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Tips and Techniques from Zipline

10 Tips for Adding Social Media to Your Next Business Training

Social media tools can bring learning to informal settings; it's ideal for adult learners, especially those already active in social networking. Social media increases interactivity, builds excitement in learning, and ensures that it continues beyond the classroom. To get the most out of social media, try out these suggestions for your next scheduled live or virtual classroom training:

1. Identify your goals! Opportunities for social media tools in training are vast, but without a plan you're likely to become discouraged. First, decide on your goals for social media, such as helping teams collaborate on projects, enhancing a course with quizzes and activities, providing information in alternate venues, and so on.

2. Get back feedback! Before training begins, post questions on Twitter—such as "What do you expect to learn from this class?" or "Have you had any experience in this area?"—and seek responses from participants. After training ends, post follow-up questions to gain additional feedback, such as "What is the most important thing you learned in class?"

3. Keep them learning! During a lunch break, tweet an intriguing question about a topic you plan to introduce and ask for feedback before everyone returns. Then read the responses in class to launch the discussion. As you pique their interest in the topic, participants will feel they're contributing to the learning experience.

4. Share the knowledge! Share your own learning tips with colleagues by launching a page on Facebook, joining an online community of practice or LinkedIn discussion group, or starting your own blog. Also include links with additional training materials for past and present students to visit.

5. Upload the learning! Record short (1-3 minute) comments covering issues for later discussion, then upload them to YouTube or another video sharing site. You can even post the files as RSS podcasts to your company's intranet site so participants can download and watch them at their convenience.

6. Start a scavenger hunt! As a classroom assignment, ask participants to find specific information on the Web about a topic by following the hints you post every day on your pages on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other sites. Also provide links to industry experts who blog or tweet their ideas so that participants can identify differing viewpoints.

7. Enable collaboration! Break the class into teams to work on a short industry report about a broad topic, using SharePoint or other collaboration tool. All the information in the team's report must come from their own knowledge, not from other sources. After reading the entries, post the winning team's report on an industry collaborative web site ("wiki") or your department's intranet site.

8. Meet online first! A couple of weeks before class begins, ask participants to join your Facebook page, posting their professional profiles, likes and dislikes, hobbies, and other information. You and your class will learn more about one another—which can improve their collaborative skills—and everyone can continue their social networking long after the class is finished.

9. Publish without paper! Instead of photocopying handouts for distribution, post them on the intranet or use a digital document publishing site (e.g., Scribd). Make certain the documents don't contain proprietary or confidential information. Alert all participants to where to find the documents, and open a page of your blog or social network site to discuss the documents in advance of the class.

10. Bookmark your favorites! As part of the reading list for your class, give participants the benefit of knowledge you've found on the web. Tag the sites with a bookmarking tool (such as Del.icio.us, Digg, or ShareThis) for automatic posting to your Twitter page. Or ask your class to join your bookmarking network so they can continue learning along with you.