Thought INDUSTRIES

ZoomInfo's Strategic Commitment to Customer Education Drives a 15% Increase in Customer Renewals

The Enterprise SaaS company has used the Thought Industries Learning Cloud to focus on its 'North Star'— proving the connection between educated customers, product usage and renewals.

How do you measure the impact of customer learning on your organization?

This is the question that Tom Studdert, Vice President of Customer Onboarding and Education at ZoomInfo has been working on answering since he joined the company back in 2015.

ZoomInfo supports revenue teams with their Go To Market (GTM) strategies, delivering detailed information about prospects and partners, and helping Sales, Recruitment and Operations companies to engage with them.

The business has experienced tremendous growth over the past six years, moving from 2,000 to 30,000 customers, with more than 300,000 end users across these accounts. The company recently went public, and made a number of strategic acquisitions, growing to 3,000 employees — of which Tom was number 120, back when ZoomInfo and DiscoverOrg were two separate entities.

Tom's own team, Customer Education and Enablement has mirrored this exponential growth. *"When I started, we were a three-person team, and now we have fifty five employees, both on the training side, and also instructional designers and content creators. We focus on training customers across the lifecycle, so the enablement team owns our University and Knowledge Center — they create the content for those, and then we have an adoption team whose role it is to make sure customers hit certain milestones during the first 30-90 days to help guide them to value with our products."*

30K
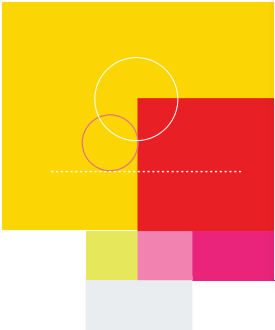Customers

300K
Users across accounts

3,000
Employees

TOM STUDDERT
VP of Customer Onboarding and Education, ZoomInfo

Of course, Rome wasn't built in a day. The growth of ZoomInfo's Customer Education team has been a journey to maturity, one which has relied on proving to the C-suite the impact of the work that is being done to get buy-in for each new idea and project. *"I remember early on, the CEO would say 'I know the customers have to be trained, I just wish they didn't!"* laughed Tom. *"He definitely thought of us as a cost-center, and in many ways we were. But as we've evolved and become a central tenet to customer experience, we've learned how to prove our worth."*

"At one stage we were looking at engagement and saying 'Excellent — the customers are enjoying the training', and that was all we could measure. We knew we had to go beyond the smile sheets and the satisfaction scores. Now we're having a direct impact on renewals and upsells. We've got to a place where we can prove that we're an engine that does two things; provides ROI to the customers and is also strongly linked to revenue generation."

> **" Now our CEO says — How many more trainers do you need to provide me with X% logo renewal this year?"**
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> **TOM STUDDERT**
> VP of Customer Onboarding and Education, ZoomInfo

Focusing on Product Usage

All businesses start from somewhere, and when it comes to measurement and data analytics, that first-step is usually an Excel spreadsheet. ZoomInfo started out on Litmos, an LMS that was built specifically for employee needs -- where customers were an afterthought. Each customer would be onboarded, have a single training session, and be marked as complete on an Excel form, before the trainers moved on to the next. *"There was no philosophy,"* said Tom *"It was just about keeping up with the backlog and making sure people were being trained. I call that stage one."*

"The next stage for us was being able to show a correlation between trained users and their usage of the product. **If you can show that trained accounts are displaying deeper product adoption, you immediately have a story to tell to the board to get buy-in for expanding education."**

In order to achieve this, in 2019, ZoomInfo onboarded the Thought Industries Customer Learning Cloud, a customer learning platform that, unlike Litmos, was built from the ground up for customer education. The team was tasked with tracking foundational customer success metrics. As well as deeper product adoption, these metrics focused on improving the number of trained accounts and completion rates.

*"We were looking at unique users who were accessing content on Thought Industries. We had a baseline of 916, and we wanted 2,000 per month. We wanted to grow from 90% to 95% accounts trained in segments, we wanted to increase the number of customers accessing non-onboarding-related content from less than 1% to 15%. We achieved all of that and more in the first 9 months on TI. **I remember I was asked to grow certified users from 50 per quarter to 75. It felt like a colossal goal, and we knocked it out of the park within 9 months. Now, we have 350 certifications per week!"***

There was no doubt that customer education was fueling the growth of the company, and even supporting many of its most essential goals — including product usage and revenue growth. In fact, user activation had doubled since ZoomInfo had onboarded Thought Industries.

So, what was next?

GROWTH GOALS ACHIEVED IN FIRST 9 MONTHS ON TI

Unique users per month
increased from 916 to

2000

Unique users per month
increased from 90% to

95%

Number of customers accessing non-onboarding content
increased from <1% to

15%

Certified users
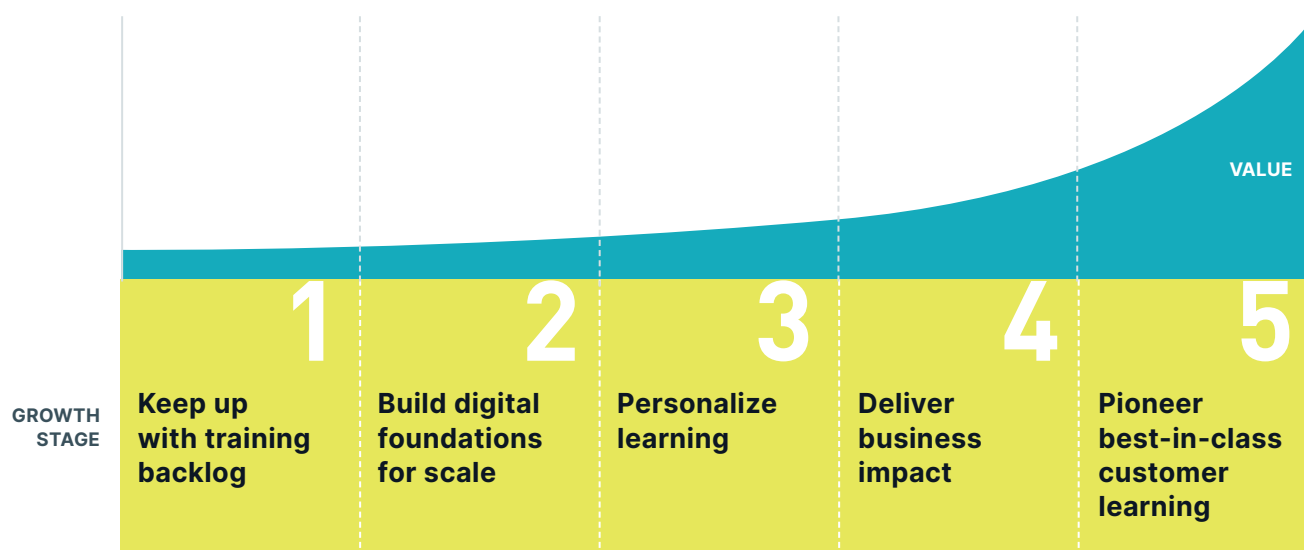increased from 50 per quarter to

75

GOALS

The Technology for Maturity

The Thought Industries' Maturity Model maps out the roadmap to high-performance customer learning, and you can track the stages of ZoomInfo's journey along the same curve. While their Excel spreadsheets and an integration with Salesforce reporting could be called stage two — digital foundations for scale, ZoomInfo knew that these weren't the right places to store training data, and that the immature systems made it messy and complicated to correlate data and get insights out of the information they were tracking.

Roadmap to High-Performance Customer Learning

Value delivered by learning program increases with maturity

VALUE

1	2	3	4	5
Keep up with training backlog	Build digital foundations for scale	Personalize learning	Deliver business impact	Pioneer best-in-class customer learning

GROWTH STAGE

Building out all of their non face-to-face customer training on Thought Industries, they created webinars, VILT, customized videos and more within the platform, and used smart tagging and filtering to reach the right personas at the right time. ZoomInfo moved swiftly through to stage 3. This is where personalized learning could begin to be delivered at scale. *"Almost everything that we do is as a result of us having the Thought Industries technology, which was not available in any other LMS that we have looked at — and I looked at 35!"* commented Tom. *"All 30,000 of our customers are signed up to Panorama, where we can provide them with a dedicated space and their own bespoke training across all products. For enterprise customers, we can create co-branded courses inside Panorama, and we can log into our executive dashboard where I can view all the data in a snapshot, and see who has been trained and what they've done."*

Another differentiator was the back-end capabilities to integrate into the existing technology suite that ZoomInfo was using, for example offering a tight SalesForce integration, and to embed Thought Industries into ZoomInfo's own products. Through Single Sign On functionality, customers never need to leave the ZoomInfo platform, and can access education across multiple products and platforms. *"I like to say we have one University that caters to many products, which really reduces the friction for customers and helps us to correlate metrics across our solution suite,"* said Tom. *"To share a simple example; we can look and see that a certain account is signed up to Chorus, but took a course on Engage, and yet they don't currently have that product. This prompts the Sales team to go and have that conversation and suggest an upsell."*

As the Customer Education team has continued to show value, the data architecture has advanced alongside. From humble beginnings with Excel spreadsheets and manual reporting, ZoomInfo then onboarded a Business Intelligence tool, Tableau, and over the past 2 years, an integration with Snowflake, a data lake where they can collect and utilize usage data on course completions, certifications, and demographics about their accounts. These tools provided them with the ability to get to the top of the pyramid — and to deliver insights that lead to best-in-class customer learning.

The insights they uncovered showed a clear connection to product usage. ZoomInfo found that on average, when a customer takes a course there is an immediate 5% jump in their usage pattern.

Over time when they looked across all customers, they identified a 108% growth for customers who have completed a course.

By prompting additional product usage, this showed a direct correlation to renewal and churn. In fact, the team found a straightforward dotted line correlation that suggested **customers who don't engage with the University have a higher propensity to churn.**

By looking more deeply at the data, ZoomInfo also developed a better understanding of its various customer segments, so they can have the right conversations about upending their traditional way of working, or adding more resources where they are needed the most. *"Another example,"* adds Tom. *"We've been able to look into our small business segment who currently get a very high-tech touch without a lot of personal support. That's great because we get them onboarded quickly, but we've found that they are actually far more likely to churn or downsell than those with a higher-touch approach. So we're talking about increasing resources in that group — and that wouldn't have happened without the data and the visibility from Thought Industries."*

When ZoomInfo looked across all customers, they identified a 108% growth for customers who have completed a course.

108%

increase in product adoption

Following the North Star

With its newfound confidence and capabilities, in 2022 ZoomInfo set out to present to the C-suite on organizational impact metrics — upsell and renewals, by gleaning data insights from the Thought Industries dashboard.

Knowing that logo renewals were their 'North star', Tom and his team correlated the engagement with the University with the renewals on a suite of ZoomInfo products. *"This was really crucial for me on the CX team,"* said Tom. *"It's well known that it's cheaper to retain a customer than onboard a new one, and we wanted to prove our part in that. I wanted to be able to draw a direct line between educated customers and better renewals. We looked at accounts where at least one user in an account completed a course in the University, and we saw an increase in logo renewals in these accounts of between 10%-15%."*

10-15%
increase in logo renewals

5-10%
increase in upsell rates

ZoomInfo didn't stop there, and were further able to report that upsell metrics showed a similar uplift, between 5%-10% on average depending on the product. This was specifically when looking at accounts which were engaging in training and completing courses in the University. "We definitely found that **accounts which had been trained had a greater propensity to buy, whether that was more seats, more credits, or more products**" said Tom. *"This worked on a curve. The more people that had been trained within an account, the more likely they were to buy additional products, or say yes to the next product in the evolution of the GTM strategy."*

CEO of ZoomInfo, Henry Schuck, believes that without a strong Customer Learning platform partner, the team could not have achieved as much as they have. *"We had partnered with other LMS vendors along the way, and we never got the uplift or adoption that we've seen with Thought Industries, both internally and externally."* he commented.

As the team began to scale the education function, Tom needed a strong partner to help him to deploy, to get engineering people confident about the work they were doing, to encourage other internal stakeholders to get on board. Thought Industries has been a great partner to get us to the place we are today, and I believe it would have been really hard to get to this point without a great partner."

Henry Schuck
CEO, ZoomInfo

Going back to the Thought Industries maturity model, Tom had been able to use data to show that customer education was delivering true business impact, a stage that our extensive research has shown us less than 5% of programs across the industry have achieved to date.

Tapping into Human Nature

For today's Customer Education teams, especially those at the earlier stages of their growth, ZoomInfo's story is truly aspirational, and an indicator that the metaphorical pot of gold really is at the end of the rainbow, even if the journey involves some heavy lifting to move up the maturity model.

"I wouldn't expect a new Customer Education team to go from no data to the kind of data we have now, **but the important thing is to start measuring something."** Tom continued. *"It took us six years to get here. We always wanted it, but we just weren't ready. It's hard to skip the steps as your team evolves and grows, but even if you're using Excel sheets, get yourself to stage two and start understanding who is being trained and then start comparing that training to usage. Then you at least have the data to start the analysis."*

Customer Education has become key to ZoomInfo's growth strategy, not just the recognition that trained customers renew more often, and can be upsold to more easily, but also understanding the simple human psychology behind why education works.

> **If you're trained on a product, and you know the best practices and you can see it working — whether that's making your day job easier, or helping you get better in your career, you want more of it!"** said Tom. **"That's an integral part of our strategy, and why we put a lot of effort into using education to get customers to see value quickly with the products we offer."**
>
> **Tom Studdert**
> **VP of Customer Onboarding and Education, ZoomInfo**

Thoughts from the C-suite

Whatever their named role in a company, I believe that ultimately everyone needs to be a business person. *And what that means is being able to tie your passion or skill for the work that you do back to a business result. For example, Tom is an L&D professional, but he could be the best L&D guy in the world, and it doesn't mean anything if he can't connect those dots back to business outcomes.*

At ZoomInfo, we live and die by the idea that every minute of our time, every dollar that we spend needs to be backed up by its efficiency gains for the company. So, when it comes to Customer Education, if the team comes to me with a plan for broadening the University, writing new courses or content, adding engineering resources to the mix and so on, I want to hear how it's going to drive efficiency.

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CEO, ZoomInfo

Of course, at first – you only have a theory about how education is going to move the needle. Your Customer Education team tells you it's going to make customers smarter about how to use the platform, help them access better data insights to drive their own business outcomes, which will show the value of ZoomInfo and therefore increase usage, and retention, and renewals. But it isn't rocket science. In fact, it makes a lot of sense. If you get people to use the platform more, and you can speed up the outcome they expected when they invested in your software, they're going to want more of it.

Nothing happens overnight, so I'd tell other CEOs to be patient and accept you're on a journey. 6 years on, Tom can now show me dashboards that detail the impact of education in granular detail. A 1% increase in university activity drives 66 additional users through upsell. A 1% increase in accounts who are actively engaging with education content drives the userbase by 52 new renewals. That's not what it was like at the start!

But the vision was there.

I would say - let your teams make that commitment to the return that you're going to see on your Customer Education investment. If they believe it's going to drive better results for the customer, it will almost certainly drive better results for the business. So let them lay out their roadmap and hold them accountable for delivering on that. After all, every employee wants trust from their CEO, and every CEO wants to know that resources are thoughtfully spent and designed to provide an outcome for the business."

Henry Schuck
CEO, ZoomInfo

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