Dispelling the myths & misconecptions about virtual instructor-led training (VILT)

Before training departments can make the move from traditional, in-person training to virtual instructor-led training (VILT), they need to understand the virtual classroom, the value of virtual training and how this type of training actually works.

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From Misunderstandings to Myths and Realities

Virtual training software gives students the freedom to learn from wherever is most convenient for them—and makes learning accessible to everyone. By removing the geographical barriers to learning, virtual training software helps enhance product adoption, career development and knowledge of offerings—without sacrificing the instructor's teaching effectiveness.

But virtual instructor-led training (VILT) is misunderstood by many. And with this misunderstanding comes common myths about what virtual training is—and is not. Here is a closer look at some of the fallacies and realities.

Myth 1

VILT is not as interactive/collaborative as traditional, in-person classroom training

Many believe that face-to-face training allows instructors to implement successful strategies to keep students involved and engaged, which encourages better results. At the same time, many students believe that virtual training is basically just watching presentations and videos, without the engagement and interactivity that's available in an in-person class. Consequently, VILT students must possess a great deal of self-discipline and focus in order to learn.

Facts

In fact, today's most innovative virtual training software includes features that make virtual classrooms the same or better than real-life classroom environments, making it very easy for instructors to provide effective learning experiences for students. For example:

- Virtual training labs (also known as hosted labs) allow for hands-on exercises and practice examples.
- Emoticons and Engagement Monitor allow instructors to check on how students are doing.
- Public Chat allows back-and-forth communication with the entire class.
- Help Queue allows instructors to prioritize students who need assistance.
- Whiteboard allows instructors to draw, write and load images that can be used during a whiteboard session.
- Private Chat allows an instructor to have a one-on-one, private conversation with a student.
- Screen Share allows instructors to share their desktop with students, or share a student's desktop with the entire classroom.
- Group Management allows instructors to break out the class into smaller groups for group assignments.

The bottom line is that virtual training software provides a nearly identical teaching experience for instructors—and arguably a better learning experience for students. The innovative virtual training tools that make up virtual training software have taken instructor-student interactions to a new level.

Myth 2

VILT does not provide hands-on interaction with the software

Many believe that online training classes are only made up of lectures and PowerPoints—and they don't include any interaction with the actual software being taught.

Facts

Online training can include virtual training labs—also known as hosted labs or hosted training. Although optional, these virtual training labs are critical in replicating realistic situations that teach students the skills they need when they are finally working on the actual software back at their desks.

Because learning by doing has been proven to create a much higher knowledge retention than just listening and watching, the combination of VILT and virtual training labs helps students achieve performance fluency in several ways:

- VILT provides numerous virtual training tools, such as Whiteboards and Breakout Groups, which help instructors effectively guide students through the course curriculum.
- After sharing the theory, instructors can screen share with students—showing them how to use the product/application.
- After screen sharing, instructors can give students hands-on exercises using virtual training labs. This hands-on practice can help students get the real-life skills they need to succeed in their jobs.
- If students need help or have questions during the hands-on exercises, instructors can take over a student's system and get them back on track.

It is important for students to experience practical hands-on exercises to prepare them for real-life scenarios they will face when they're back at work. Virtual training labs emulate the way humans are meant to learn—which is by doing. By incorporating virtual training labs into a VILT course, instructors can help students become high performers.

Myth 3

VILT is not a cost-effective alternative to in-person training

Many believe that implementing an online training program does not provide any ROI for organizations.

Facts

Training departments actually save a significant amount of money from online training. In fact, companies can save between $9,550 and $15,870 by moving one course from a traditional classroom to VILT. This includes the cost of technology, travel and transportation costs.

According to a Tagoras report, Association Learning and Technology, the cost differences are greatest for employees who work across several work sites, where travel is required, and for mid-level and senior- level employees, where the "opportunity cost of time off task" is greatest.

And for employees working at one work site—with no travel requirements—the cost savings of VILT represent effective savings of $1,910 to $2,535 per training session.

In addition, online training can actually increase an organization's revenue. In fact, the Tagoras report found roughly half of associations that use technology for learning purposes have been able to increase their net revenue from educational offerings.

Myth 4

In-person training is easier for students and instructors

Despite the growth of VILT, many students prefer the traditional classroom setting because they believe it is easier to learn in a classroom rather than online.

Facts

However, the opposite is true:

- On average, students in online learning situations performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction (Source: U.S. Department of Education).
- VILT offers convenience and flexibility because students can attend instructor-led courses from home or attend self-paced courses anytime and from anywhere.
- With VILT, there is no inconvenience from travel, such as missing important family events, missing actual work, managing lost productivity from traveling to training locations, and dealing with the stress of being away from home.

In fact, according to Scott Cohen, Deputy Director of Research at the University of Surrey School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, business travel causes a great deal of negative effects. His study, titled *A Darker Side of Hypermobility*, found that frequent business travelers:

- Age faster
- Have weaker immune systems
- Are out of shape
- Are at a higher risk for obesity
- Have a higher risk of mental health issues

And finally, in-person, face-to-face training forces students to sit through the entire curriculum—even when they only need to attend some of the training. With VILT, students can pick and choose which sections of the curriculum to focus on.

Myth 5

Moving to VILT is a huge undertaking for an organization

Many people believe that transitioning from traditional training to virtual training is a huge endeavor for organizations. They expect the transition to involve many confusing and time-intensive steps, as well as numerous different departments.

Facts

The opposite is true. Moving from an in-person training delivery to VILT is quite simple with a four easy steps:

1. **Select your virtual classroom tool:** there are numerous online meeting tools available to organizations that are free and easy to use. However, an online meeting is quite different from online training—and these differences require different features and capabilities.

   For example, in most meetings, individuals speak whenever they want, and audio is constantly in full duplex. But in a training environment, it would be very disruptive for students to interrupt while the instructor is lecturing on a complex subject that requires full concentration.

   The bottom line is that a virtual classroom is not the same as an online meeting tool. ReadyTech's virtual classroom tool is built from the ground up, specifically for training delivery—and should be part of your product evaluation.

2. **Make your virtual training labs available online:** in-person IT training delivery commonly requires students to work on pre-installed desktops in the classroom. But for VILT delivery, this is not an option, so labs must be available online.

   While you may consider building a virtual lab solution in-house, you will quickly realize this is not a good solution. Building this entails a lot more than setting up a hypervisor server and assigning a public IP address to a virtual machine. Instead, it is a very complicated and expensive undertaking that requires a great deal of expertise to develop a very basic solution.

Consequently, it is vital to rely on an experienced virtual lab provider, such as ReadyTech, to help you develop virtual training labs. You can either upload your existing virtual machines or software images—or quickly build it directly on our platform. Once your image is setup, scheduling VILT classes is simple via our lab automation system.

3. **Add VILT-specific slides to your existing in-person slide decks:** in most cases, you can use the exact same slide decks for VILT and in-person delivery. It is a good idea to add a few slides to the course introduction that explains how the virtual classroom and virtual training labs work from a student's point of view. This will boost students' confidence in using a tool that might be completely new to them—and improve class participation throughout the course.

4. **Ask instructors to practice via role play:** It is important for instructors to run some practice classes. Each participant should play the instructor, as well as the student, to become familiar with the various features that instructors and students can access.

Myth 6

Students become unproductive and distracted when using VILT

It is a common belief that human interaction is vital for learning. By being in a room, face-to-face with others, students can take part in detailed discussions, lively debates and hear viewpoints not yet considered. In addition, some believe it is easier to meet, interact and network with students in a traditional classroom setting (Source: The Training Edge).

Facts

Participation and peer-to-peer learning are integral parts of virtual training software. The VILT platform allows instructors to effectively teach students and, when appropriate, allows students to collaborate and communicate with one another.

For example, the Thumbnail View enables instructors to see all students' remote desktops in a single screen at all times during the class—allowing instructors to see where students are in their exercises or which students are struggling. The Live View feature allows an instructor to zoom in on a specific student's screen and offer personalized help.

For students, there are several virtual training tools available to help them connect—visually and vocally—such as Public Chat, Private Chat, Emoticons, Audio and Webcam.

Myth 7

VILT requires tech-savvy students

Many students who are unfamiliar and uncomfortable with VILT believe that they need to be extremely tech savvy or own special equipment to participate in online training programs.

Facts

If you have used web conferencing tools such as WebEx, GoToMeeting, FaceTime or Skype, you will be quite comfortable with online courses. After just a few minutes, many students master the simple processes needed to be successful in a virtual classroom.

While students do need basic technology skills (such as how to connect to the Internet and navigate a browser), many tools are quite easy to use. And many platforms offer tutorials and help guides in case of problems.

In addition, many training organizations include an assistant instructor or producer during their online courses. Assistant instructors enable the primary instructor to focus on delivering the course content, while the assistant instructor can focus on troubleshooting any technical issues that students encounter or assist students with lab-related questions.

And finally, ReadyTech provides 24/7 Support to all instructors and students using our virtual training software. This means that if students encounter technical issues, students can contact ReadyTech—ensuring a fast return to their online course.

Myth 8

VILT classrooms are merely physical classrooms online

A common misconception is that VILT classrooms are merely physical classrooms that exist online.

Facts

VILT provides many types of virtual training tools that are not available in the physical classroom. And ReadyTech's tools offer a great deal of value compared to traditional training. For example:

- Virtual Training Labs allow instructors to assign hands-on exercises to students. These hands-on exercises give students the practical training they need to work on the actual software. In addition, virtual training labs have the added benefit of not requiring any installs or plugins.
- Private and Public Chat allows instructors to communicate back and forth with individual students—or with the entire class. ReadyTech's Chat features also allows instructors to search the history from previous chats, which is useful for multi-day courses.
- With Whiteboard, instructors can draw and write on the whiteboard, as well as demonstrate flowcharts, process maps and IT configurations. ReadyTech's Whiteboard feature also accepts custom image libraries.
- With the Screen Sharing feature, instructors can share their desktop or a student's desktop with the class.

VILT courses also go through a specific design process that ensures not only that the course is well organized, but that the course content is delivered in a way that conforms to best practices for virtual classrooms.

About ReadyTech

ReadyTech provides sophisticated, yet easy-to-use training delivery solutions. Our 25 years in the training business has helped us design feature-rich solutions that global training organizations use to deliver great training.

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