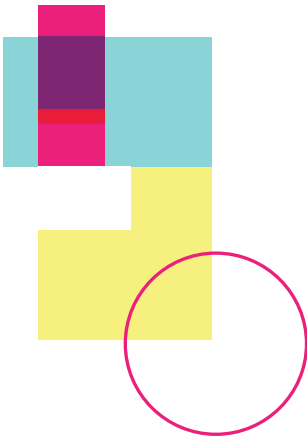# How to Improve Productivity With Customer Learning

Service Businesses Impact Scale and Revenue Growth by Implementing Learning Programs

Introduction

For business services and management consultancy firms, delivering impactful training is often reliant on offering a bespoke, white-glove service. Each customer has its own organizational goals, culture and business requirements — and unlike for SaaS tools or physical products, there's never a single way to see success. In short — management training can never be one size fits all.

However, the more time your business spends on customizing and delivering bespoke training to meet demand, the more difficult it is for you to see your own business growth behind the scenes. For management services, onboarding a high-value customer is only step one. Success will hinge on whether you can serve this customer's needs efficiently and at scale.

The goal? To support a growing number of customers with customized training solutions, all without eating from your own revenues.

For some, this might feel like a utopian dream that's getting further away. Today's business services stakeholders often report an increased need for customer hand-holding and hyper-personalization. At the back-end, they don't have the systems to support customization at scale, and usually have an over-reliance on inefficient processes to support anything from monetization to content authoring and governance.

To solve for inefficiencies and meet the constant need for nuanced customization — your business is forced to add headcount to manage new client accounts. After all, what's the alternative? Say no to a customer with a complex or specific requirement? We didn't think so. However, while this gives you more employees in place to meet the pressing demand, it's a seriously expensive fix, and it's not scalable. You can't keep throwing headcount at the problem, or you'll never see a return on the services you offer. You may have succeeded in selling the customer on your customized training solution, but the delivery is blowing your margins.

The most frustrating thing is, while your managers sit on hold to the recruitment company yet again, existing customer support reps or instructors are regularly answering the same questions dozens of times a week, or delivering almost exactly the same onboarding training that by now they know off by heart.

It's time for a change.

Enter: A Cloud-Based Customer Learning Platform

Entering into a strategic partnership with a cloud-based software provider, and taking the OpEx rather than CapEx route makes great business sense. CapEx means Capital Expenditure, all the heavy upfront costs that are involved with building your own training platform in-house. In contrast, OpEx is short for Operational Expenditure, a transparent and consistent monthly cost that can be weaved into the budget.

A CapEx approach to building a platform for customer training will involve a lengthy scope, design and build cycle in-house, and a dedicated team to manage and deliver the project. In contrast, relying on the OpEx model means you could be delivering training within weeks or months, while all of those internal resources can be utilized elsewhere.

As time = money, OpEx allows you to minimize upfront costs, and it also continues to pay dividends once your training services are up and running. As the market evolves and new features become "must haves", a cloud-based software provider handles this functionality behind the scenes, rolling it out with the next software update for your immediate business benefit. This guarantees you the quickest time to value with on-trend features and updates.

When it comes to a customer learning platform — they aren't all created equally. Here's 5 ways that a subscription-based customer learning platform should support you in scaling support and success.

#1: Train More Customers Without Adding Headcount

This should come as no surprise to any stakeholder in business services. If a single instructor can only train one group of customers at a time, then in order to scale — you're going to need to add headcount. However, people are the most expensive part of doing business, and you really want to save these high-value resources for high-value conversations or clients.

Business services are increasingly looking for ways to cut costs, especially as downward price pressure on services is called out as a challenge for more than 35% of firms. The need to onboard new CSMs, instructors or designers is a step in the wrong direction.

Accelerated by the pandemic, remote training and Virtual Instructor Led Training (VILT) has become a boon for many companies who offer business services, including anything from executive coaching to management consultancy, and by leveraging a mixture of in-person, instructor-led, hybrid,

community-driven, on-demand and self-serve content. By creating eLearning courses for common needs such as onboarding, instructors can be freed up to focus on white-glove in-person sessions that can be monetized at a premium.

ArrowStream is a great example of a company who saw the benefit of creating a blended learning strategy for their customers. "We were conducting

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training one on one approximately 15 times per month with the sessions lasting up to 8 hours. This was inefficient." said Brittany Tamul, Director of Customer Success, ArrowStream. "Since we launched the online platform we've seen a 74% decrease in the time CS spends onboarding and training customers month over month. The impact on engagement has also been huge. Now, 80% of our client-base is logged in and accessing the learning site regularly."

#2: Create Customized Learning Experiences at Scale

Your platform needs to be built for customization across multiple brands and use cases, so that you can continue to offer the white-glove experience. eLearning can't be generic, as today's customers demand a lot more personalization for their employee training. This could feel like being stuck between a rock and a hard place. On the business' side, you want a repeatable process which improves your margins. On the customer's side — they need a training experience that's built for purpose. Can both requirements ever be met?

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That means when you land a new client, and they want to deliver your tried and tested content with their exact permutations, you don't need to head back to the drawing board to create a learning path or an eLearning course that fits the bill. Instead, your learning experience designers can make small changes on the fly to meet their needs, and you can say yes to a single use case, even if you can't scale this across all of your high-value customers.

Taking this even further, many business services companies have seen success by providing the client with the autonomy to make changes for themselves, providing self-serve training capabilities to put them in the driver's seat. One example is Industrial Training International (ITI), who quadrupled the amount of learning content they had and saw a 520% increase in online subscriptions as a result. "We're able to be so much more agile in how we deliver training to empower and support our customers" commented Christina Lanham, Managing Director, ITI. "We can now build custom pages and create a branded look for our business customers, offering engaging and meaningful content in different formats to support our business clients in achieving their goals."

The other huge benefit of native customization and control is the ability to meet requirements of globalization. Whether it's handling various currencies, localizing for language or cultural norms, or simply scaling availability and support to new regions — your platform has to provide for those needs if you're going to retain a competitive edge.

#3: Support Flexible Monetization Options

Your goal as a business is to make it as easy as possible for customers to sign on the dotted line. If you walked into a coffee shop, ordered a latte, and then were directed next door or down the street to make your payment, or given a phone number to call to complete the transaction, how likely would you be to wait around? 40%? Less? In that scenario, there are at least 6 in 10 prospects who are walking away because it's just not easy enough to make a purchase.

Monetization is table stakes when it comes to generating revenue from corporate training and business services. This means that your training offerings should integrate seamlessly with a range of payment solutions, so that decision-makers can simply click to buy. We regularly see customers who are still relying on manual processes such as "get in touch for a quote" or a separate, non-integrated solution that takes the prospect out of the main flow in order to take payments. Crucial Learning was one such example.

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"When we met Thought Industries, we were relying on a custom code solution on-site, and some manual execution to process transactions" said Russ Rollins, Senior Director of Product Technology at Crucial Learning. "This couldn't help but add bottlenecks and delays. Together, we decreased client setup time by 80%, and reduced our transaction errors to less than 1% thanks to the removal of manual eCommerce processes. We are now able to grow so much faster — we quickly saw 220% revenue growth as a result of the platform."

It's not only about eCommerce capabilities, although this should be top of the list for business services solutions. It's also about having the capability to be agile and adaptive with the way you charge for content, whether that's the ability to offer bundles and subscriptions, a la carte or geo-targeted offerings, or to provide coupons and credits that can be handed over to employees and used at a later date.
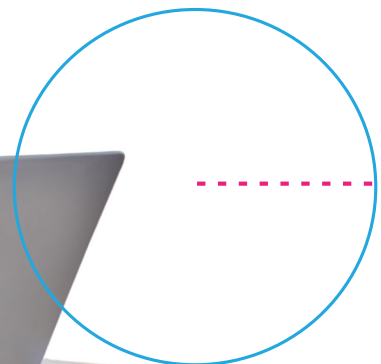
#4: Add Productivity Through Integrations

It's not only eCommerce that should be built into your training platform. Many professional services businesses spend a lot of time manually copying

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data from one system of record to another, which is duplicate effort, and can lead to inaccuracies or errors. Another problem is the need to write content in one place, design it in another, and then publish it in a third. When changes need to be made, these disparate tools can quickly make even a small tweak into a nightmare.

Integrating multiple different parts of a training solution can't help but correspond to a hit to productivity and revenues. This is a common challenge for today's management consultants and business service providers. Companies consistently underestimate the amount of maintenance required to keep API connections working in harmony, or how quickly seemingly lightweight solutions run into challenges of scale. These issues dictate that your customer learning platform is all-in-one, including eCommerce capabilities, content governance, and business intelligence from a single dashboard.

"With our previous system, it always felt like we were living on the ragged edge of disaster," comments

Clyde Seepersad, senior vice president for training and certification at The Linux Foundation, which offers online training for more than 200,000 professionals worldwide. "Thought Industries provided us with an integrated system with built-in authoring, e-commerce, and multi-tenant delivery capabilities that we needed to continue our growth."

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"We have one partner to author content, manage sales and eCommerce, and to conduct certification exams" continued Seepersad. "Our curriculum developers can update course content with bespoke details, then publish directly — giving them holistic control to provide for customer needs, however niche those might be."

#5: Turn Data Into Business Impact

The modern learning experience is a connected one. Every time your client's employees engage in training, attend a course, open a knowledgebase document or speak to an instructor — that's data that can help you to understand engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes. A successful learning program is able to connect the dots and provide both your own business and the customer with answers. This could be:

- How satisfied employees are with L&D opportunities
- The channels and modalities with which employees prefer to learn
- Which courses get completed, and why
- The ways in which training is moving the needle on metrics like employee retention, morale, or even promotions.

However, at the moment — getting value out of data is something your prospects are struggling with. More than half of L&D professionals say that they cannot use data effectively due to lacking in-house skills. If you're offering professional training and business services, these customers are looking to you to close this gap.

Your customer learning management platform should be able to integrate both qualitative and quantitative data insights that can help you discover and isolate gaps in customer's employee requirements, prove the impact of the training you're providing, and understand the true ROI of projects, teams, and tools. This is not just a value-add for the client, it's also powerful for you as a business.

With data insights to hand — you can step into the next board meeting able to show that with the exact same client portfolio, you've driven up margins with the help of blended learning and smarter routes

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to personalization on-demand. At the same time, customer satisfaction is high as clients are seeing faster time to value from their training, and existing team members are having more strategic and impactful conversations than before. Ultimately — you now have a clear view into what's selling and what's working, and what isn't.

The truth is that most platforms just don't enable this kind of action or insight. Perhaps that contributes to why OnShape experienced such success by partnering with Thought Industries. "We were looking to track and report customer training behaviors so that the company could develop a stronger, more effective training program," said David Katzman, Vice President of Strategic Accounts and Business Development. "Thought Industries has given us great insight into how our customers become educated and how well they understand our key differentiators."
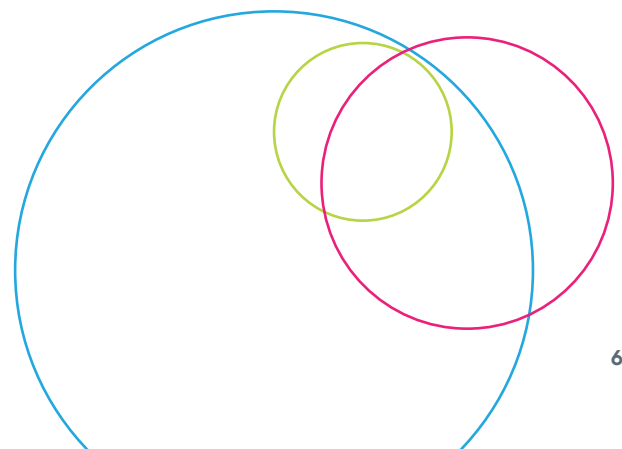
Deploy Customized Training Faster and at Scale, Increasing the ROI of Existing Accounts

Between 2021 and 2027, the global corporate training market will accelerate to see a CAGR of 9.4%. Those who grab the largest slice of this pie will be business services who can adapt to solve the greatest challenge in the industry — successfully scaling customized training without negatively impacting internal margins and growth.

A subscription-based customer learning platform provides an OpEx-based approach to tackle head-on the traditional challenges of delivering training, coaching and certifications. The facts are, only when business services have quick access to a cloud-based platform that's built for purpose, can they truly monetize customized training at scale.

Here's how you get into that mindset:

- Instead of increasing the price tag of training to account for inefficiencies — remove those inefficiencies with a **single platform that covers all of your business requirements**.
- Rather than throw headcount at your teams to handhold clients and ward off discontent, start relationships strong right out the gate with a **customized blended learning journey**.
- Switch out guesswork, gut feeling and reactivity and replace it with a **data-driven approach to how clients are engaging and performing**, all from the very first interaction.
- Provide a **customized brand experience 'out of the box',** satisfying your C-suite's need for strong margins while catering to the client's need to differentiate and meet their own goals.

Let's add your own business requirements to the conversation! Looking to improve your margins on delivering customized training at scale? Schedule a demo of the Thought Industries platform.