

SWIFTSmart IS WIDENING ACCESS AND CUTTING THE COST OF TRAINING

Powerful technology is best operated by well-trained employees. But, at a time when many organisations are facing budget constraints, we recognised that a more practical alternative to on-site training was required. In November, we launched SWIFTSmart, a cloud-based, inter-active, on-line learning service. This platform offers our community a cost effective, convenient solution enabling staff training anytime, anywhere and from any device.

For banks using SWIFT, operational excellence is not a nice-to have. Bankers have to send and receive messages safely and securely, which means all users have to be well-trained. This is why SWIFT has long maintained an in-house training group and a network of third party trainers to coach both new and established users in how to make the best and safest use of its services. So it was a matter of some concern to Dana Brants - head of services marketing at SWIFT headquarters in Brussels, with responsibility for global consulting, training and operational support - that the number of people attending training courses had fallen continuously since 2000. By 2015, numbers had fallen from a peak of more than 18,000 at the turn of the century to just 5,000.

"A number of factors were at work," she says. "Our members wanted more on-site training, but our budgets were under pressure, which made it hard for us to deliver the requisite quality of training that way. The shrinkage in the number of employees at the banks also made it difficult for those that remained to be away from the office for two days or more to attend a training course off site. And the younger generation of employees - the ones who need the training the most - rely on digital technology and multi-media in so many other aspects of their lives that they are increasingly reluctant to attend all-day classes anyway."

Clearly, something had to change. In 2015, Brants took to the board a revolutionary vision of the future of training. "In deciding what to do about the problem of falling numbers, we went back to our core mission, which is to ensure that everybody working with SWIFT at every institution connected to our network has a sound basic knowledge of how to work with us safely and securely," she explains. "Our goal was to deliver that basic training to everybody, while ensuring that the revenues were sufficient for us to maintain the quality. The answer we came up with was to put everything that was mandatory on to an e-learning platform."

Once the board approved the plan, the new strategy was put into effect remarkably quickly. The pilot on-line courses were tested by users in the

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spring of 2016, and the first became available on-line on 14 November 2016. In other words, in less than 18 months, 80 separate classroom courses were successfully distilled and migrated on to the e-platform. This timescale was achieved despite the fact that over 100 people at SWIFT had to contribute, including the product managers (who were charged with reviewing all the content created for their area) and the support staff (who checked the content addressed the questions asked every day by users).

“It has been a steep learning curve,” admits Brants. “When we started, everybody at SWIFT thought our timelines were impossible, but we did it. We are a highly motivated team, who enjoy working with new tools, and are open to doing things in new ways.” Apart from some initial consulting from a pair of e-learning experts, Brants and her colleagues decided not to outsource the preparation of the courses to a specialist firm. “We felt we knew the content better than anyone else,” she says. “So we chose a system where we could develop the multi-media courses ourselves, and which is easy for us to maintain and keep up to date. The external consultants were helpful at first, but now we have the knowledge in-house, and we are driving SWIFTSmart on our own.”

The ability to tailor courses to the needs of SWIFT customers remains important. While the e-learning platform means access to courses is now effectively universal, bespoke training courses are still delivered to banks that request them. They are willing to pay extra for the service, either because they wish to deepen the knowledge of their employees or because they want to adapt a generic course to the requirements of a particular business, market or jurisdiction. “The modular approach facilitates self-paced learning, and makes it easy to go back to review earlier material, but we cannot offer every scenario on the e-platform,” explains Brants. “That is where our ability to offer bespoke courses adds value for our customers.”

More than 100 on-line courses are now available, in nine languages, at www.swift.com/swiftsmart. They cover what Brants calls the “baseline knowledge” courses (message standards for payments, treasury,

trade and securities, SWIFT software, and SWIFT connectivity). 2017 will see courses added on corporate actions, ISO 20022 adoption, cyber-security and real-time payments innovation. The choices do of course reflect the strategic priorities of SWIFT in the coming year, notably the Global Payments Innovation (gpi) initiative and the Customer Security Programme (CSP), but they also reflect the unique character of SWIFT. As a co-operative governed by its users, SWIFT has the ability to relieve its members of the costs of duplication of training in areas of common interest, such as cyber-security.

Brants also emphasises that the selection of on-line courses is driven primarily by customer demand. She says that any course attended by less than 50 people in the last 12 months was moved to the back of the migration queue, with the most popular courses always given priority in the timetable. Brants adds that the e-platform has also enabled SWIFT to broaden the range of topics it covers in its training programmes. “With the e-platform, we are no longer bound by the logistical constraints of classroom learning,” she says. “We are able to add content we never had in the classroom, such as courses about financial crime and compliance.”

After just two months, it is clear that SWIFTSmart is working. Our statistics show that 3,900 individuals, drawn from more than 1,900 separate financial institutions, have taken at least one on-line course. It is too soon to compare the impact with classroom training, but Brants knows already what is different about on-line training. “The real challenge in creating an on-line training course is to answer the question, ‘What is the key message you want the customer to retain?’” she says. “If you chop a training course up into 15 minute pieces, there has to be a key learning each time. It requires a totally different mind-set towards the end-consumer and the whole concept of learning.”

SWIFT trainers test the courses, quizzing themselves on how the user experience can be improved. Newcomers to SWIFT are invited to test every course and give feedback on where the material is unclear, or they struggled to understand it. “During the first

year of the project, we spent most of our time in start-up mode,” says Brants. “Even now, we are still testing and learning and if it does not work, we go back to the drawing board. We never industrialise a training course or a feature on the platform until we are completely satisfied with how it works.”

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