



Real-Time Results

How one small business gained a competitive edge through the development of their own online university

By Heather Ertel

In unpredictable times, intelligent companies do more than survive; they forecast the future. With economic market flux, a winning competitive strategy becomes vital to an organization's success and continued growth. APB Lending, a niche player in the mortgage banking industry, recognized for outstanding service, industry leadership, and entrepreneurial spirit understood this. In the highly competitive world of mortgage service providers, they couldn't afford the historical training time required to get a new Loan Officer up and running. Still, training was critical because improperly trained Loan Officer's resulted in unsatisfied customers and missed sales opportunities. Jim Melchior, Vice President of Operations for APB Lending, needed a breakthrough strategy for rapidly developing and deploying a training system unique to his organization's needs.

The Objective

The goal was simple: retain and grow the most valuable assets of the enterprise — its people. As a field-deployed asset in the frontline, Jim Melchoir possessed valuable insight into the identification and analysis of Loan Officer's core competencies. He knew off-the-shelf training would not provide the transfer of knowledge needed to properly train his Loan Officers in those competencies. The old adage says if you build it they will come; Jim needed to take that one step further. He needed to build, manage *and* administer whatever system he decided upon. More importantly as company needs changed in response to the market; APB would need to react decisively. They could respond by developing custom online courses that provided training for innovative solutions that addressed real business problems.

Situation Analysis

Typically APB hired keen sales professionals who weren't necessarily experienced in the mortgage industry. By measuring gaps between required skills and the employee's current skill levels, APB could gain a better understanding of the tools, techniques, and educational approaches needed to support their organizational goals and then rate the effectiveness of the training program against those goals. APB had distinct needs for the solution they would employ: Jim, as the administrator, needed a platform that he could manage himself without requiring the additional expense of hiring a programmer. He also wanted to personally embed his subject matter expertise into courses he could create quickly and efficiently.

The Solution

The flexibility of eLearning appealed to APB. Learners could access the internet to receive training on their own time - whenever, wherever. More importantly, learners could visit often for refreshers. The concept of an on-demand solution added further ease-of-use benefits. There was no software to install, no hardware to purchase (and more importantly to maintain, or upgrade) thereby drastically reducing the cost of ownership.

APB found such a platform in ePath Learning's **ASAP+**, an Integrated Learning Management Service or iLMS, that's easy to use, and enterprise scalable. **ASAP+** provides a unique blend of an LCMS (Learning Content Management System) and an LMS (Learning Management System), delivering the best of both via an online service.

To APB there was great appeal in working with a service provider who would be implicitly concerned with APB's results. Why the added level of focus? Because the service model depends on it. It's ideal for fast-track companies that can't afford the expense and delays of setting up and managing top-tier applications. In a service model, the end user can easily cancel, just like gym membership, as soon as the service stops meeting their needs. The same level of support from traditional software vendors is virtually unheard of once they have made their sale. Best-of-breed online services offer the type of unlimited, on-the-fly scalability that many installed software vendors or internal IT departments simply can't offer - especially within a reasonable time frame and with minimal cost.

A Running Start: Collaborative Authoring

APB could now collaboratively author eLearning courses, tests and surveys, while they seamlessly deliver and manage all their learning content - be it on-line, classroom-based, or blended - via a single, browser-based, easy-to-use, online service. APB was able to log on within minutes of subscribing to the service.

APB worked closely with the vendor to ensure he was utilizing the service to the best of its capabilities. As the SME (Subject Matter Expert) Jim was ready to start translating his knowledge into content in a quest to turn a "best practice" into a "corporate practice". Many successful organizations tap into their Subject Matter Experts (SME) to capture, organize and distribute their best of breed knowledge. This is at the heart of the concept called "Knowledge Management". Organizations can test and evaluate how well they perform this capture-organize-distribute-measure process and then refine and repeat it to increase productivity and maximize performance. An outline-based development process integrated into the application enabled APB to quickly structure content into outlines, speeding the development of instructionally sound courses. Better yet, Jim could access a Topic Library of reusable content: he stored, shared and copied "reusable learning objects" for the development of other courses and tests.

Jim enriched his concepts by applying adult learning theory to course content development. Drawing on its own experience in adult learning theory, the vendor offered advice on how to define the characteristics and needs of adult learners *and* effective ways to meet these needs through online instruction.. In no time APB designed an introductory course: *Introduction to the Mortgage Industry*, the first course in the *APB University*. The course was developed and published to the internet in less than three days.

The APB University

Feeling confident in his abilities to develop a unique user interface, enriched with content customized to his organization, Jim added five more courses to the university. Within weeks, APB boasted a fully functioning university. Initial student enrollment was approximately 100. Soon APB rolled-out their online university to all employees nationwide.

"The real benefit of deploying **ASAP+** is our ability to reduce the time it takes for a new Loan Officer to become fully productive. This reduces their ramp-up time by up to three weeks and has dramatically improved new Loan Officer productivity."

The APB branded online university kept all learning modules organized and made them easy to access and navigate. A learner could also access a personalized learning path which indicated which courses needed to be taken in what order. A fully searchable Research and Reference Library allowed learners to access to all learning content - whether structured courses or supporting material- relative to their learning query. Engaging learners with a custom home page and unique content created a truly interactive format.

But the rapid development of the online university, along with learner engagement, was just the first step in the training process. Could the training platform be easily adaptable as new needs for training arose in response to the marketplace? APB tested the capabilities of ASAP+ when they were faced with complying with new industry regulations.

Do Not Call Compliance

The rapid changes in DNC regulations by both state and federal governments impacted the mortgage industry in a big way. The complexity of these regulations, along with their aggressive enforcement, forced APB to find a quick solution to comply with these mandates. In addition to providing a learning portal for all APB's courses, the online university provided management with critical compliance data: learner records could be accessed via robust reporting functionality. Jim, as the builder and administrator of APB's online university, could access all of this information from one central location online and in real-time. Comprehensive management and tracking of all online training was critical to the successful implementation of the eLearning platform.

Administration and Reporting: People Perfect What You Inspect

Activity alone does not equal productivity. Oftentimes, the training conundrum is that productivity becomes difficult to calculate. When an organization deploys learning solutions it should be prepared to evolve through a number of development stages. During this evolution the organization should never lose sight of what it is trying to accomplish. Reporting measures are essential for an organization to maintain an awareness of what's happening in its environment.

Results: Content to Competency with No Downtime

Addressing training needs may not be new, but how companies are approaching this age old problem certainly is. By deploying an eLearning solution unique to its organization's needs, APB Lending was on the cusp of the trend. Jim Melchior had this to say about the trend: "I can't imagine that any organization of any size would be able to get along without the use of eLearning right now". The value proposition of the service model is a compelling one: take advantage of eLearning expertise and economies of scale, and avoid the pain and expense of hiring your own specialists and constantly installing, maintaining, and upgrading packaged software. The key take-away is rapid knowledge transfer, via an online university with on-demand accessibility. The activities of the learners within the online university, once measured and reported, are the subject of management focus that will generate improved performance and productivity for many companies for many years to come. APB Lending is just one such example.

About APB Lending

Headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky, APB Lending is a growth oriented innovative mortgage leader focused on leveraging technology and personal customer service in providing an enhanced customer experience. Additional information about APB Lending can be found at the company's website, www.APBMortgage.com.

About ePath Learning

ePath Learning, Inc. provides online and professional services that empower organizations to measure the effectiveness of their current training while enabling them to develop, deliver, and manage their own eLearning. ePath Learning developed the industry's first iLMS, (Integrated Learning Management Service), **ASAP+**, as a new class of learning management technology that provides a single, easy to use, browser-based platform for the management of all learning content delivered via a blend of media types. Available on demand as an online service, ePath Learning's **ASAP+** eliminates the cost, resource, and time deployment issues associated with traditional server-side learning management solutions. Additionally, through its award winning **PRO-SERVICESSM** team, ePath Learning provides eLearning design, development, and conversion services for its customers who lack the resources to develop their eLearning courses themselves. Recognized by Deloitte as one of the fastest growing technology companies in North America, ePath Learning is a profitable, privately held corporation with headquarters in New London, Connecticut. The company was founded in June 1999. **Additional information can be found on the company's website at www.ePathLearning.com or by contacting their sales office at (908) 722-6622.**

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