

CONTINUING EDUCATION

MAXIMIZING THE RETURN ON YOUR TECHNOLOGY INVESTMENT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a distributor, you want to get the most out of every dollar you invest in your business. Yet, the vast majority of distributors use less than 40 percent of the functionality in their enterprise software solutions, rendering 60 percent of their investment worthless.

When it comes to using your enterprise software solution, what you don't know can hurt you. Lack of knowledge about your solution can cost you money in terms of inefficiencies and errors. Fortunately, you can recoup that loss with an investment in continuing education for your employees.

THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH EMPLOYEE EDUCATION

Whether you have two employees or 200, one fact remains the same: no two people are exactly alike. Which makes the process of creating a continuing education program problematic at best.

Each one of your employees has a different knowledge set relating to your enterprise software solution. Your bookkeeper might excel at processing payables and receivables, but stumble through creating financial reports, while your warehouse manager might be able to track your inventory from the moment it's ordered to the moment it's delivered, yet be mystified by editing shipments or processing returns. How do you pinpoint the areas on which you need to focus your education program?

Some distributors choose to take a blanket approach when training employees. Everyone in a particular job or department is given the same training regardless of his or her knowledge level. While this gives everyone an equal footing, and is an excellent way to train new employees, it also wastes time and money teaching existing employees things they already know or potentially may never use.

Other distributors choose to offer training programs based on the current challenges faced by the company. Perhaps your inventory isn't turning as quickly as you would like and you have a growing amount of dead stock, so you hire a consultant to train employees on ways to improve inventory management practices. The problem with this strategy is that you are always in catch-up mode – trying to fix what is wrong rather than proactively stopping problems before they start.

AN EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE

The most effective way to train employees requires identifying training needs before they become problems.

With this method, you first have to identify your knowledge weaknesses, and then create a specific training program to meet those needs. Following the training, you need to measure employees' retention. After all, no learner will retain 100 percent of the content covered, so it's important to find out where additional training is needed and start the process again.

Pinpoint exactly what employees know and don't know: While you could ask your employees to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, you probably wouldn't get a very accurate measurement. First, every employee may not use the same perspective or scale. Second, it's even more difficult to know what you don't know. Testing, which does not have to be intimidating, will give you the best measurement of your employees' strengths and weaknesses.

Create a specific curriculum: Once you know the areas on which you need to focus, you can create a curriculum specific to your employees' needs. This could be a combination of existing resources and tools created expressly to meet your goals.

Provide training incentives: Provide incentives to encourage your employees to participate in the training program. Create a formalized certification program in your company offering monetary incentives for employees who have achieved educational milestones. Some companies pay employees according to knowledge and performance rather than how long they have been at the company.

Test retention: Following training, test employees again to pinpoint what they have learned and identify what areas with which they still need help. Then restart the process, continually educating your staff on getting the most out of your enterprise software solution.

ACTIVANT CUSTOM EDUCATION PROGRAM

Activant® offers a method for its customers to develop their own custom education programs. This free, online service helps distributors pinpoint their training needs.

The first step requires you to complete an operational survey that asks questions about business priorities and functions, and the parts of your Activant enterprise software solution you utilize.

Your responses to the operational survey will generate diagnostic surveys customized for your employees. These surveys will identify knowledge deficits and can be used for benchmarking employee knowledge or designing your own certifications or training incentive programs.

Based on the results of your employees' surveys, you will receive a report prioritizing the educational resources and services Activant offers that would be of benefit to you. In addition to using this document to help you determine your current employee's educational needs, you can also use this as a road map for educational resources for training new employees.

And you aren't limited to measuring what your employees know about your enterprise software solution. You can also enter your own questions into the database, enabling you to test employees on their knowledge of any aspect of their business. Now you can gauge employee's knowledge of product lines, services, business practices, customer service and sales skills, and so on.

You can also use the Custom Education Program to specify a complete educational path for an employee -- whether it's a two-day orientation or a 12-month program. The Custom Education Program then monitors the employee's progress. Called the Training Agenda, this functionality allows you to outline a variety of action items an employee must complete. This may include educational courses offered by Activant and other tools you already have in place. As your employee navigates through this curriculum, you receive updates via automatic e-mail with the employee's status and scores for each test, thus eliminating the need for follow-up on your part.

CONCLUSION

Activant designed the Custom Education Program, available on the Customer Web Site, to help you identify your employees' training needs, select the most appropriate educational options for your employees, and increase the return on your training investment. You can use this service as often as you feel necessary to maximize your use of your enterprise software solution.

ABOUT ACTIVANT'S WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTION SOLUTIONS

Activant provides technology solutions and services to more than 3,800 wholesale distributors throughout North America. A leading technology provider for the distribution industry, Activant develops comprehensive enterprise software solutions to help distributors improve customer service and maximize the return on their technology investment. In addition, the company offers an Internet trading network that expedites sourcing, expands geographic reach, and streamlines transactions between distributors and manufacturers. Activant solutions are backed by a host of professional services, including support, consulting, and educational programs.

Activant Solutions Inc. ("Activant") is a leading technology provider of business management solutions serving small and medium-sized retail and wholesale distribution businesses in three primary vertical markets: hardlines and lumber; wholesale distribution; and the automotive parts aftermarket. Founded in 1972, Activant provides customers with tailored proprietary software, professional services, content, supply chain connectivity, and analytics. More than 30,000 customer locations use an Activant solution to manage their day-to-day operations. Activant has operations in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Canada, France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.

For more information, please visit www.activant.com, e-mail distribution@activant.com, or call 1-800-776-7438, press 1.