

Train Anytime, Anywhere

A new tool makes training a seamless addition to your day

Making time for training is hard. Sessions tend to break up the work cycle, and it can be boring to your salespeople and expensive to boot. But when your sales force needs new or refreshed selling techniques or a tutorial on a new product, there might be no option but to take sellers out of the field and put them into a classroom.

Until recently, that is. A training company based in St. Louis, ej4, has been developing "nano-training" programs since 2003. Most sessions are 10 minutes or less, making time out of the field a nonissue. They can be viewed as a video or DVD, streamed online, or downloaded to a PDA, cell phone, or video iPod. (The "nano" moniker derives from the measurement prefix in science, and refers to the courses' extremely compact form.)

The mini sessions feature traditional computer slide shows with a host (often Ken Cooper, cofounder of the company) expounding on the material. Cooper's clients choose the topics and collaborate with ej4 on the production of the sessions. A course costs between \$5,000 and \$15,000 to produce, and can generally be made in about a week, or even a day, if need be.

Ej4 helped Agilis Systems Inc., a software company also based in St. Louis, train 1,500 new sellers dispersed throughout the country. Last year, Agilis developed a global positioning system tracking ability for Sprint cell phones. The Sprint sales force became reps for Agilis in the deal, but without any formal training on the system. For them, ej4's system was the ideal solution. The program was more time-efficient and less expensive than in-person training would have been.

Agilis made six training sessions for Sprint, which allow reps to study up on their specific weaknesses right before a sale.

"The timeliness of [nano-learning]—being able to watch it just before you go in for a sales call—is key," says Dan Hubar, CEO of Agilis. "You walk in with more confidence."

Hubar also says the short video format is conducive to the sales team's learning style.

"We're used to very short soundbites of information. We're just not geared to anything longer," he says.

Buffalo Rock Company, a Pepsi-Cola bottler based in Pensacola, Florida, also has integrated nano-training. The entire staff now takes 12 to 20 sessions a year. Forty-two other Pepsi bottlers use the ej4 system, and together, they have developed an extensive library: The staff has access to about 200 individual training programs.

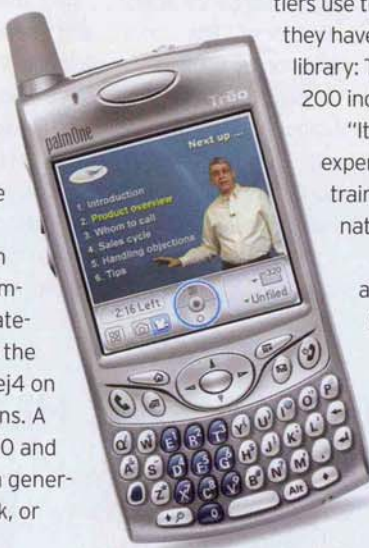
"It's been a really great learning experience," says Scott Grisset, the training and quality control coordinator for Buffalo Rock.

Buffalo Rock truck drivers also act as sales reps, negotiating with buyers and vying for optimum placement in stores. The training sessions offer a convenient way for the drivers, who typically work 12-hour shifts, to improve their skills.

The extensive training system also offers an opportunity for staff development. Employees hoping to advance can take additional courses, which allows the staff to show their interest in a new job while giving them the practical knowledge they would need for the position.

Like any online tool, ej4's success depends on in-person integration. "You absolutely need the supervisor reinforcing the behavior," Cooper says. Ej4 also provides training for sales managers on how to reinforce, in person, the nano-training sessions.

—Rebecca Aronauer



S&MM PULSE

Think training is expensive? It can be, but it also turns out to be a good long-term investment. The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) found that companies that spend more on training have a higher median total stockholder return (TSR) the following year than companies that skimp on employee development. Firms that spend more than average on training have a TSR that is **45 percent** higher than firms that spend the market average, and **86 percent** higher than firms that spend less than market average. And ongoing training benefits more than just shareholders. ASTD also found that organizations offering ongoing training to their salespeople are **10 times** more likely to create peak-performing salespeople than companies that don't.

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