

## **Making a Case for a Blended Solution**

# **Build, Buy, Blend: A Range of Options for Sales Training**

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## Executive Summary

Within the life-sciences industry, the three primary methods or tracks for learning development are: Build, Buy, and Blend.

Within the life-sciences industry, the three primary methods available for developing technology-based training are: Build, Buy, and Blend.

Build means creating custom solutions, either internally or with the help of an outside e-learning partner. Buy means purchasing an off-the-shelf solution. Blend (not to be confused with blended learning) means customizing elements of an off-the-shelf solution.

### Primary factors to consider when deciding the best plan for learning development

- **Time:** How quickly does the training need to be available?
- **Content:** What is the nature of the content and is the information proprietary? Does the company have the necessary skills in-house to produce this content? How often will the content need to be updated?
- **Audience:** How many learners are there? How diverse is the audience? (Rep vs. MSL vs. Home Office)
- **Budget:** What are the cost parameters for the initiative — initial deployment as well as ongoing maintenance?
- **Deployment:** Does the company have an existing delivery environment, such as an LMS?
- **Resources:** What internal resources are available to support the e-learning initiative?

These factors are also related to the budget. In general, the more targeted and customized the learning, the more changes that will be required over time, and the more learners that there are who will need the training, the more the cost.

## Examining the Options — Build, Buy, Blend

The Build Model requires a significant commitment and investment.

### Analyzing the Build Model

#### The Environment

The Build option involves developing a customized curriculum, original content, and a complete technology implementation from the ground up. This requires: 1) a large commitment in terms of time and energy from in-house staff, or 2) contracting with the right vendor. Making a decision on whether to build internally or work with a vendor is based on the staffing considerations and project management expertise available within the training department.

Research reveals that companies that have an ongoing, substantial investment in their compliance training departments are more likely to build their own training

programs. They have an established infrastructure, either internally or with external developers, to handle their requirements on a per project basis. In other cases, some large companies have a culture of “must be done in-house” or “the training must be unique to our organization.” In essence, this culture requires that all training be customized, and it doesn’t matter if the program is for clinical, marketing, sales, or compliance training.

### Build Model: Advantages/Disadvantages

#### ADVANTAGES

Training modules unique to a company's culture, processes, and terminology	91.0%
Content can be modified at company's discretion	82.0%
Modules can be modified to work within existing delivery environment	57.9%
Courseware provides a competitive advantage	42.1%

#### DISADVANTAGES

Expense	82.3%
Time to create and roll out	73.1%
Additional costs to update content	30.8%

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because multiple responses were selected; percentages based on 130 responses.  
Source: PharmaVOICE, Titusville, NJ; NXLevel Solutions, Hopewell, NJ.

#### Advantages

There are several acknowledged advantages to custom-built solutions. For example, they can provide a competitive advantage by including company-specific and competitive intelligence; they can be made to work within the company's delivery environment; and the content is ownable, in other words the company retains the rights to the information. According to a recent survey of training executives, the

The Buy Model does not always have matching content to the company's training needs.

most significant pros to the Build model are that resulting programs are unique to the individual company's culture, processes, and terminology; and the content can be modified at the company's discretion.

### Disadvantages

It is no surprise that overwhelmingly the biggest disadvantages to custom-built training and learning programs are time and cost. Expenses can encompass costs associated not only with internal resources, but also outside vendors in terms of consultation, and the need to pay for any updates as shelf life expires. It also has been noted that custom programs take longer to roll out and deploy than off-the-shelf modules.

## Analyzing The Buy Model

### The Environment

When companies buy "off-the-shelf" learning solutions program(s) or modules they are typically used "as is." This reduces development times and costs and generally requires less training staff time, leaving trainers positioned to do what they do best:

train. But there are limitations to be considered with off-the-shelf programs, such as what to do when the content doesn't match the company's unique requirements and what approach to take when updating the content in terms of copyright issues.

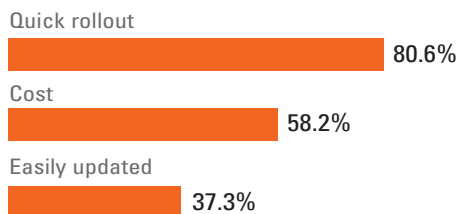
### Advantages

There are a number of factors that contribute to favoring off-the-shelf solutions, such as

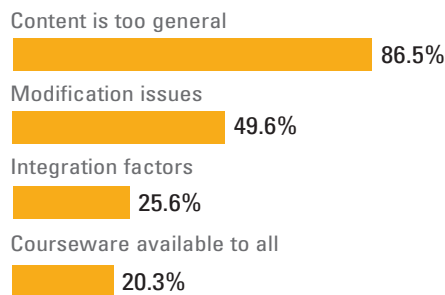
less reliance on internal resources (that applies to both human capital as well as

## Buy Model: Advantages/Disadvantages

### ADVANTAGES



### DISADVANTAGES



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because multiple responses were selected; percentages based on 133 responses. Source: PharmaVOICE, Titusville, NJ; NXLevel Solutions, Hopewell, NJ.

**The Blend Model satisfies the unique requirements of the pharmaceutical industry.**

budgets); greater access to external subject matter expertise and instructional design — content developers who are in tune with the changing environment on a regular basis; a quicker deployment schedule or time to market; and more efficient methods to update content.

## Disadvantages

The biggest negative associated with off-the-shelf modules is that the content is too general to address a company's unique culture or needs and that the same courses are available to potential competitors. Other disadvantages include difficulties integrating modules into existing learning delivery environments, an inability to modify programs, and the need to wait for updates from the content developer.

## Analyzing The Blend Model

### The Environment

Between Build and Buy is the Blend approach, which involves buying or licensing an existing learning solution and then customizing or tailoring the content to fit the specific needs of a company. External content and development resources are leveraged as a strong, externally validated content foundation. Then, this foundation is modified or built upon by the internal staff resulting in an amalgamation of custom and off-the-shelf material that best fits an organization's needs. It should be noted

that this option should not be confused with the "blended learning" term that refers to utilizing different forms of content delivery in a learning program.

This combination of off-the-shelf products and custom training content is extremely well-suited to the diverse requirements of the

## Blend Model

### OFF-THE-SHELF SOLUTIONS THAT CAN BE CUSTOMIZED



Note: Percentages based on 153 responses.  
Source: PharmaVOICE, Titusville, NJ; NXLevel Solutions, Hopewell, NJ.

pharmaceutical industry, regardless of an organization's size and scope. In fact, in a

recent survey, most trainers stated that they might or would be interested in an off-the-shelf solution that could be customized to meet their needs.

### **Advantages**

It is clear that “content is still king,” and the blend model combines the best of all worlds: content developed by industry-wide subject matter experts in concert with internal personnel who are in tune with the specific training needs of the organization.

The Blend option also offers the opportunity to brand and visually adapt the courseware so that it is in sync with other learning programs.

Additionally, using a hybrid solution from an established off-the-shelf vendor can save time and money while providing a system for updating and maintaining the courseware on a regular basis, which addresses the biggest disadvantages associated with custom and off-the-shelf programs.

### **Disadvantages**

In comparison with the other two established models, a Blend approach has no discernable disadvantages, and in fact, bridges the gaps between Build and Buy efficiently and effectively.

### Conclusion

Organizations small and large are struggling with the same e-learning design and deployment challenges today that they have been facing for several years. Now, more than ever, it is critical that companies develop a training strategy that blends the right combination of content and instructional resources and expertise.

Achieving this goal should create opportunities for the vendors and content providers who successfully address an organization's needs with the appropriate mixture of ready-made products, custom offerings, flexible pricing models, and content expertise.

### A Training Scenario: Taking A Blend Approach to Compliance Training

Marketing regulations are prompting companies to establish cultures that value ethics and compliance. To remain in compliance with evolving guidelines — state, industry, and federal — companies need to make sure their employees, especially their sales representatives and marketing professionals, are trained on the latest regulations. As each state moves toward passing its own rules and regulations, trainers need to consider the pros and cons of employing custom programs versus off-the-shelf modules versus a hybrid option for these scenarios.

#### **Compliance Training — Part of the Corporate Culture**

There are advantages and disadvantages to both Build and Buy models for compliance training. These pros and cons need to be matched against the current and anticipated future requirements of the organization. The overall understanding regarding the importance of healthcare compliance has changed dramatically in recent years. Compliance training is no longer something that's regarded as "oh yeah, by the way;" it has become part of the corporate culture and is treated with the same or higher level of importance as other training.

#### **Evaluating Custom Learning**

Custom learning programs allow a company to tailor the learning experience to directly reflect its processes and procedures in order to comply with the guidelines set out by the OIG as well as the company's unique corporate culture. This option may also ensure full ownership of the content, which some life-sciences companies require.

However, there are a few cons that need to be considered with custom training solutions. For example, it may be difficult for in-house subject-matter experts to match the industry expertise available from an off-the-shelf provider who specializes in a particular topic.

In addition, custom programs typically take longer to develop and may not be able to keep pace with regulations that are continually changing.

Higher cost is also a factor, as is content licensing. If the custom solution relies on outside or contracted subject matter expertise, the organization needs to make sure that external content is licensed properly for current and future use.

### **A Better Approach: The Blend Model**

On the other hand, a Blend approach, in which off-the-shelf programs are customized, offers many advantages, including proven content developed by subject matter experts who specialize in topics such as healthcare compliance. Additionally, programs typically can be delivered in a shorter period of time and at a lower cost. And, depending on the vendor, the content will most likely be updated on a more regular basis.

Because the Blend option, or hybrid solution, provides off-the-shelf courseware that can be customized, it can directly reflect an organization's interpretation of the OIG guidelines, unlike a traditional off-the-shelf solution.

A blended program essentially allows internal information to be integrated into the latest compliance content so that the end result is courseware that includes external or government guidelines and internal processes and procedures.

### **The Need for Continuous Training**

According to guidelines published in the Federal Register, *OIG, Compliance Program Guidance for Pharmaceutical Manufacturers*, May 2003, "The proper education and training of officers, directors, employees, contractors, and agents, and periodic retraining of personnel at all levels, are critical elements of an effective compliance program."

This means a person's individual role requires that he or she apply those regulations differently. Thus, it is imperative that the learning program clearly presents what's important for the learner. One way to do this is to customize or adapt case studies or scenarios to real-world situations that directly apply to the learner.

Because the learning needs to present the regulations and show how these apply to the individual taking the course, the end result could be a set of courses that contains about 80% to 90% of purchased content with the remaining information tailored to specific audiences. This is a clear application for the Blend model.

The Federal Register also states: "A pharmaceutical manufacturer should regularly review its training and, where appropriate, update the training to reflect issues identified through audits or monitoring and any relevant changes in federal health care program requirements."

A good hybrid solution provider will develop its courseware in a way that allows for the updating suggested by the OIG in an efficient manner. A custom-developed solution may not take future revisions into account, which could add substantial time and cost to later versions of the courseware. The hybrid vendor's experience with developing compliance courses may also help to shorten legal review times, which would translate to cost savings as well.

At the end of the day, when considering the compliance training solution that's best for an organization, companies need to remember that no one shoe fits all. And it's important to note that either an off-the-shelf or a hybrid option should only be one component of the training initiative, not the entire curriculum.

### About NXLevel Solutions

NXLevel Solutions' core business is creating and deploying standards-based, media-rich, instructionally sound, e-learning programs. We are experienced learning and media professionals who have been engaged with interactive media for more than 20 years. We build partnerships with our clients to create "Fully Engaged Learning" programs that capture and sustain the interest of learners.

To access a Podcast on the topic of compliance training featuring Peter Sandford, Executive VP, NXLevel Solutions, please visit <http://www.pharmavoice.com/podcasts>.

Visit [NXLevelSolutions.com](http://NXLevelSolutions.com) to learn more about us, or contact Peter Sandford at 609.466.2828, ext. 11.