

South West Employers offers guidance and practical assistance to member organisations on employment-related issues. Local authorities and other regional government organisations pay an annual subscription in return for a wide range of help and advice including development and training. They recently set up an e-learning portal in conjunction with Video Arts.



"...the e-learning portal from Video Arts has been extremely cost effective."

South West Employers: easier access to relevant learning

Tell us a bit about your remit

I head up the Learning and Development team and we run scheduled courses for employees of local authorities within the South West region. Our range of events is very broad - from specialised technical training to broad-based generic skills. We have courses that run year-after-year, some that are more ad-hoc (perhaps in response to a government white paper) as well as bespoke courses when a local authority might call us with a specific brief. We'll design a programme and source a trainer for them. Each year we offer around two hundred events.

In terms of our coverage, we've got 51 local authorities in the South West region that we serve. Some are huge and some are quite small. We also cover things like parish councils, fire rescue services that sort of thing. The target audience covers hundreds of thousands of people.

"We needed a better way to give people access to relevant training."

How would you describe your current approach to L&D?

We're trying to create a more proactive function. So, rather than saying 'you can go on this training course' we're working to develop a structured programme of training events throughout the year that is closely aligned with the learning needs of our audience. That's one of the reasons for working with Video Arts. Taking a more structured approach to what we did meant we could review and improve our content, including our video and e-learning content.

Part of that review is looking at how we use different delivery channels to get the right balance of learning methods for our learners. For example, we had a two-day residential presentation skills course. Residential events can be hard for people to fit into their work and home lives and it was becoming more difficult for our learners to attend the course when they needed to. We needed a better way to give people access to relevant training. So, we've split up the theory and practical elements of the training and reduced the face-to-face part of the programme to one day, covering purely practical exercises. The theory is developed in pre-course and post-course self study and group work - supported by our new online learning portal.

What did you see as the benefits of an online learning portal?

It's about better access, varied delivery and overcoming geography. You don't have to be in the same place and it helps our learners build their learning around work and domestic commitments. Nine o'clock at night with a glass of red wine when the kids are in bed is a much better time for some people to learn rather than trying to find a babysitter and shooting off to a classroom!

We do have to be careful about our target audience of course. There are some people who are wary of online delivery. But not just that, some people aren't solitary learners: they like to debate and toss ideas around.

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I suppose that’s the main reason we’ve adopted a blended approach to learning: to meet the needs of as many of our learners as we can whether they are solitary or social learners; web-junkies or technophobes.

Combining solitary and social learning

A typical South West Employers blended learning programme:

1. Online self study in preparation for team work
2. Team assignment (group meet online, by phone, or face-to-face)
3. Classroom training
4. e-learning refreshers

How did you go about setting up your portal?

We’re using a Video Arts learning portal so people can access it from anywhere.

We had been discussing e-learning for a while when Video Arts contacted us and presented us with a solution. Video Arts is well known and has a great reputation so that was the first box ticked.

And then we looked at the support that would be available to us. We don’t have our own infrastructure to support this and our knowledge is all about teaching not technical infrastructure. We knew we couldn’t ask the board for a budget for thousands of pounds worth of kit and new servers or anything like that, so we liked the fact that VA could totally support it and host it. Once we understood that we wouldn’t have to worry about the IT side it all fell into place.

We’ve got access to an agreed number of users per title and we can use any of the Video Arts content and any of their online self-study programmes.

It sounds expensive!

Budget is always a problem, but the e-learning portal from Video Arts has been extremely cost effective. The set up was reasonably priced and the course titles are priced per head...it’s totally affordable.

I think that the wariness in local government is often more about new ways of working than budget constraints: although e-learning isn’t new anymore. I suppose it’s really that they tend to be more traditional and like their face-to-face get-togethers.

And, what about the Video Arts team?

Personal support from Video Arts has been very good. Our account manager has been great. I fire off a question and a response comes back really quickly - and it’s a proper response, not a holding one. The people setting up the portal have been brilliant. It’s all very good.

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Speak to Video Arts about learning portals

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