

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EBSCO expands the concept of learning content to include summaries of business books and articles from leading journals and business publications. This combination of content is unique to the corporate learning space. Using business periodicals and book summaries provides a significant return on investment (ROI) to the learning department and the company as a whole.

EBSCO Learning Content can be applied to a variety of learning applications, from formal to informal, from instructor-led to online.

### Formal Learning:

- EBSCO Learning Content enhances an investment in an LMS.
- EBSCO Learning Content is SCORM compliant.
- EBSCO Learning Content can be used as discreet learning content objects (LCO), or included in other LCOs.

Instructional designers can identify EBSCO learning content articles and summaries to include as “related reading” before, after, or during an in-class training course.

### Informal Learning:

- EBSCO Learning Content can be integrated into non-LMS learning portals, including SharePoint and departmental intranets.
- EBSCO fosters performance support by enabling learners to search the EBSCO learning content independently, and at any time.
- EBSCO provides access via PDA so individuals may access learning content when in transit, or at other times when they are apt to use their PDA.

### E-learning:

- EBSCO content is fully e-learning capable, being completely digitized and designed for precise online search and retrieval.
- EBSCO content is available in XML format.
- EBSCO content supports mobile learning, and all of the content is accessible via PDAs and Smartphones via the EBSCOhost Mobile application.

### EBSCO Learning content consists of the following elements:

- 1,300+ Business Book Summaries, with new summaries added continuously.
- Concise overviews for over 200 soft skill competencies.
- Over 5 million full text articles from over 4,000 business and technical journals and periodicals. Only EBSCO offers this aggregation of immediately accessible full text business content.
- EBSCO provides immediate full text access to business periodicals such as *Forbes*, *Fortune*, *The Economist*, and (with an Extended Use License) *Harvard Business Review*. These sources are ranked among the top business journals each year, and they are available to corporate learning programs via EBSCO’s targeted Learning Centers or the flagship *Business Source* database. These are the leading publications of their type and their quality of the content is demonstrated by the reputation of periodicals.
- EBSCO business content is as current as the publications themselves. Full text from a leading business periodical appears in the EBSCO database within a few days, fully indexed and ready for learning use.
- EBSCO learning content is indexed and abstracted to enable precise discovery of the most relevant material.
- EBSCO learning content is designed for adult learning support. EBSCO is the leading learning content provider to over 95% of all colleges and universities in North America, and we leverage that experience to bring learning content to the corporate training space.

## ROI AND IOB

### Demonstrating the Benefit of Learning Content in Corporate Learning

Corporate Learning initiatives may be measured with two methods: Return on Investment (ROI) and Impact on Business (IOB). Both methods have their place in understanding the benefit of corporate content in corporate learning, and of corporate learning programs in general.

ROI is best used when examining activities that can be

measured using accepted financial accounting principles. That is, define clearly what you are measuring with the ROI calculation, and what you are *not* measuring with it. In the corporate learning area, ROI can focus on these measurable items:

- **Performance gain.** This is a proxy for revenue gains, which are tough to track directly back to a corporate learning activity. However, performance improvement, when defined by reviewing specific metrics of individual or department activity, is measurable.
- **Process savings:** This is a proxy for resources and time savings from learners, when they apply their learning in their jobs.
- **Administrative savings:** This estimates the savings in the corporate learning department itself, through more efficient instructional design and delivery.

It is generally easier to measure *savings* due to a program or initiative, rather than *revenues* generated by it. This is because we know our costs (at least we are supposed to) and we can see how those costs change due to specific actions we take. There tends to be less direct correlation between a specific action taken and the sale of a product so calculating revenue enhancement is more challenging (and more easily challenged) in an ROI exercise.

The dissociation of the ROI estimator from the corporate learning process poses another challenge. In a sense, ROI is designed to reduce a project to the numbers, so that project can be compared to any other project. In this way, we transform the apples and oranges to a common substance, and do our comparison with that. The analogy is apt, because in reducing the corporate learning process to numbers, we lose sight of the real benefits of learning in the company. In a similar way, it is difficult to directly show the positive ROI for using business periodicals as learning content, other than to point out the factors that are listed below. The simple fact is that the person using the ROI outcomes may not be familiar with corporate learning, and so lacks appreciation for the other benefits from learning.

Impact on Business (IOB) can be used where the measurements are not definable using accepted financial accounting principles. The Impact on Business concept is better used to show long-term performance gain or process savings. IOB also works best when comparing results over time. The relative shift in costs or revenues can be discovered, and the impact that learning had on that shift can be identified through end-user feed back, and some simple econometrics where the corporate learning “variable” is tested against the other variables that impact revenue.

For this paper, we will focus on the ROI method, and concentrate on the savings opportunities that learning content can provide.

## Learning Content is Critical to Corporate Learning ROI

According to Mark Helliger, (“The ROI of Reusable Content” *CLO*, July 2008) *CLO Magazine* columnist Bob Mosher argues the most effective and long-lasting training results follow the “20/30/50 model.” That is, a “blended” learning approach is best, with 20 percent in-class training, 30 percent e-learning, and 50 percent performance support.”

The author goes on to state that most corporate learning programs are about 60% in class with an ongoing effort to convert the in-class learning material to e-learning materials.

### ROI Factor 1: Versatile, re-usable content:

At the most basic level, learning content that is already e-learning ready will provide an immediate benefit as it saves the long term cost of conversion to e-learning capable content. For example, using EBSCO learning content provides the immediate benefit of being adaptable to any e-learning application at any time. This ROI is estimated by determining what the cost of content conversion to e-learning formats and use would otherwise be.

### ROI Factor 2: Content for Dynamic Performance Support

Being able to dynamically create content “on the fly” to integrate into the range of performance support initiatives in an organization provides tremendous ROI benefits. Rather than having to spend time and money trying to create customized learning content, quickly, for a range of competencies, learning content that can be identified immediately by competency or function and immediately made available within the learning environment would provide significant long term savings. The savings results from not having to create new e-learning content, because instructors can re-use existing learning content. In the case of EBSCO Learning Content, articles can be used repeatedly, and new articles can be found immediately using the EBSCOhost search interface.

### ROI Factor 3: The Role of Learning Content in Formal Learning Systems

Formal learning is measurable, able to be evaluated, time-tested and structured. As an example, in 1998, 5.3 million managers attended formal training sessions totaling 166.2 million hours (Bassi & Van Buren, 1999). Formal learning provides a foundation, a baseline of knowledge, for key

topics and objectives that employees need to acquire. Most Global 1000 learning departments have well established formal learning programs, with post-learning surveys to determine how effective the learning program was. The results of those post-learning surveys can be used to help estimate the ROI of the formal learning program.

#### **ROI Factor 4: Learning Content in Informal Learning**

In recent years, many organizations have questioned whether formal training allows managers to keep pace with a constantly changing workplace and economic environment (Tannenbaum, et al, 2006). As such, ongoing training should incorporate informal learning.

Informal learning can be characterized as self-directed, networking, coaching, mentoring, performance planning, and trial & error (Watkins & Marsick, 1992). In 1996, the US Department of Labor estimated that at least 70% of all learning done in any organization can be considered informal. It may be fair to assume that the 70% informal learning estimate by the Department of Labor is vastly underestimated for use in 2009 with the explosion of social networking, advancements in internet technologies and an increased home-based work force. However, just because informal learning is unstructured, experiential and non-institutionalized (Marsick, 1999), does not mean it cannot be proven to be effective.

In 2003, Bell, Enos and Kehrhahn studied the degree to which trainees applied the knowledge, skills and attitudes they gained in training to their jobs. A sample of 84 managers with an average of 10 years experience from a Fortune 100 company participated in this study. The study called for these participants to report whether they best learned the 20 core managerial skills, as identified by the company, from formal training or informal learning experiences. For each of the 20 skills, the majority of participants reported that informal learning best prepared them to learn that skill. In fact, there were only four skills in which those favoring informal learning didn't more than double those favoring learning that skill from a formal training experience. In addition, of those four skills, only 2 were closer than a 60% to 40% ratio of those favoring informal over formal learning.

### **EBSCO Learning Content and Corporate Learning**

#### **Performance Support:**

Precision and Relevance Millions of people surf the open web every day looking for answers to both the simplest

and most complex questions. Search engines like Google are powerful tools. Their ease of use is undeniable. As information users, we have been trained that if you need information, look for it via Google. However, you need to ask yourself these questions when combing through the result lists:

1. Is what I have found authoritative, accurate and unbiased?
2. Is the information I found free or am I going to have to pay to finish reading the entire article?
3. Are the results relevant or are they clouded by results that are just trying to sell me something?

While most employees are probably savvy enough to answer the above questions, can your business afford the time spent by employees on the web? And at the end of the day, all of that time spent still has not provided access to the opinions and studies published by the leading experts in their field.

The International Data Corporation (IDC) performed a study of over 600 companies in 2007 that showed that searching for and accessing content consumed over 24% of a typical information worker's time. They then estimated that from a monetary standpoint, that resulted in a cost of over \$14,000 per year. In addition, the amount of time spent in unsuccessfully searching the web totaled at least 3 ½ hours per week per worker or about \$5,000 per worker.

#### **The EBSCO Solution:**

- **Provide learning departments with a Googlelike search engine, (EBSCOhost) to access pre-selected learning content from the EBSCO learning content repository. This content search utility can be integrated into an LMS, Share-Point or other learning portals.**
- **Via EBSCOhost, your learners can have a single search engine that will allow full-text access the top experts in their field to help support the decisions they are making. As an indication of the value of the EBSCO learning content solution, a very prominent open web company uses us in their corporate university to provide their employees with access to our journals and book summaries to support their learning objectives.**

#### **EBSCO and Formal Learning:**

While informal learning is gaining momentum and corporations are building networks that will allow it to thrive, formal learning undoubtedly still has value and cannot be ignored. It is measurable, able to be evaluated, time-tested, and structured. As such, many corporations have spent millions of dollars on learning management systems, train-

ing programs and e-learning courses. The questions then arise ... Are these costs sustainable, how do you bridge the gap between assigned courses, and keep up with constant changes in today's workplace? The following is a general list of costs assigned to formal learning opportunities:

1. Investment in the training program whether delivered in person or online
2. Travel expense when training is delivered in person
3. Time lost from work when attending training program
4. Reinvestment in training program to keep them updated and current

So while the financial investments are warranted and necessary, how can corporations sustain those costs and maximize their ROI?

#### The EBSCO Solution:

Our approach is three pronged.

- **First, corporations are utilizing the articles and book summaries we provide to help keep the courses they have already invested in up-to-date.**
- **Second, as new learning needs and competencies arise, corporations are utilizing our content to build/develop new courses instead of making additional program purchases.**
- **Third, corporations are assigning articles and book summaries to read before and after the training course to both help establish a learning foundation or to keep what was taught fresh in the minds of their employees. This, again, helps to maximize the investment in the training course by ensuring employees are prepared to learn and/or are extending their initial training so they can transfer what they have learned into their daily responsibilities.**

#### Coaching, Mentoring and Continuous Learning:

Coaching and mentoring is a key element to informal learning. In 2006, Tannenbaum, Eddy, D'Abate, Givens-Skeaton and Robinson researched what characteristics make for an "effective" interaction between mentor and advisee. Their studied demonstrated that in effective interactions the mentor focused on the needs of the advisee and used and encouraged a self-discovery approach. In addition, the interactions were voluntary and occurred over a long period of time. Finally, the advisee seeing the mentor as a "knowledgeable" advisor was key and those mentors were sought out most often. The advisee did not just default to seeking the seeking out their direct supervisor.

#### The EBSCO Solution:

- **Since we have already established our ability to provide vetted, authoritative and relevant results for self-directed learning experiences above, let's focus on fostering employee collaboration and team building. How does the saying go, "the best teacher is experience?" So then how valuable would it be to validate a mentor's point-of-view by referencing an expert in the field; or fostering new ideas based on the latest book or article written? How valuable would it be to include the successes of those who have come before you and to learn from the trials of others?**
- **Our content solutions can be integrated into any RSS feed or email alerts so that the learning is still self-directed, informal, builds a foundation for discussion, and allows all mentors to be seen as knowledgeable.**

#### Integrating Learning Content

Finally, learning content solutions have the maximum impact when that content can enable learning within your organization whenever, however, and wherever needed. Ease of integration in to LMS, SharePoint and other portals is essential. There should be multiple integration options, from SCORM to XML to RSS to persistent links. Whatever the learning application, the learning content, and in particular the business articles, should be able to be accessed from it.

#### The EBSCO Solution:

- **EBSCO Content can be accessed via any of the following learning applications:**
  - LMS integration
  - SharePoint integration
  - Google-like search engine
  - RSS feeds
  - Email alerts
  - Persistent links
- **EBSCO content can be accessed within these learning constructs:**
  - Learning content objects, mapped to learning competencies
  - Targeted reading programs
  - Pre- and post-class reading assignment
  - Benchmarking to develop new classes

At EBSCO, we view the inclusion of business content into learning content objects and other learning content applications, as an evolutionary step in corporate learning. We are taking the proven results of providing learning content to academic users, and transferring that skill to the corporate learning market.

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**For further information, please contact:**

Joseph Tragert  
Senior Director, Market Development  
EBSCO Publishing  
10 Estes Street  
Ipswich, MA 01938  
+800-6532726 ext 2661  
jtragert@ebSCOhost.com

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