



THE ROI OF VIRTUAL TRAINING

Virtual training offers organizations the opportunity to save on travel and facilitation costs while enabling employees to learn when and where they want. The question is how to quantify the intangibles to calculate an accurate return on investment. **BY GAIL DUTTON**

The choice between hosting face-to-face meet-ups or creating a virtual learning environment was easy for the founders of The Hive. They chose the online option, so the organization could deliver business topics, forum discussions, and regular Blab chats (www.blab.im) to small business executives throughout the country rather than only those near its New York offices.

The greater geographic reach of virtual learning was a potent benefit for Pamela Herrmann and Patty Dominguez of CREATE Buzz, who developed The Hive. It is equally powerful for corporations with far-flung offices. Aside from the obvious logistical benefits of helping employees learn in place—thus eliminating the expense of airfare, hotels, meals, and meeting space—virtual learning offers an immediacy and customization that face-to-face classes can't deliver.

Additionally, "you can react to issues quicker, gaining access to an expert and swiftly developing a half-day training program that people can fit into their schedules without the need to coordinate with others," says Lee Arthur, manag-

ing director of the New York Institute of Finance and ExecSense, an online learning business for the C-suite. This lets organizations adjust course almost immediately, rather than months later, and, therefore, supports revenue flow.

Virtual training also provides access to world-class business leaders. ExecSense's monthly subscription, for example, offers hour-long classes from the head of marketing at TD Ameritrade and the CIO of J.P. Morgan, among others, in collaboration with the Columbia University Center for Technology Management. "For the first time," Arthur says, "small business owners can get these lessons from Columbia's Master's program without attending Columbia University."

Measuring ROI

Throughout business, "return on investment (ROI) for training often is discussed but rarely measured," Arthur says. A recent ExecSense survey reports that although 90 percent of respondents acknowledge the link between learning and organizational performance, 60 percent of learning organizations don't track the return on training investment.

ROI for The Hive is measured in two ways. Volume is the