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Managing the Technology and Administration of Modern Training: *Expertus – A Focused and Growing Solution Provider*

About the Author



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The corporate training outsourcing business is served by many companies of various types:

- **End-to-End Outsourcers** – Like Accenture, IBM and ACS that focus on outsourcing entire training functions or departments to help transform organizations;
- **Functional and Program Service Providers** – Like Intrepid, NIIT / Cognitive Arts, RWD, General Physics, Intrepid Learning Solutions and Raytheon Professional Services that provide content development, delivery, technology, administration and end-to-end program management for strategic programs and initiatives;
- **Customer Content Developers** – Like Allen Communications, Enspire, NIIT, Tata Interactive, Mzinga and dozens of others that focus on providing content development solutions for a wide range of programs; and,
- **Content Providers** – Like SkillSoft, ElementK, GlobalKnowledge, Harvard Publishing, Ninth House and many others that provide libraries of content for topics (like leadership and IT), as well as in functional areas.

In each of these four areas, there are many solution providers, each focusing on different industries, geographies, organization sizes and functional areas.

But there is also another fast-growing service provider in this market that we have been learning about, Expertus¹. A 500-person corporate training solution provider, Expertus built its business out of some extensive and deep levels of experience in the implementation and operations of Cisco's and ADP's learning management systems (LMSs).

The Challenges of Training Technology and Administration

Today, more than 30 percent of corporate training is delivered through some form of e-learning and more than 40 percent of the organizations we speak with are trying to rapidly implement what we call "learning on-demand." As a result, the technology infrastructure and underlying systems for corporate learning have become mission-critical.

In the past, the term "learning management system" referred to the system that was used for the administration and reporting of formal training and traditional e-learning courses. In today's environment, however, organizations need far more. From a learning platform standpoint, organizations need:

- A dynamic online learning platform that stores formal training, e-learning, supporting materials and access to online communities of experts;
- as well as a system that:
 - Can have two identities:
 - o One as an internal employee learning platform, and
 - o A completely different system that can meet the needs of customer training, partner training and reseller training;
 - Can provide highly flexible pricing, packaging and delivery options for customer education, using many of the classes and programs also used by internal employees;
 - Can be "simplified" for many audiences with only a few buttons and programs available, but also provides a wide range of learning offerings for other audiences;

¹ For more information, please visit www.expertus.com.

- Must be integrated with the corporation's social networking, content management and collaboration systems; and,
- Supports multiple learning "portals" that may be integrated with the corporate HR portal, as well as portals for customer service employees, salespeople or functional portals – providing access to the learning catalog and other learning offerings without forcing users to "log in to the LMS."

From an administration standpoint, there are also a myriad of opportunities for corporate learning organizations to improve and add value. In particular, today's modern training organization must provide:

- User help desk support for enrollment, cancellation, pricing and logistics of training programs;
- Scheduling of classrooms, facilities, instructors and resources;
- Optimization of expensive resources (like classrooms, and training equipment and simulation systems), so that classes are not too small or located in expensive locations;
- Optimization of student travel to avoid employees flying all over the world to attend courses that should be offered in other locations;
- Production, shipping, and the restocking of books, printed materials and other learning support;
- Analysis of the usage of e-learning and other online courses to optimize spending on external content providers; and,
- Detailed analysis of course utilization, completion, satisfaction and other metrics to continuously optimize the course mix, instructor quality and content strategy.

When you add up all these things, our research shows that high-impact training organizations often spend 20 percent to 30 percent of their total budgets on such technology and administration. As corporate training becomes more and more technology-enabled, this percentage continues to grow.

Enter Expertus

Expertus is a corporate training solution provider focused on training technology and administration. While the company also develops content, its core focus and expertise are on optimizing training efficiency.

The company gained its experience in this area from many years of helping large enterprise customers grapple with the complexity of implementing, operating and optimizing the use of their LMSs. Since then, the company has helped Cisco, EMC, ADP, Honeywell, Schlumberger and other organizations improve and optimize their LMS and learning technology investments.

Because Expertus focuses on training technology and efficiency, the company has built several innovative solutions that we believe are important to this market.

- Expertus has built a “learning system portal” and a series of “widgets” that enable organizations to improve the user experience (when browsing the course catalog, enrolling in courses, purchasing courses and other LMS functions in a programmatic way) without formally logging into the LMS. The outcome is a better user experience that translates into increased registrations for internal training, and increased revenue for customer and channel partner training. These widgets can be easily used to add learning and LMS functionality to any type of portal – a customer support portal, an internal HR portal or a functional portal. This important technology fits into our “learning on-demand” architecture, enabling the LMS to be a “back-office system” providing services to a user-centric application.
- Expertus has built a complete training analytics system and data warehouse solution, called *Total Visibility*, which enables larger training organizations to see all of their training administration and evaluation data, so they can make better business decisions. This solution (which uses some of our research on the design and need for training analytics) enables companies to quickly identify many areas for improvement, such as:

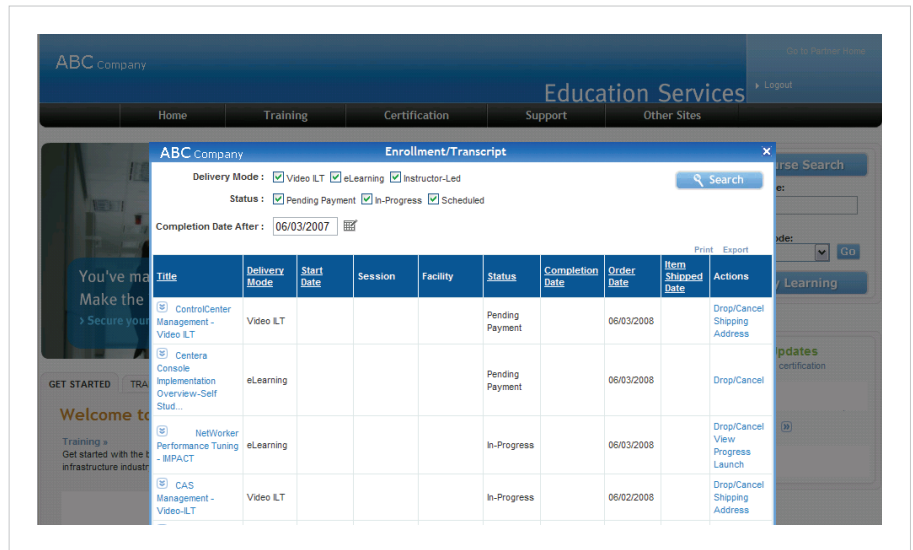
- o Classes with low enrollments;
- o Courses that are underutilized; and,
- o Instructors or e-learning programs with high or low satisfaction ratings.

It is designed to help training organizations build a dynamic “dashboard” of their training operations.

- Expertus has built a series of corporate training “business workflows,” called the *Learning Process Encyclopedia*, which model the processes that occur in modern learning organizations. These include well-designed processes for course publishing, enrollment, scheduling, sale, purchase and more. These processes enable companies to select and implement their LMS in a far more efficient way – and also help companies improve efficiency when they already have such processes in place.
- Expertus provides outsourcing services and staff to outsource administrative functions.

Figure 1 shows an example of how Expertus’ LMS widgets enable a company to expose and deliver learning programs through an existing

Figure 1: Example of LMS Integration into Customer Education Portal



Source: Expertus, 2008.

portal. As this image shows, the user clicks on a link, which then sends a message to the LMS – and the resulting information is displayed in a popup window, which allows the user to browse the course catalog, enroll in a course, pay for a course or launch a program.

While Expertus is not the only company that offers such services (RWD, GeneralPhysics, Mzinga, Accenture, ACS and others provide such services), we believe the company is unique because it takes an “innovative” approach to the training market. The company has a strong software development team in India; Expertus regularly takes on the role of “general contractor” for corporate training, and can apply its innovative technologies toward the big issue of training operations and efficiency.

The Growing Need for Optimization in Training Technology and Administration

Many years ago, KnowledgePlanet (now named Mzinga) pioneered the concepts of “running training like a business,” and providing focused technology and service solutions to help L&D optimize its operational efficiency. Many of today’s LMS companies now offer “Software as a Service” (SaaS) as a tool to help.

But the market has evolved. Now, modern training organizations are grappling with new issues, such as:

- How to deal with mountains of e-learning and other forms of content;
- How to build social networks and integrate formal learning into many other corporate portals;
- How to take their existing LMS and “transform it” into a more flexible, user-centric system; and,
- How to build learning solutions that meet the needs of customer training, customer education and customer support.

Companies like Expertus, Accenture and ACS (which take a process and technology-based approach to corporate learning) help fill this need.