

PERFORMANCE INSIGHTS

DON'T EXPECT THE SAME EXPERIENCE, BECAUSE IT'S NOT. AND THAT'S OKAY!

CREATE (INSTEAD OF CONVERT) VIRTUAL INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING

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In the past few months, we've all found ourselves connecting more in a virtual space than in person. Before this, I wouldn't have taken an online exercise class or used a telemedicine service. Why would I when I live in an urban area with so many amenities only a few blocks away?

But when in-person togetherness went away, it pushed me to try more virtual experiences. And you know what ... that's not such a bad thing at all! Via Zoom, I've taken dance classes and Pilates, gone on a guided Shamanic journey, and watched a performance of the Glass Menagerie with actors all in different locations. I've seen a modern dance premier streamed live from an empty theater and had my daughter visit the dermatologist over Facetime.

At first, I approached the virtual experiences with an attitude of "it won't be the same as the real thing, but it's better than nothing." I quickly realized though, that it's not about trying to recreate the same experience virtually; it's more about creating a truly virtual experience. And what you get out of that experience is not better or worse than the live experience ... it's simply different.



We need to think along the same lines when it comes to converting instructor-led training (ILT) to virtual instructor-led training (VILT). In fact, using the word “converting” may be what keeps us from developing truly engaging VILT. Don’t try to make one be the same as the other. Don’t approach VILT as if it will be lesser than an ILT and only as good as it can get under the circumstances. Give VILT a chance to be a great and impactful moment to learn by creating VILT, not converting.

When we use best practices for engaging virtually through presentation skills and the technology available to have the audience chat, annotate, share screens, and discuss in breakout rooms, we can build an experience that our learners will remember and that will meet the objectives we set for the training. And we give our learners the opportunity to practice additional skills such as being able to communicate successfully in a virtual setting, comfort with the technology that allows us to do that, and the ability to express themselves in different ways.

When I sat through the dance performance, I realized how focused I became without the audience and the applause. I got to see chats about what people thought about the performance in real time. Likewise, there were more people on the Shamanic journey who had never participated in one than those of us who had. Perhaps it felt easier and safer for the first-timer to participate virtually and that allowed more people to give it a try. When I watched the play with the actors in different screens, I was able to focus on each individually while being profoundly affected by the overall performance.

We can have this kind of impact in our VILT classes as well. Rather than approaching design and development as if we're trying to make the class live up to an ILT, we can start with fresh eyes to ensure we incorporate interactions and experiences that come alive in a virtual setting. We can provide learners with not only a class that meets the objectives for knowledge or skill transfer, but also a new perspective on what learning can be. They can walk away from the virtual experience as I did, pleasantly surprised by what's different. And that's okay!



Denise Renton (denise.renton@innovativeLG.com) is a performance consultant at Innovative Learning Group, a performance-first learning company located in Troy, Michigan. She has 30 years of experience designing and developing training and performance support solutions for Fortune 1000 companies. Denise finds that one of the most interesting aspects of the instructional design field is learning about what other people do in their jobs and how different companies pursue performance improvement for their employees.