

# OUTSTART



## American Management Association Launches Blended Learning Based on OutStart LCMS

Blended learning is a real-world approach to training, in which both classroom and online training programs are used to ensure maximum effectiveness for the learner, while ensuring maximum cost-effectiveness for the organization. Well-designed blended learning has the ability to capitalize on the key benefits of instructor-led training, which includes interactivity, real-life experience of instructors, peer interaction, problem solving and classroom practice. It also includes the strengths of online training, such as cost effectiveness, on-demand availability, and global accessibility.

The American Management Association (AMA) recently launched their blended learning offering, which is based on the OutStart LCMS platform. In this case study, Nicholas Igneri, Director of Learning Technologies with the AMA, discusses why the company added blended learning, and why they chose OutStart LCMS.

### THE CHALLENGE

The first step was to understand how we could maximize the advantages of instructor-led training, and minimize, or eliminate, its disadvantages. In addition, we knew it was critical to think through the alignment of the blended learning offering to our core business. After much work and planning, we at AMA developed several core strategic initiatives for our blended learning offering:

- Increase our value to our customers
  - Become the leader in delivering blended learning
  - Design a platform that was simple to access over the web, with very few limitations to accessibility
  - Increase the effectiveness of the AMA offering
  - Provide measurement data to our clients, to gauge the effectiveness of their training
- After defining our core strategic targets, we began to build our blended learning solution. We chose to utilize the Kirkpatrick Model as a frame of reference, which is a four-level model of training evaluation:
- Level I measures reaction to the training experience. With AMA seminars, measuring occurs at the end of a training event and is accomplished through an evaluation form.
  - Level II measures the transfer of learning through our blended learning approach.

### INDUSTRY

Professional Services

### SOLUTION

Based on OutStart LCMS, a blended learning solution was developed, with a great deal of flexibility to create more customization.

### RESULTS

- Add content to the pre- and post-seminar environment to more thoroughly prepare learners for the seminar.
- Use a variety of media in our tune-up courses, including graphics, sound and video.
- Add organizational specific application measurement tools, such as 360-degree feedback or specific evaluations.

“We like the fact that the ability to dynamically generate content is part of the core product and does not require customization.”

Nicholas Igneri,  
Director of Learning Technologies

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- Level III measures behavioral changes or retention of knowledge on the job which is managed with our blended learning model. It is much easier to do with onsite deliverables, as we can gain access to the people and measure their application of knowledge on the job. It is more difficult to do in a public seminar model, but we do have some initiatives in 2006 to measure behavior change and retention with such assessments as simulations.
- Level IV is return-on-investment. We plan on moving towards this in the future. Once we had decided on our core strategic targets and the Kirkpatrick Model as our frame of reference, we began to build our blended learning offering. One of the most important steps was to decide on the technical platform to host, build, manage, and distribute web-based learning. After much consideration and a lengthy RFP process, we decided on OutStart LCMS. We are currently using the OutStart LCMS platform with no customization.

### THE SOLUTION

The AMA Blended Learning Solution consists of three main components delivered online:

#### Prepare the Learner

- Learners review seminar objectives before the seminar. We also ask them to align their expectations with their manager's expectations.
- We assess pre-existing knowledge to create a baseline for measuring transfer of learning, and to pin-point areas of development and strength.
- We create a dynamic development plan, based on assessment results, and on learner feedback on their personal and organizational goals.

Learners registered for a course will receive an email that explains accessibility and provides a username and password. Once they enter the site, they land on 'My Courses', which is personalized to show courses the student can access as well as any special notifications. To launch a course, the learner clicks on the name of the course.

“Courses which use online assessment tools; average pre-seminar assessment score is around 45 and the post-seminar scores tend to be in the high 80's.”



### CASE STUDY:

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We use a three-step pre-course approach to help our learners prepare to get the most from their course.

## Step 1:

### *Review the Seminar Outline and Objectives.*

We chose to provide links to seminar outlines and objectives, as this information is constantly changing. This information is external to OutStart LCMS: a lot of it is re-usable and easy-to-build, and we only update it in one central place. We simply add links into the OutStart LCMS system as needed.

## Step 2:

### *Take your Assessment.*

Each assessment is different, and averages about 35 questions. In the material we do explain that the learner may likely score low. If they score high, we then suggest they look at a more advanced course.

## Step 3:

### *Complete and Print your Learning Plan.*

Each seminar has key learning topics – it is these learning objectives that we measure against. The learning plan is dynamically generated based on the learners assessment results, and identifies areas for improvement as well as areas of existing proficiency in the learning topics of the seminar.

Participants are given access to the environment three weeks before the seminar takes place, so they have sufficient time to accomplish their pre-seminar work.

## The Learning Seminar

The seminar experience is delivered in one of our many offices, or customized and delivered onsite.

## Post-Seminar Components

Once the seminar has been completed, the learners have access to the post-seminar environments. Learners enter the site in the same way with their username and password. This environment provides several key elements:

- Measure the transfer of learning through a Level II assessment
- Identify any knowledge gaps
- Close knowledge gaps by providing tune-up courses, which are focused web-based refresher content
- Support their learning with online resource materials
- Measure behavior change and knowledge retention for on-site clients

The post-seminar assessment is the same as the pre-course assessment, and identifies any gaps in knowledge. If learners don't score adequately, they are given a tune-up course. In fact, it's not uncommon in a three-day seminar that learners are not going to be able to retain all knowledge. The post-seminar assessment identifies areas where knowledge gaps exist, and the system dynamically generates a tune-up course based on the key learning topics that were flagged during the learner's post-seminar assessment.

Courses which use online assessment tools; average pre-seminar assessment score is around 45 and the post-seminar scores tend to be in the high 80's.

## Tune-Up Courses

Tune-up courses are one of the key elements to our blended learning offering. They are focused, interactive, engaging and are designed to close knowledge gaps. The ultimate goal is to give learners 100% mastery of learning content.

One of the key reasons we selected OutStart LCMS is that the core functionality of the product has the capability to dynamically generate content for tune-up courses based on learner assessments. We like the fact that this functionality is part of the core product and does not require customization.

Also, we provide pre- and post-seminar reports for public seminars and onsite clients, and have the ability to provide custom reports for onsite clients.

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## THE RESULTS

With our blended learning solution, we have a lot of flexibility to create more customization.

- Flexible Content: Add content to the pre- and post-seminar environment to more thoroughly prepare learners for the seminar. This can include company specific information such as policies and procedures.
- Make the pre-seminar qualification more robust, and follow-up with pre-seminar tune-up courses to align the basic concepts or to ensure that attendees meet the course prerequisites.
- Use a variety of media in our tune-up courses, including graphics, sound and video.
- Add organizational specific application measurement tools, such as 360-degree feedback or specific evaluations.

With our blended learning solution, the AMA has moved from event-based learning to a continuous learning model. This provides significant benefits to the learner and the company.

## Benefits to the Learners

Our blended learning solution provides many benefits for learners, which ultimately results in increased performance on the job:

- Align all expectations before embarking on the training
- Obtain additional learning materials
- Acquire 100% mastery of seminar content
- Measure knowledge retention and close knowledge gaps
- Enable the system to support the learner back on the job

## Benefits to the Company

Equally as important, our solution provides significant benefits to the organization:

- Provide measurement data that supports the buying decision and helps the organization identify their return-on-investment.
- Achieve increased value - rather than purchasing a two or three-day seminar; the company has a six month investment in a seminar.
- Align learners with the content, so the organization can be assured that the learners know what to expect before they attend a seminar.

- Measure knowledge retention and provide means to close learners knowledge gaps
- Support the learners after the live event, which assists in increased retention of the learning content.

## About OutStart

You view knowledge sharing between your employees, partners, and customers as a strategic priority. Their knowledge leads to your success. OutStart's portfolio of inter-related mobile, social, and learning Knowledge Solutions accelerate and broaden access to colleagues and the knowledge they need to respond to business requirements more quickly and make better informed decisions. Together you excel. Recognized as a Visionary in Gartner's Magic Quadrant reports for the last seven years, OutStart is regularly acknowledged for its award-winning solutions including OutStart LCMS; Participate, social business software that integrates social networking, collaboration and knowledge sharing technologies; Hot Lava Mobile to develop, deliver & analyze high impact mobile learning; OutStart LMS, a full featured, configurable learning management system; and TrainingEdge.com an affordable learning & knowledge suite for the Enterprise that extends LMS and traditional elearning to support informal, social & mobile learning.

For insight into customer implementations, best practices, industry news and more, visit the OutStart Knowledge Solutions Blog, and follow us on Twitter @outstart.

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## CASE STUDY: