A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO OUTSOURCING E-LEARNING DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

OUTSOURCING
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1. Why Organizations Do/Don’t Outsource E-learning

1.1 Why Organizations Outsource E-learning

An opinion poll conducted at the webinar ‘How to Navigate Outsourcing Custom eLearning Development to Maximize ROI’ (by CommLab India and presented by its Founder-CEO R K Prasad) on 24th September 2019 provided some interesting results as to why organizations do or don’t outsource e-learning.

*Figure 1: Top Reasons for Companies to Outsource E-learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with Increased Demand</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs Reduction</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick Turnaround</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveraging Vendor’s Expertise and Manpower</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest voted reason for outsourcing eLearning was that organizations could leverage the vendor’s expertise and manpower, followed by increased demand, cost reduction, and quick turnaround. There is more to this list of benefits of outsourcing but let’s first delve into the apprehensions organizations might have about outsourcing eLearning.
1.2 Why Organizations Don’t Outsource E-learning

There are many imagined hindrances for outsourcing eLearning design and development. According to a poll held in the same webinar, the following are the top reasons for companies not going for outsourcing e-learning.

![Figure 2: Top Reasons for Companies NOT to Outsource E-learning](image)

The highest voted reason for organizations not outsourcing eLearning is that it is more economical to design and develop courses in-house, followed by quality issues, confidentiality issues, and communication barriers, in that order. Do you also feel the same about outsourcing eLearning? Read the rest of the eBook to put those apprehensions to rest.
2. Four Elements that can be Outsourced

Here are all the different parts of eLearning development you can outsource to your eLearning partner.
2.1 Rapid E-learning Development

‘Rapid’ eLearning development, as the term indicates, is creating courses rapidly (within 2-3 weeks). You can go for this when you have content in the form of PowerPoint Presentations (PPTs), Instructor-led Training (ILT) material, Word documents, videos, quizzes, Portable Document Format (PDFs), and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This content can be quickly repurposed into eLearning courses — after adding some element of instructional design — using standard templates of rapid authoring tools. A few of the popular rapid authoring tools include:

01. Adobe Captivate
02. Articulate Storyline
03. iSpring Suite
04. Lectora Inspire
05. dominKnow

One major advantage of rapid eLearning development is that rapid authoring tools do not require any programming knowledge to develop courses. Another obvious benefit is the reduced efforts from you and the subject matter experts (SME).
### Table 1: Pros & Cons of Outsourcing Rapid eLearning Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Cheaper, faster, core training that does not need complex instructional design</td>
<td>Low on interactivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Quick assessments possible</td>
<td>Courses more of ready reckoner type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Minimum demand on SMEs’ time</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>No additional investment needed in the authoring tool</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tip: Use Lectora Online to quickly convert PPTs to eLearning courses.

#### 2.2 End-to-end E-learning Development

End-to-end development means designing and developing e-learning courses from raw material that are aligned with the broad learning outcomes decided on in the kickoff meeting. The process looks something like this:

- You and the vendor together finalize the learning outcomes and content
- The vendor creates the storyboard and sends it for your approval
- After approval of the storyboard, the vendor develops the course without audio narration and sends for approval (with the audio script)
- You review the course and provide feedback to the vendor
- The vendor then updates the course and sends it with audio narration
You can use your authoring tools to leverage your in-house resources. You can make the process of end-to-end development outsourcing quicker and easier with a little pre-work, such as:

- analyzing the target audience
- finalizing the learning outcomes
- organizing the learning content

A major benefit of outsourcing end-to-end development is that you can take advantage of the vendor’s experience in choosing the most suitable authoring tool for the project.

**Table 2: Pros & Cons of Outsourcing End-to-end eLearning Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Substantial cost saving</td>
<td>More SMEs’ time needed to explain and validate content/course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Can leverage the vendor’s expertise and specialized resources</td>
<td>Project management is more demanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Tip: Plan for your e-learning translations along with the end-to-end course!*

### 2.3 Flash to HTML5 Conversion

Flash-based legacy courses are converted to HTML5 for many reasons, the top one being mobile compatibility. But before you proceed with the conversion, you need to analyse your existing courses and creating an inventory in which courses are organized according to:

- Level of interactivity
- Authoring tool used for development
- Availability of source files
- Training requirement
This will help you prioritize the courses. The Flash courses can then be converted to HTML5 output using one of the four conversion strategies:

1. **Record**— Converting courses by recording them and publishing the output in MP4 format.
2. **Republish**— Converting courses into the latest version of the same authoring tool.
3. **Rebuild**— Converting courses from one authoring tool to another.
4. **Redesign**— Converting courses post revamping the design and interactivities.

### Table 3: Pros and Cons of Outsourcing Flash to HTML5 Conversion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Substantial cost saving</td>
<td>Auditing existing Flash courses is a huge task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Can leverage the vendor’s expertise and resources</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Can be done with/without source files</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Unlimited volume of conversions handled with ease</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Tip: Create a roadmap to monitor the progress of the eLearning project and track key deliverables.*
2.4 E-learning Course Development

You can outsource only the eLearning course development when your in-house learning and development (L&D) team is not equipped for it. Customizing corporate training programs for specific training needs of the learners and using authoring tools effectively is something that comes easily to experienced professionals.

When you outsource only course development, you will need to provide your vendor with all the resources and elements (graphics, images, videos, etc.), after which your vendor will develop the courses in the selected authoring tool. It is also important to observe that since course development is a crucial factor, you and the SMEs will need to expend time and effort to validate the content and courses. A major benefit of outsourcing only the eLearning course development is that you get a high-quality course that is not only effective but engaging.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Cheaper and faster</td>
<td>Needs an in-house team of instructional designers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Quick assessments possible</td>
<td>No relative cost saving vis-a-vis end-to-end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Complex animations can be outsourced</td>
<td>Vendor may not be able to translate IDs’ ideas into reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Can obtain media-rich courses cost-effectively</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Tip: Ask the vendor to use the authoring tool that you have, so updating the course becomes easier at your end.*
Other Parts of E-learning Design and Development You can Outsource

- Consulting on Training Strategies
- Instructional Design
- Multimedia Components
- Translation and Localization
- Digital Assets for Performance Support
3. Three Tasks Before You Outsource

A little pre-work by you before initiating the eLearning outsourcing project will put you on the right track and save time in the process of development.
3.1 Set Measurable Learning Objectives (LOs)

Learning objectives (LOs) are measurable statements that provide clarity of vision on the course. They define the expected goal of a curriculum or a course. LOs are integral to determining the strategies for eLearning courses.

An ideal learning objective has 3 components:

1. Performance – what the learner is expected to do
2. Condition – the condition under which the performance is to occur
3. Criteria – how well the learner should perform to be considered competent

Providing good learning objectives at the beginning of the course fulfills the adult learning principle that says ‘adults need to know why they should learn something’. Learning objectives are also good tools for evaluating whether or not the training material has achieved its purpose. Setting learning objectives beforehand will help conserve time and form the basis for deciding:

- Scope of the content
- Choice of instructional method
- Evaluation
- Duration of course
- Cost

*Tip: Follow Bloom’s hierarchical order of objectives when designing learning objectives.*
3.2 Check the Availability of Content

You need to check the available content to assess how much of the content is relevant, or if it is at all relevant. Your SMEs will play an important role in determining which of the available content is good to go and which of it you can do away with. Content can be the biggest bottleneck in outsourcing, and also the highest determining factor.

- Too much content, be it ILT, legacy courses, or marketing PPTs, can be a problem.
- Too little of relevant content is also an issue.

So what does one do? You can consider these three ‘F’s:

1. **Filter** content using pre-set learning objectives.
2. **Fire** all content not aligned to learning objectives.
3. **Fill** identified content gaps.

Experienced and competent eLearning partners can help fine-tune your LOs and identify any content gaps.

*Tip: Follow the principle of ‘form follows function’.*
3.3 Get Your Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) On-board

Subject matter experts are integral to the process of eLearning development, given that they are the flag-bearers of content. They have knowledge, experience, and special skills in a particular topic or field.

- They are high-value employees.
- They provide and validate content.
- They hold proprietary information.

Considering that their primary responsibility is not training, they are still needed during the design and development of the course. But since their time is premium, it is best to use as little of their time as possible.

Conserve the SME’s time in these 4 ways:

1. **Make the SME receptive to eLearning** – so they understand what and how much is needed from them.
2. **Plan for curriculums, not courses** – so the SMEs’ focus is not lost with time.
3. **Leverage their resources** – so the resources (PPTs) provided by the SMEs can be quickly recorded and turned into a microlearning module.
4. **Plan in advance** – so they know when they’ll be needed to review the storyboard and the course.

*Tip: Saving the SMEs’ time in eLearning design and development saves you a lot of costs.*
4. Three Steps to Select the Right E-learning Partner

Selecting the right vendor is not something you should do over-night. Since you will be depending on them for well-crafted eLearning courses, you need to do a lot of research before selecting the right one. Begin by clearly defining your expectations from the e-learning outsourcing project. Only then will you be able to decide who can be the right vendor for you.

E.g. If you have a globally dispersed network of employees, you will want to look for a vendor who can also provide you eLearning translations. This reduces the hassles of working with different vendors for different services.

Here are 3 steps to guide you in choosing an outsourcing partner, after you define your expectations.
4.1 Shortlist 5-7 Vendors

Check directories or groups that list vendors vetted by:

- eLearning Industry
- ATD
- Brandon Hall
- Training Industry

This will help you identify vendors who are well-qualified in creating valuable training solutions for your employees.

*Tip: Check for thought leadership—companies that provide good informative materials—for their customer education initiatives!*

4.2 Evaluate Their Websites

Select the top three vendors after evaluating their websites.

- Ensure e-learning development is their core business and check for their experience.
- Figure out if they keep up with the latest trends in technology and industry.
- Gauge their ability to work across different time-zones and cultures.
- Review the resumes of the company’s team members you’ll be working with.

Also, make sure they have a well-defined process of development. The *Successive Approximation Model (SAM)* fashioned by Michael Allen, for example, is an agile iterative process of development. It comprises of three stages – Preparation, Design, and Development.
It offers a chance for review and feedback not just at the end, but at every stage in the development process. So this model can help in saving a huge amount of time and money.

Tip: Issue a request for proposal (RFP) to narrow down on vendors based on the proposals that meet your requirements.

4.3 Request for a Prototype

Ask the vendor for a prototype. Your vendor is obliged to provide you with a prototype at no cost, but you won’t be obliged to outsource eLearning to them just because they provided you with a prototype.

The vendor’s experience in eLearning and expertise with authoring tools does not automatically make them the right one for you! One way to assess their work would be a prototype based on your requirements. A prototype—a fully functional sample— will let you assess if the vendor can provide your expected training solution.
You can evaluate the prototype based on:

**Instructional design (ID) skills**
- Presentation of content
- Understanding of ID principles
- Ability to synthesize information from various sources
- Selecting the right instructional multimedia components

**Project management (PM) skills and processes**
- Ability to have clear communication
- Planning a project with effective collaboration
- Controlling and managing risks

*Tip: Check the responsiveness of the prototype to assess its mobile-compatibility!*
5. Five Factors that Help Estimate the Cost

You can choose the right vendor based on the steps we have just discussed. But choosing the right vendor is only half the job done. You need a budget estimation to convince your top management on outsourcing eLearning design and development. Here’s what goes into costing.
Factors that Affect Cost

The cost of an e-learning course depends on elements such as:

- Course duration
- Level of interactivity
- Customization of user interface
- Assessments
- Translations

You need to ask yourself if you need:

- Plain user interface vs. a more engaging one
- Short vs. long duration
- Basic interactivities vs. simulations
- Simple quiz vs. a more engaging training activity
- Linear navigation vs. branching scenarios

All these decisions affect the budget. Higher the level of interactivities and the more intricate the activities, the more it will cost you.

*E.g.* A course with a high level of interactivity, customized templates, scenario-based assessments, and translations into different languages will definitely cost more than the one in single language with simple interactivities.

*Tip: You can have your own Learning Management System (LMS), and outsource its support and administration.*
Tips to Reduce Costs

There are various indirect hidden costs that might prove costly to you. Identifying them beforehand and putting measures in place to handle them would be the solution. Here's how you can cut down on costs:

5.1 Follow an Iterative Development Process

- A linear eLearning development process with review and feedbacks only after development is not cost-effective.
- An iterative process such as the Successive Approximation Model (SAM) with a feedback loop after each step of design and development will help cut costs.
- An Iterative Development Process also offers scope for constant communication.

5.2 Set the Right Timeframe for Rollout of the Courses

- Costs will escalate with the speed of course development.
- More the speed of development, the more the cost!
- Setting the right timeframe can prevent incurring extra costs.

5.3 Leverage In-house Resources

- Ensure your vendor develops the course using the authoring tool you already make use of in-house.
- This will enable you to implement any changes and update the course if needed.
- Pass on any templates you have in-house to your vendor.
5.4 Outsource Only Part of E-learning Development

- Outsourcing only part of eLearning development is a good way to lower costs and leverage your in-house expertise.
- Outsource when you don't have in-house expertise in:
  - Instructional design
  - Authoring tools
  - LMS administration
- Leaving these to the experts will provide you with a high-quality course.

*Tip: Planning for curriculums gets you bulk discounts!*
6. Four Ways to Support Your Vendor

You can make eLearning design and development much easier by supporting your vendor. Providing timely feedback, for example, is a great step towards making the whole process time- and cost-effective. Read more on this.
6.1 An Approved Project Plan

- At the outset, agree upon non-negotiable timelines.
- Ensure you are on the same page with the vendors when it comes to minimum requirements.
- Take your SMEs’ approval on the project plan, so reviews occur in a timely manner without hassles.

6.2 A Single Point of Contact

- In case of multiple SMEs, appoint a single point of contact to communicate with the vendor.
- That person would be responsible for consolidating feedback and sorting out internal inconsistencies before it goes to the vendor.

6.3 Regular Communication

- While communicating, keep in mind cultural differences and idiosyncrasies.
- Insist on written communication.
- Ensure weekly communication through calls and reports.

6.4 Closure Meetings

- Have closure meetings for detailed and specific feedback on what went right and what could be improved upon in the project.
- Use insights gained for improved efficiency and engagement for future projects.

*Tip: Work with the vendor to implement learning analytics to track the success rate of the online training program.*
7. Appendix

7.1 Checklist to Identify What to Outsource

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Outsourcing Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>If you have raw content in the form of PPTs, ILT material, Word documents, PDFs, videos, SOPs, or quizzes</td>
<td>Outsource end-to-end e-learning development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>If you want a quick rollout of courses with a few interactivities</td>
<td>Outsource rapid e-learning development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>If you want to convert your legacy Flash-based courses</td>
<td>Outsource Flash to HTML5 conversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>If you have good instructional designers but no authoring tool experts</td>
<td>Outsource course development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>If you cannot decide on the right training method</td>
<td>Outsource training decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>If you have in-house authoring tool experts but no instructional designers</td>
<td>Outsource instructional design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>If your in-house L&amp;D team cannot create multimedia elements</td>
<td>Outsource multimedia components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>If you need your courses to be professionally translated into different languages</td>
<td>Outsource translation and localization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>If you need post-training resources for effective employees performance</td>
<td>Outsource digital assets for performance support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 7.2 Checklist to Select the Right Vendor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Things to Look For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Is the company led by a team of learning and corporate training experts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Do they have at least 5 years of experience in eLearning domain?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Do they understand the psychology of learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Do they use technology for learning and not just to dictate terms?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Will they be able to meet your training standards and needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Do they have experience in handling global clientele?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Do they possess well-documented project management capabilities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Do they have expertise in instructional design?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Are they proficient in using authoring tools?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Are they willing to provide customized demos and samples?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Are they willing to provide references from existing clients?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Can they provide an unbeatable cost-time-quality proposition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Do they have quality assurance (QA) checklists in place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Do they provide additional services (e.g. translations, LMS)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Final Thoughts

All risks that you think are associated with outsourcing eLearning can be overcome one way or another. On the whole, outsourcing gives you more advantages than disadvantages. When you outsource your eLearning development, per se, you would not have to worry about hiring more employees for your in-house team or training them.

 Outsourcing benefits you in many ways. You just have to identify the right time to outsource your e-learning design and development. Here are four aspects that tell you what ‘the right time’ is.
1. When you are not sure where or how to begin
2. When you are in a time crunch
3. When your resources are maxed out
4. When you are unable to match expectations with reality

You may have an in-house team with a talent for eLearning development. But they may not have experience in tracking and reporting data and/or eLearning translations. This is where you need expertise because these two aspects of eLearning for training are equally important.

Developing a course does not solve the problem of training, you also need to know how your employees receive the training. You would want your courses to cater to your global employees from different regions speaking different languages. Evaluating the course is also important to let you know what the learners feel about the courses.

Outsourcing is the answer to all your training needs, but of course with the right vendor!
About Us

CommLab India is the most sought-after global leader for its rapid eLearning solutions. It has been ranked first among top providers of Rapid eLearning and Blended Learning Solutions for 2020 by eLearning Industry.

With our formidable authoring tools expertise and decades of experience in corporate training and instructional design, we offer rapid eLearning solutions for speed, scale, and value...with any authoring tool!

What we do:

- Convert ILT material into instructionally sound, visually appealing, engaging eLearning curriculums, virtual sessions, and other digital learning formats.
- Convert legacy courses developed in Flash or any other authoring tool to HTML5, even without the source files.
- Translate English eLearning courses into 35 international languages – both text and audio.

www.commlabindia.com

Get in Touch
Want to **Become an eLearning Champion**?

Don’t miss this eBook that is filled with practical insights, implementation ideas, best practices, and more. Explore how you can align L&D with corporate strategy to design and deliver online training programs that will help employees stay current, competitive, and contribute to your organization’s bottom line in today’s dynamic business environment.

‘**Become an eLearning Champion**’, dedicated to learning professionals, is a distillation of CommLab India’s 20 years’ experience in instructional design, eLearning, corporate training, and technology-enabled learning.

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