



E-LEARNING FOR THE WORKPLACE:
CREATING CANADA'S LIFELONG LEARNERS
CENTRA GAS BRITISH COLUMBIA
CASE STUDY #7

SEPTEMBER 2001

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

BACKGROUND

Centra Gas BC Inc. (Centra Gas) distributes natural gas to residential and commercial customers on Vancouver Island, and also supplies and distributes propane to the gas system in Whistler, British Columbia. With 245 employees working in district offices, regional operations centres, and various field locations throughout the region, the company is widely dispersed.

DRIVERS OF E-LEARNING AT CENTRA GAS

Employees at Centra Gas must have, and must maintain, a wide range of skill sets including: engineering, finance and accounting, utility construction, gas measurement, sales, marketing, lands acquisition, materials management, customer care, human resources management, labour relations, safety, and information technology.

For many years now, Centra Gas has maintained a strong focus on supporting the training of its employees. This is a good thing, for in an industry where continuous improvement is a necessity, not an option, the ongoing development of employees' skills and knowledge is critical.

In the past, a variety of traditional training methods—including workshops, classroom courses, practical on-site demonstrations, technical training sessions with in-house experts and industry specialists, tuition reimbursement for courses taken on employee time, and the sponsorship of various apprenticeship programs—were used to facilitate the company's training needs. Although many of these learning methods are still widely used, Centra Gas has also jumped into e-learning: a training medium that provides the company and its employees with a more flexible and less disruptive learning schedule.

CENTRA GAS' USE OF E-LEARNING

Centra Gas is an organization that adopts and uses new technologies. It has been involved in e-learning for over five years—a result of the company's desire to be a leader in compliance and regulatory testing. Using its information technology (IT) network to deliver training has made it easier for employees to attend and complete training. As well, the company has been able to offer more effective training solutions than in the past.

Initially, Centra Gas installed a group of five training modules onto its IT network. These were tested with "early adopters" before being launched company-wide. Over time, additional modules were added to Centra Gas' list of computer based training (CBT) initiatives to include programs for safety compliance, environment, and industry-specific skills training—in areas



such as information technology. Today, Centra Gas' CBT system is accessible from the Intranet site, or from any computer with Internet access. The system has a 24-hour mentoring support function and an e-mail inquiry feature. To date, over 200 IT courses are available to the IT group and another 37 CBT courses are accessible to all employees.

- ▶ CBT is used by Centra Gas to establish basic knowledge and understanding of a subject matter. It is most effective when followed up with practical on-site demonstrations or group discussions.
- ▶ CBT is utilized in Centra Gas' employee orientation sessions.

KEY CHALLENGES

- ▶ Many employees want to take the CBT modules. To regulate the use of e-learning and ensure that there is a link between what people are taking and their jobs, Centra Gas instituted an executive and management sign-off process.
- ▶ As the CBT platform of products and systems expanded, it became a challenge to manage and keep track of all the learning courses. A CBT index was created to centralize the training course selection process, provide course lists and details of log-in information. In total, the CBT index lists over 340 individual courses, with links to web-based programs and e-mail links to support staff.

PRIMARY BENEFITS

- ▶ Provides uniform content.
- ▶ CBT training enables courses to be taken while accommodating work schedules. Studies can be completed without having to attend training institutions for the full duration of a course.
- ▶ Courses are interactive and designed to ensure that learning is reinforced throughout the modules.
- ▶ The interactivity of the CBT modules helps to ensure that participants complete the courses.
- ▶ The automatic training records management system enables Centra Gas to better monitor the skills development of employees.
- ▶ CBT promotes a workplace culture that supports new technology for training programs.