



## E-LEARNING FOR THE WORKPLACE: CREATING CANADA'S LIFELONG LEARNERS

# ***BANK OF MONTREAL*** **CASE STUDY #5**

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Effective practices in developing and supporting Internet-based corporate learning, training and development initiatives.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Bank of Montreal (BMO) has been using e-learning since the early 1990's, primarily in the form of computer-based training. Today, e-learning at BMO is not just about skills development, it is also about bridging learning with high performance, and BMO's e-learning strategy integrates web-based learning technologies with organizational performance. This approach was the direct result of organizational change, the advent and use of new technologies, and an evolution in BMO's thinking around learning and employee development.

### **DRIVERS OF E-LEARNING AT THE BANK OF MONTREAL**

BMO has a strong legacy of support for employee and organizational learning. Since 1991, the company has invested more than \$500 million in employee training—both formal and informal, through workplace learning initiatives and external learning suppliers (i.e., colleges and universities).

As well, BMO constructed its very own national Institute for Learning (IFL), in 1993. The facility is completely devoted to and equipped for the innovative delivery of employee learning activities. Employees attend the IFL to develop new skills and knowledge, and to take part in innovative program delivery initiatives.

BMO's move to e-learning was the result of two broad organizational strategic shifts:

1. In the 1990s, BMO moved from a business model premised on transactions and the movement of money, to one of knowledge and value-added financial services.
2. The company's technology strategy changed with the implementation of its client-server architecture. BMO's learning staff took advantage of the company-wide technology upgrades quickly realizing that they provided the means through which e-learning capabilities at the branch level could be implemented.

These two organizational shifts created new employee learning needs and new opportunities for meeting these needs. A parallel change occurred in the way the company and its employees viewed training. BMO moved from a paternalistic learning model—one that was reactive and remedial—to one defined by employees who are responsible for their own lifelong learning.



## **BANK OF MONTREAL'S USE OF E-LEARNING**

At BMO, e-learning projects are directly funded by the business units requiring them. Typically, business units look for “e-options” because they expect learning to be as “e” as possible. Learning teams work with the business units to help design effective programs, and the IFL helps with content, vendor management, and technology requirements.

Today, all bank branches have learning workstations, and the BMO's salesforce use laptops to access all online learning activities.

Examples of e-learning at BMO include:

1. The Learning for Success program helps employees develop strengths in marketing, sales, risk management and e-literacy capabilities.
2. At BMO's Harris Bank, in the United States, an integrated e-learning program supports Sibel—a web-enabled customer relationship model.
3. BMO's virtual classroom is an e-learning initiative for the bank's commercial lines of business. In the virtual classroom learners complete a preliminary self-assessment. Learning models are established and employees engage in a program of web-based self-study.
4. The Knowledge Café, created at the IFL, uses the bank's technology platform and connects employees to information and knowledge through formal and informal collaborative learning activities.

## **PRIMARY BENEFITS**

The benefits realized by BMO through its e-learning initiatives have been significant, and include:

- Greater efficiencies in the workplace—for example, efficient, convenient, and effective knowledge-transfer to those who need it (employees and customers), when they need it.
- E-learning unifies and centralizes the training and development needs of different business units and career tracks.
- Content quality is consistent and can be updated quickly and easily.
- Testing and grading are automated into the e-learning strategy.
- Travel expenses and classroom scheduling and costs are greatly reduced or eliminated, thereby reducing fixed training costs and freeing up more training dollars for content and delivery development.
- Learning and training modules can be re-used and reformatted quickly and easily, and a single training event can be repeated as often as required.

## **KEY CHALLENGES**

- ▶ Finding the time to take training.
- ▶ Ensuring that the learning offered through, by, and for BMO clearly reflects the strategic needs and growth areas of the organization.
- ▶ Maintaining a direct link between BMO's human resource strategy with its corporate strategy.
- ▶ Ensuring that all of the training materials are up-to-date and accurate.