



Instructor-Led Virtual Classrooms

By Kathryn Rebilas

Today's healthcare environment demands quick information turnaround and flexible on-the-job learning to stay competitive. In order to keep pace with the rapidly changing environment, instructor-led virtual classroom utilization is on the rise in the life sciences industry.

In January 2016, TGaS Advisors conducted a study on instructor-led virtual training. The goal was to investigate how companies are using virtual classrooms and identify best practices and challenges for implementation. Twelve pharmaceutical companies responded, all of whom use an instructor-led virtual classroom for at least one component of their training curricula.

TGaS identified several common drivers behind the adoption of virtual classrooms. (Figure 1: Business Rationale for Investment) Across the board, organizations are using virtual classrooms as a means for faster skill implementation. Learners no longer have to wait to travel to an in-person educational classroom for high quality, instructor-led educational experiences. Virtual classroom training can be scheduled frequently between live new hire classroom sessions in order to transfer the baseline knowledge and skills new sales representatives need to begin calling on customers effectively.

Companies are also looking to create efficiencies while cutting costs. Virtual classroom training can reduce learner time out of territory while also reducing learner travel and lodging costs. For instance, some companies are reducing the amount of time a representative is out of territory at a POA meeting, choosing to conduct a

FIGURE 1 BUSINESS RATIONALE FOR INVESTMENT

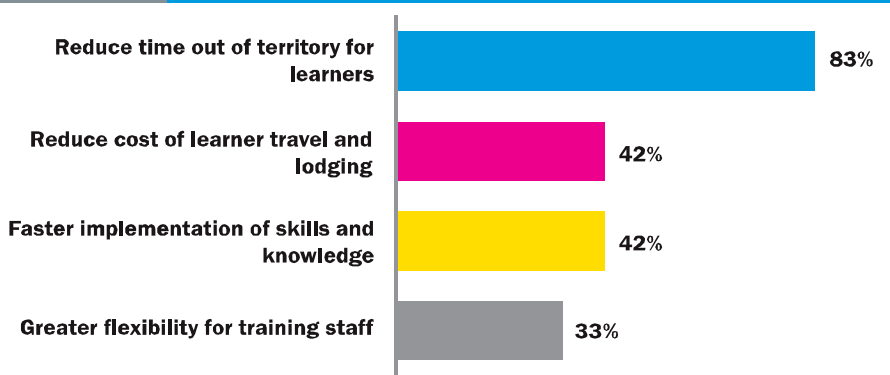


FIGURE 2 VIRTUAL CLASSROOM TRAINING AUDIENCES

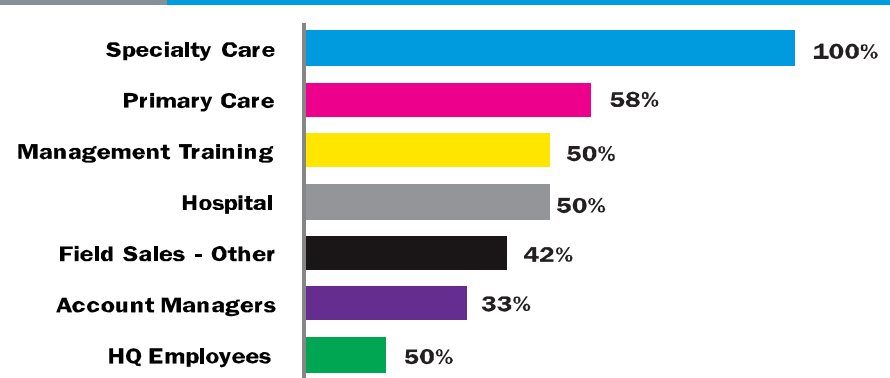
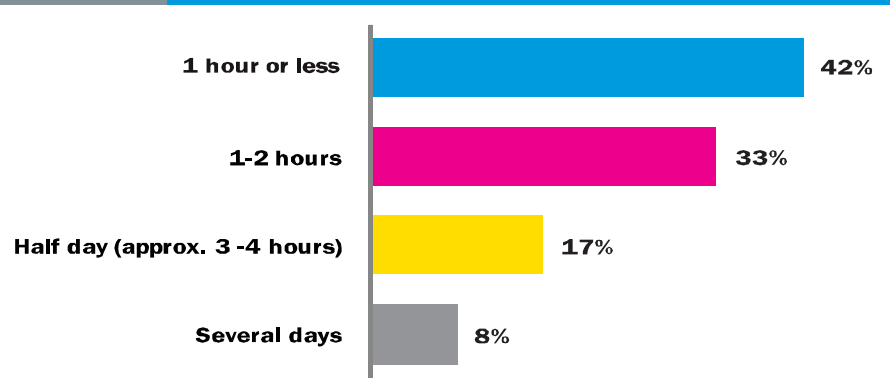


FIGURE 3 LENGTH OF VIRTUAL CLASSROOM SESSION



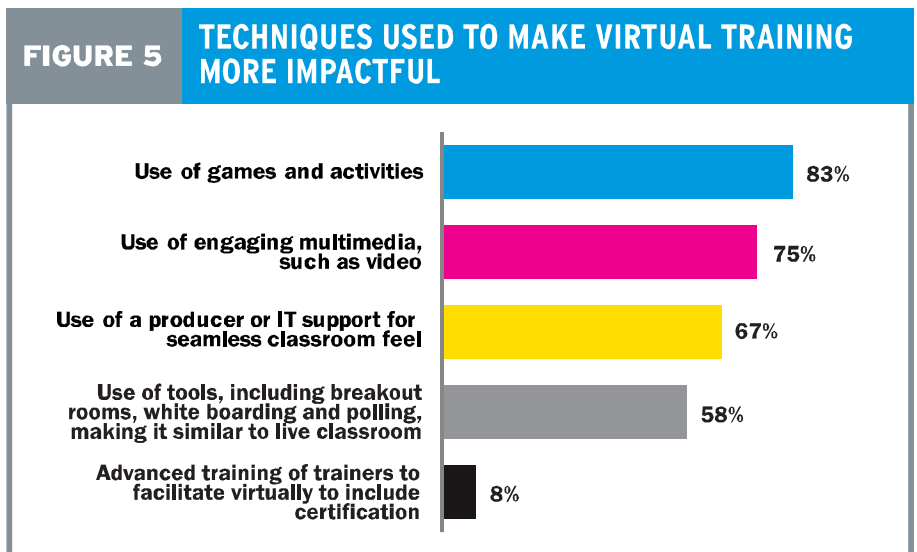
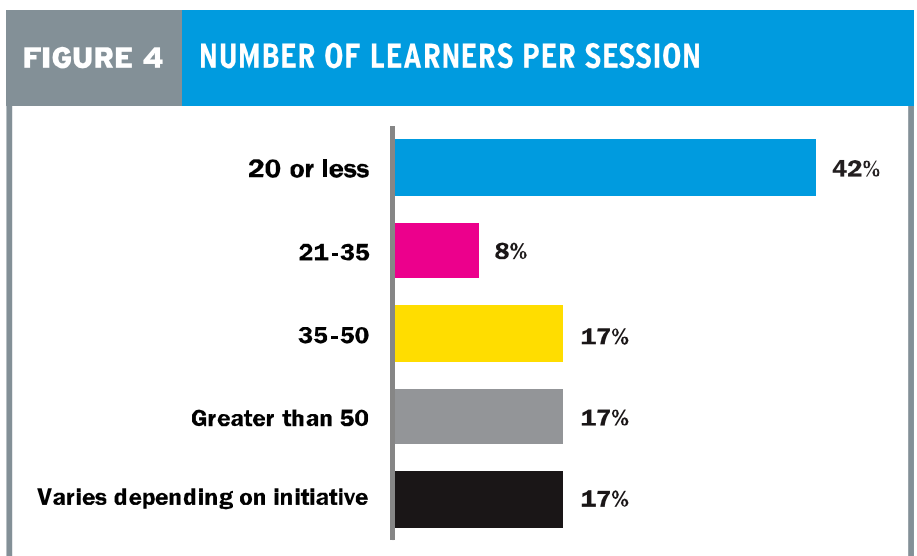
portion of the meeting virtually as part of either pre-work or sustainability/pull-through.

According to this study, virtual classrooms are most frequently used for learners in the field sales organization, particularly those in specialty care, primary care and hospital sales forces. Virtual classrooms are also commonly used for management training. (Figure 2: Virtual Classroom Training Audiences) These groups typically have well-established training curriculums, which can make for a more logical and organized conversion to a virtual classroom setting than those that are constantly changing. Because these audiences are typically larger and demand more frequent training sessions, the use of virtual classrooms can help fill in the time gaps between scheduled live training sessions.

In order to maximize learner engagement, the majority of organizations limit their virtual classroom sessions to two hours or less. (Figure 3: Length of Virtual Classroom Session) Much like a typical live classroom schedule, companies who opt for longer virtual sessions tend to schedule breaks and engaging activities, such as specially designed virtual games and impactful videos, to keep the learners' attention.

Organizations that have had success with virtual classrooms recommend creative use of as many of the classroom's built-in interactive capabilities as possible, including breakout rooms, whiteboards and polling. Use of these features tends to be easier with smaller groups. Many companies cap the number of learners in a virtual classroom session at 20. (Figure 4: Number of Learners Per Session)

Several organizations also enlist the support of a producer to manage the technical aspects of the session, enabling the facilitator to have a



greater focus on content and learner engagement. Companies may benefit from specifically training and certifying their virtual classroom facilitators on virtual training techniques to better promote a seamless experience for learners. (Figure 5: Techniques Used to Make Virtual Training More Impactful)

Respondents note that technology and logistical issues, such as audio and internet glitches, hardware incompatibilities, set-up logistics and limited maximum capacity of the classroom are their top challenges with virtual classroom

implementation. Other challenges include understanding how to best leverage engagement tools and keeping groups engaged during sessions. Many of these challenges can be mitigated with proper time, practice and planning.

Organizations have seen a good deal of success with instructor-led virtual classroom sessions. The flexibility of virtual classroom learning allows learners to stay home, reducing the stress of travel and enabling them to implement their learning on the job immediately. Organizations also note that quick,

efficient and effective delivery on key training topics promotes more timely business results and consistency of messaging across sales teams. Across the board, organizations are finding that the benefits of virtual classrooms are outweighing the challenges. As a result, we expect to see utilization continue to expand. ■

About this Study: Working in partnership with LTEN, TGaS Advisors, a benchmarking and advisory services firm, conducts studies of training and development in life sciences companies. For more information on the 2016 Instructor-Led Virtual Training Study, contact Kathryn Rebilas, kathryn.rebilas@tgas.com.

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