out the Web site of the Internal Revenue Service at [www.irs.treas.gov](http://www.irs.treas.gov). Go to "More Quick Links" for downloadable forms, guidance for filing your taxes, and advice on what to do and what not to do.

Your guides can become part of your internal knowledge warehouse—an electronic storage center for collecting information and knowledge that will help your company succeed in the future. In our company, that warehouse includes databases of clients, projects, best practices, and market research.

To complete the process, you will want to create a systematic way to document and share your success stories within the company. Some common practices include wrap-up sessions and/or reports at the completion of a project; brainstorming meetings on a specific issue (make sure the findings are documented); and threaded discussions on issues, topics, or projects. You can see how we turned some of our success stories into interactive case studies for our employees and clients at [www.odassoc.com](http://www.odassoc.com).

Once you have captured this knowledge, the computer becomes a powerful tool for training employees in your vision, processes, and best practices.

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