



A Framework for Optimizing the Virtual Live Learning Experience

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Learning in 2020 and Beyond

The online learning market has been booming for the last 20 years. In 2019, revenues from the global e-learning market surpassed \$200 billion as hundreds of tools evolved to create, deliver, and manage learning activities and resources for corporate organizations.

The complex challenges of modern business have led L&D teams to focus on upskilling, reskilling, and providing resources for ongoing development – all with the goal of helping employees thrive in an environment of constant change. Much of this learning has been self-paced and often based on performance goals or individual career goals. However, in-person, instructor-led training remained the gold standard for educational experiences. In a live, instructor-led experience, employees can interact in a way that fosters collaboration, potentially increasing learning retention and employee engagement while enhancing the company's culture.

Quick Pivot to Online Training

The coronavirus pandemic caused all organizations to immediately rethink employee learning. As companies pivoted from live to virtual learning, many quickly defaulted to video conferencing tools.

But needless to say, running a meeting is not the same as delivering a training session. Video conferencing tools are not built for virtual instruction, as explained in this paper. Their limitations put an undue burden on instructors to deliver an engaging experience and present information in a way that learners will retain.

In an online setting, instructors are competing with all the attendant distractions that appear on a learner's screens. Instructors must work harder to capture learners' attention, encourage interaction, and reinforce the key points from the session.

Additionally, training organizations are being pressured to develop new training to address continually evolving business situations, they're relying more on subject matter experts, many who have no formal instructional experience, to create and deliver training.

Recognizing that the return to in-person training may be months, or even years, away, leaders are evaluating other digital delivery options that can offer better learning experiences.

Consequently, the market for virtual classroom technology is growing fast. A May 2020 forecast from Global Market Insights predicts that virtual classroom technology will grow at a CAGR of 11% between 2020 and 2026, faster than the overall learning category average of 8% CAGR.

Specialized Technology for Live Virtual Learning

The benefits of specialized virtual instructor-led training (VILT) tools are obvious to any L&D professional who has had to deliver training via video conferencing tools. VILT tools offer features that enable instructors to optimize the learning experience, helping learners retain information and collaborate, potentially increasing employee engagement, and driving revenue. This paper serves to:

- Explore the principles of live virtual learning and offer a framework to compare features of learning delivery tools for live training.
- Look at the business impact of optimal and sub-optimal learning delivery.
- Consider ways to measure training outcomes.
- Offer guidelines for choosing a VILT tool.
- Indicate how companies might need to adapt live training going forward.

The events of 2020 have forced companies to reconsider budgets as they confront myriad unexpected expenses. We hope that companies will adequately equip their teams to do their best work with digital tools that bring people together, no matter how physically far apart they need to be.

Principles of Effective Online Learning

The early days of online training, instructional guides and PowerPoint decks were turned into online, “page-turning” programs. While there is no doubt that some content is purely cognitive and needs to be learned through close study, such programs offered no human interaction and, for the most part, were unengaging.

Collaborative learning empowers individuals to retain the information as well as think for themselves. Quality training equips employees with knowledge *and* guidance on how to apply the information on the job.

Multiple studies published in the *Harvard Business Review*, *Science*, *Nature*, and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* have found that students learn best in active, social learning environments. A LinkedIn Survey of 2,000 learners found that more than half feel more motivated to learn in a social environment with their colleagues.¹

The most important job of instructors is to inspire and engage learners. Through the process of asking questions, providing advice, giving context, and explaining specific examples and solutions, an instructor brings learning to life for each individual in their own meaningful way. Additional learning occurs in the interactions between the learners.

Instruction needs to be built for the context in which it is delivered. This is why listening to lecture recordings and clicking through PowerPoints may expose students to information, but does not necessarily ensure that they retain it. Adapting live in-person trainings to a virtual environment requires the consideration of learners’ needs, as well as the needs of instructors and their organizations.

Basic Principles for Online Learning

Effective online learning requires the ability to design the experience to enhance learning outcomes and interaction. To increase effectiveness, live online instruction should incorporate:

1. **A common visual experience for all learners.** In a physical classroom or seminar, every learner is looking at the

same thing. Variable views in video conferencing tools allow learners to switch the way they view the presenter, the slides, and the participant gallery; they may choose to view chat or not. Creating a common, shared viewing experience is usually not possible. By contrast, enhanced VILT tools enable the host to control what the learner sees—including the display of video, slides and chat. A common visual experience for all learners minimizes distraction and ensures focus on the content that needs to be retained.

2. **Short bursts of content interspersed with peer interaction.** Online content is best retained when delivered in bursts under seven minutes long, with an ideal content length of three to five minutes. Good instructors engage in careful sequence planning to ensure that the content builds on one idea after the next, and that the interaction activities are appropriate for the content being delivered. While polls and chats are a starting point, enhanced VILT tools offer a variety of interaction options that the instructor can choose to promote the kind of peer interaction that will spark ideas and promote retention. These include:
 - a. Quizzes and games
 - b. Focused chats and Q&A for each topic
 - c. Word-based tools such as fill-in-the-answer, word clouds, sticky notes, and task lists
 - d. Simplified feedback delivery such as raised hand, agree/disagree, laughter, applause, speed up/slow down, upvotes, and star ratings
 - e. Instructor controls such as the ability to hide the attendee list, enable anonymous chat, and select learners at random
3. **Peer group breakouts.** Small group projects are a hallmark of many live training programs as they enable learners to collaborate and learn from one another. Enhanced VILT tools can offer the same interaction in virtual group rooms, encouraging true collaboration beyond just speech.
4. **Motion.** The human brain is wired for detecting motion. When people interact with a computer alone, they are constantly making something move. To combat limited attention spans for staring at words on a slide, online presenters need to provide a variety of slides, layouts, videos, and interactive features. Enhanced VILT tools offer

1 LinkedIn, [2020 Workplace Learning Report](#)

Criteria	Classroom Learning	Video Conference Tools	Enhanced Virtual Learning Tool
Learner View	Uniform view by all learners: Instructor and slides and/or whiteboard	View depends on learner preference: speaker, slides, gallery, whiteboard, chat windows	Uniform view based on instructor goals. Can include live and recorded video, slides, interactive pods, chat, games, etc.
Chat and Q&A	Students can raise hands	Single chat stream, Q&A section	Focused chat threads per topic with contents retained, focused Q&A per topic
Student interaction	Break up into small groups for collaborative exercises	Small group rooms, polls, whiteboards	Whiteboards, polls, quizzes, small group rooms with pre-defined interactive activities
Accessibility	Need live translation for hearing impaired	Closed captioning, automating transcripts, reader support, keyboard shortcuts	Closed captioning, automating transcripts, reader support, keyboard shortcuts, color customization

Figure 1: Comparison of Training Tools Across Optimal Learner Criteria

- a multitude of options to keep the presentation moving and learners' brains engaged.
- Accessibility.** Virtual classrooms improve upon accessibility of in-person training thanks to embedded closed captioning, keyboard commands, color controls, enhanced navigational features, and partnerships with screen readers for the visually impaired.

Best-of-Breed Principles for L&D Teams

In addition to optimizing for how people learn, optimizing learning delivery for corporate L&D teams includes consideration of how instructors prepare and deliver trainings as well as corporate technology integrations and security requirements. Some features of VILT tools enable stronger branding, creating memorable learning experiences that enhance the company's reputation. L&D teams need to consider:

- Content consistency.** Some types of trainings need to be delivered over and over again by different instructors. They also may need to be adapted over time. In a live classroom or video conference setting, the lead instructor can upload slides to a shared drive that other instructors can access, but most exercises will need to be recreated for every presentation. In enhanced VILT tools, the entire presentation with all interactive tools (slides, video/audio, chat threads, exercises, etc.) can be stored in a shared system with assigned editing privileges, ensuring a consistent experience for each training session delivered. In addition, presentations can be housed inside persistent URLs, preventing communication mistakes and ensuring presentation branding and consistency.
- Backstage controls.** Video conference tools offer few options for presenters to monitor the presentation as it is happening. Presenters may also need to print out speaker notes or view them on a separate monitor. Enhanced VILT tools offer an engagement dashboard, allowing instructors to shift the meeting in real time if engagement is lagging. Some tools also include a speaker notes area and a chat to enable collaboration among presenters, hosts, and moderators.
- Integrations.** Many corporate learning departments utilize a patchwork of tools for content authoring, learning management, and learner experience. The LMS and content from learning authoring tools should be easily integrated with the solution used for training delivery.
- Measurement.** In a live classroom, instructors can observe students' body language and make adjustments to re-engage the room if attention is flagging. Enhanced VILT tools offer engagement metrics for every activity, summarized in a live engagement dashboard. Measurement of online interaction gives instructors data points from which to gauge success and adapt future sessions, giving such tools a leg up over in-person training. Learning delivery tools should also enable registration and attendance measurement.
- Security.** Sensitive enterprise data is often included in training sessions. Corporate security teams need the confidence that any tool they use is compliant, encrypted, and utilizes state-of-the-art security technology.

Criteria	Classroom Learning	Video Conference Tools	Enhanced Virtual Learning Tool
Content consistency	Store slide presentations on a shared drive	Store slide presentations on a shared drive	Shared layout templates include all interactive resources, templates and files stored in the tool, presentations at persistent URL
Live adjustments to content delivery	Instructor can observe learners' body language and hear tone of questions	Limited student view, multitude of lighting situations; typed chats and Q&As make it difficult to decipher tone	Variety of tools and live metrics include engagement stats, quizzes, word clouds
Branding	Branded slides and in-room signage	Branded slides	Branded virtual environment for banners, slides, and overall UX
Backstage	Physical backstage room or hallway	Presenter-to-presenter chat options	Separate backstage area with presenter and host chat, real-time interaction metrics
Measurement	Registration, attendance, and surveys	Registrations, logins, poll interactions, surveys	Registration, logins, multiple interaction opportunities with real-time participation metrics.
Integrations	N/A	Schedule and launch from within learning tools	Schedule and launch trainings, integrate interactive content created in authoring tools
Security	Badged employee attendance	History of security breaches	Built with enterprise security in mind

Figure 2: Comparison of Training Tools Across Optimal Instructor and Company Criteria

How Learning Impacts the Business

A new employee's ability to retain learning can impact the business in a multitude of ways. Without proper training, he or she could make a mistake that could damage the company's reputation, cost the company money, or even worse, injure themselves or someone else. Ideally, training inspires employees to solve problems, equips them with information to adapt and innovate, and helps grow their careers.

Strong learning programs also impact employee engagement, which in turn impacts retention. A LinkedIn survey found that 94% of employees would stay at a company longer if it invested in their career development. This includes the development of your L&D teams. Driven by the desire to help people succeed, high-caliber L&D staff are continually adapting new tools and techniques to keep learners engaged and ensure learning retention.

The ecosystem of learning extends beyond employees to customers. Mistakes due to inadequate training can impact customers by delivering incorrect information, installing products incorrectly, product returns, and customer dissatisfaction. High-quality training drives revenue by equipping employees to create positive customer interactions and deliver innovations that help retain customers.

The quality of learning at a given company impacts future business by contributing to satisfaction ratings, which in turn contribute to the overall corporate reputation. Additionally, in times of uncertainty, effective training can foster business agility and real-time adaptability. Indeed, the overall perception of the corporate culture is the additive experience of all interactions within a company, and this includes its approach to training.

At a time when people must be physically apart, live virtual learning has the opportunity to bring people together in new collaborative scenarios, reinforcing a shared culture. Technology that creates connections among employees and empowers them with knowledge is a worthy investment—if it's implemented with the employee experience in mind.

Full Ecosystem for Successful Training Outcomes

- **Employees:** *I have the knowledge I need to do my job safely and competently. I am supported in my career growth.*
- **L&D team:** *I am equipped with the tools that help me do my job well and preserve my time. I can use my creative abilities and instructional design knowledge to engage learners.*
- **Customers:** *We receive great service, functional products, and the information needed to take full advantage of them.*
- **Potential Customers:** *I want to do business with this company because it make good products and its employees are competent.*
- **Potential Employees:** *This company looks like a great place to work because it takes such good care of its people.*

About Josh Bersin



Josh Bersin is an internationally recognized analyst, educator, and thought leader focusing on the global talent market and the challenges impacting business workforces around the world. He studies the world of work, HR and leadership practices, and the broad talent technology market.

He founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. Over the next ten years, he expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership. He sold the company to Deloitte in 2012, when it became known as Bersin™ by Deloitte. Bersin left Deloitte in 2018..

In 2019, Bersin founded the Josh Bersin Academy, the world's first global development academy for HR and talent professionals and a transformation agent for HR organizations. The Academy offers content-rich online programs, a carefully curated library of tools and resources, and a global community that helps HR and talent professionals stay current on the trends and practices needed to drive organizational success in the modern world of work.

Bersin is frequently featured in talent and business publications such as Forbes, Harvard Business Review, HR Executive, FastCompany, The Wall Street Journal, and CLO Magazine. He is a regular keynote speaker at industry events around the world and a popular blogger with more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.

His education includes a BS in engineering from Cornell University, an MS in engineering from Stanford University, and an MBA from the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.



Adobe Connect is a live virtual learning delivery solution that specializes in engagement-driven learning and delivers learner experiences that go beyond video conferencing or physical classrooms. With Adobe Connect, instructors can infuse their sessions with interactivity and create equal learning opportunities, even for participants with sight, hearing, or mobility impairments.

How Learning Measurement Can Support the Business

In-person learning outcomes can be measured through attendance and surveys and correlated to other measurable factors such as employee retention, employee and customer satisfaction, and employee performance and engagement. Outcomes can also be extrapolated to business results such as sales and customer retention (as discussed in the previous section).

In comparison to in-person learning, the virtual setting offers more granular access to metrics for L&D to measure success. Most virtual learning tools provide some measure of engagement with the training, such as poll reports. Engagement metrics are not necessarily an indicator of success, as some of the most engaged students take notes in another application during presentations.

To account for this, enhanced VILT tools that offer multiple interaction options can view participation levels for each of these interactions. Tools that provide focused chat sessions can help companies gauge interest in a subject by offering metrics on each chat separately. Results from activities such as quizzes indicate learner understanding. Instructors can use this information to guide future training to better match learner's interests and needs.

Surveys are an increasingly important tool in fostering employee engagement as companies navigate the new world of business, and they should be applied to measuring learning satisfaction, outcomes, and surfacing new topics to include in training.

A continuous listening approach to employee engagement that includes other sources of content (such as internal chat tools) in addition to surveys will likely reveal areas that can be included in trainings, whether as actual learning points or topics of discussion. To make this happen, HR and L&D need to work closely together to create workable feedback loops.

Companies that offer customer training or include an education program in their business models need to seriously consider enhanced VILT tools to maximize earning outcomes, as they directly impact revenue.

Training Measurement Summary

- *Attendance*
- *Interaction participation*
- *Test or quiz results*
- *Survey results*
- *Correlate to HR metrics:*
 - *Employee satisfaction*
 - *Employee retention*
 - *Safety incidents*
 - *Employee performance*
- *Correlate to business metrics:*
 - *Sales/revenue*
 - *Customer retention*
- *Collaborate with continuous listening initiatives*

Considerations for Evaluating a Live Virtual Learning Platform

Virtual learning delivery platforms have a wide array of features that can impact the quality of your live trainings. As you evaluate solutions, consider the following.

1. **Know what you need first.** What are your top pain points when it comes to delivering online training? Decide what you need first before talking to representatives and have a vision of where you'd like to go.
2. **Look for flexible solutions with interactive features.** The creativity of instructors comes to life when given tools to facilitate learner interactions. To streamline workflows, check to see if the tool works with your existing authoring tools and LMS through an API or existing integrations. Also consider how the solution handles storage of presentations and online learning materials.
3. **Ask detailed questions about support and updates.** How often does the solution provider update the software? What kind of customer training and support does it offer? Look for consistency and thoroughness.
4. **Consider how a solution handles security, privacy, and compliance.** Ensure that you will be able to protect sensitive company data and limit access to specific

information and reports if required. If security is a high concern, look for providers with customers in government and regulated industries.

5. **Check for experience with companies like yours.** Ask for customer references with companies your size and in your industry with similar challenges. Consider speaking directly with references so you can have candid conversations.

The Future of Learning

L&D teams are adapting at a record pace to give employees the learning experiences they need to work safely and solve new problems. Even though classroom learning has had to move online, virtual learning can still create memorable experiences when designed with the group experience in mind.

These collaborative experiences can harness the power of diverse groups to not only learn, but to know each other, like each other, and support each other. Programs focused on group activity drive change, alignment, innovation, and create resilience—which contribute to business performance in a time when there are few fixed answers.

As you select tools and build upon your learning strategy, make sure the focus on human supported, group-based learning remains at the core. You'll be glad you did.