



ELEARNING

MEETING THE TRAINING NEEDS OF YOUR BUSINESS

Every business has training needs, but whether or not they meet those needs is a different issue. Nowadays, businesses need to rethink the way they conduct training. In addition to providing correspondence-based learning, face-to-face education and regional seminars, the Water Quality Association (WQA) recently put one more tool in the toolbox for water businesses in search of quality training—online learning. This new offering saves businesses time and money while helping meet the demand for in-house training.

Today's Customer

Although your customers are more aware of their water than ever before, it does not mean they are better informed about water. Much of the information they receive on water problems or issues comes from the media. The majority of that information is distilled down to a popular “sound-bite.” They know about water treatment technologies, but do not necessarily understand the differences between one technology or another. To consumers, all treatment devices tend to be “filters.” They also have fears about the “stuff” in water—some of which are well-founded, and others not. However, this same consumer does seek information on water and water treatment, and trusts those who can explain things in a way that is easily understood.

The customer's appetite for information demands that all water treatment professionals stay ahead of the water issues bombarding

consumers, and become capable of correcting, or better directing, the customer's understanding of the issue. It also demands staying ahead of your competition—providing better service to distinguish you from “the others.” This, in turn, requires that your staff understands many issues and is able to convey them during contact with the customer.

Better Learning

Most of us remember very well the better presentations or classes we

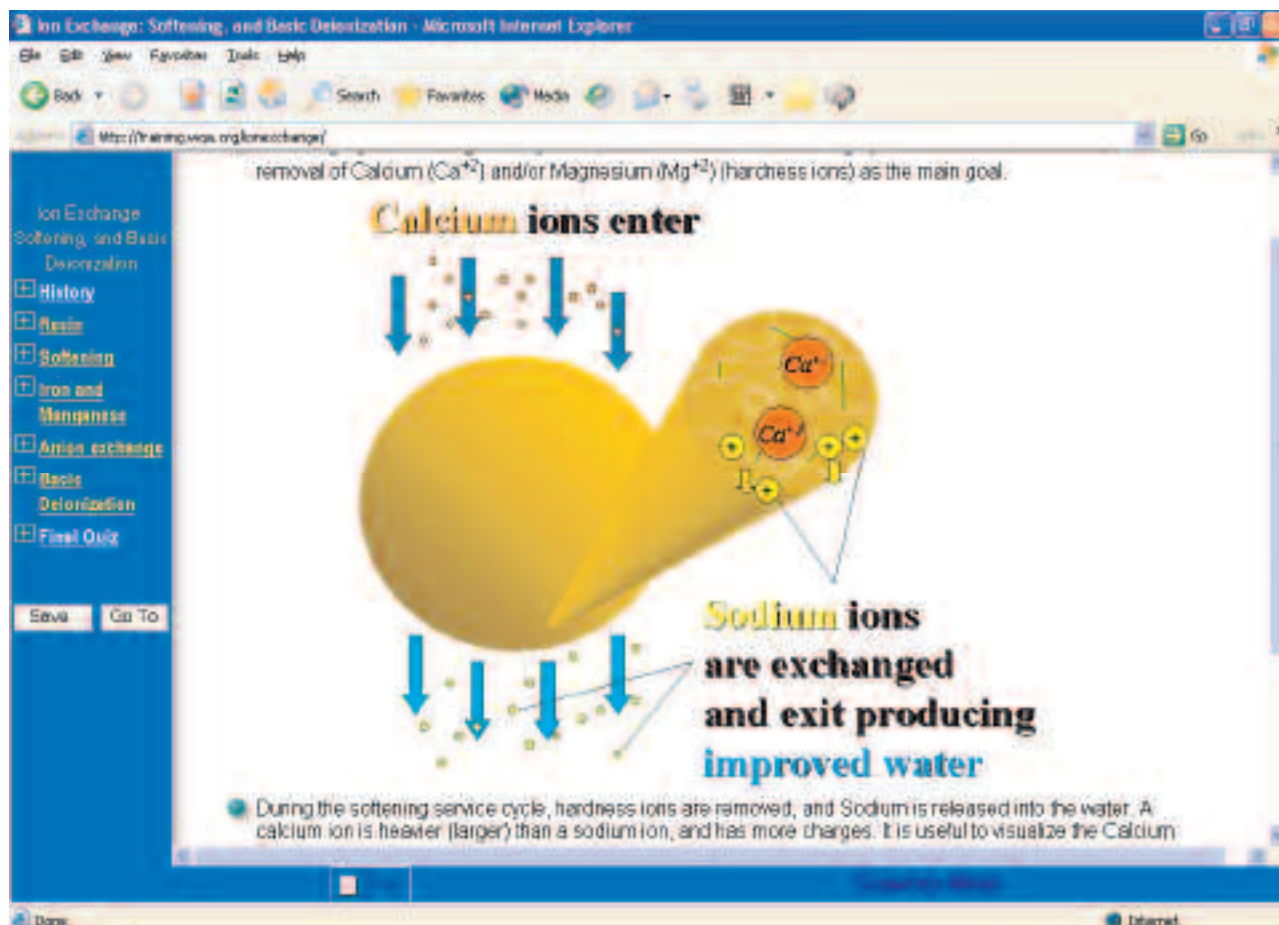
have taken on a subject. The best presentations are those that touch on as many of our five senses as possible (or practical) while not droning on too long. Presentations that contain text, audio, periodic written quizzes and illustrations, pictures or animations tend to serve the widest audience of learning types. These elements work together to break up the monotony of book learning or sitting in a classroom and provide different way to keep the learner “on his/her toes.”

E-learning

One way of pulling all of these elements

together is electronic learning or E-learning. E-learning is one example of better learning. Visuals, combined with short bullet-points of information, animations or step-wise visuals, which show concepts better than the static page. And short diversions, which periodically check a student's understanding such as quizzes, are all used to enhance the student's recall of information. These tactics are good practice, especially compared to the simple book alternative.

Another welcome feature often used in E-learning is links to “diversions” for



E-Learning gives the user access at any time.

extra study on particular aspects of a subject. These features are incorporated for students wanting to learn even more about a particular facet and are very useful, but are not necessarily required.

E-learning educational modules go beyond just the theoretical and can also present real-world illustrations of a concept. For example, in WQA's Basic Water Chemistry module, during discussion of ions in water and conductivity, a break-away segment shows photos of a common experiment where water is used to complete an electrical circuit containing a light bulb. The photos show that the circuit is completed (light bulb glowing brightly) by a saltwater solution (water having high dissolved solids content) much better than the case involving distilled water (very low dissolved solids content). The demonstration helps deliver the concept of dissolved ions and the idea of a TDS meter being able to gauge dissolved solids content of a water based on its conductivity.

In addition to being a more effective type of learning, based on peoples' varied learning types, E-learning is more effective because it can be completely self-paced. Users can access it at any time of day or night as long as a computer is available. Thus, the student has more time to digest the information and can re-visit the information if something was not clear the first time. This feature is much better than having students leave a classroom or session empty-handed.

Time and Money

In addition to the above benefits, the recent launch of WQA's E-learning program is designed to save businesses time and money. E-learning becomes even more attractive when the high cost of face-to-face learning is considered (course fees, downtime and productivity loss, travel expense, other reimbursements, etc.).

Successful Implementation

As stated previously, E-learning should be used as a tool for your business. Despite its advantages, it should not completely replace other forms of learning and should be used in balance with other training offerings (face-to-face, workbooks, etc.). But based on the inherent savings that come with E-learning, consider giving students (your employees) time to start modules for a scheduled time in the office. They will value the fact that you are willing to invest in them and will take their education more seriously.

At first you may want to be present to

answer questions as they use in-office time. Over time, you will be able to "cut them loose" during a regularly scheduled time devoted to learning or study. Even two hours a month at a specific time is better than nothing. Eventually, they will want to continue their learning at home. Doing so will help your organization run better both

internally and externally.



or by E-mail at mrowzee@mail.wqa.org.

About the Author

Mark Rowzee is the education director for the Water Quality Association where he coordinates education activities for the association and the WQA Aquatech USA trade show event. He may be reached by phone at 630 505 0160 ext. 513

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