

Extend Your Reach:

Technical considerations for taking
training content beyond your LMS

Implementing an extended enterprise approach

As companies use channel partners, resellers and other third parties to extend their reach and increase sales, the challenge of distributing valuable training across the organization doesn't get any easier.

These days, training departments are continually challenged to serve more than just internal employees, especially when it comes to product training efforts. Research reveals that learning for non-employees now accounts for more than one quarter of learning audiences and is on the rise.¹ Unsurprisingly, investments in time and budget targeting these external audiences is also steadily increasing.

What is Extended Enterprise?

According to Brandon Hall Group, *“Extended enterprise audiences are those residing outside the headquarters or specific locations of an organization... such as customers, channel partners, distributors, value-add resellers and franchisees.”*²

Establishing a plan for managing and distributing training content is essential to ensuring your products are properly understood, marketed and sold. Using an extended enterprise approach helps remove the friction of accessing training, ensures your external teams are well-informed and can provide insights into how learners are using your courses and course effectiveness.

Some of the benefits of bringing your training to external audiences include:

- **Increased collaboration with suppliers and manufacturers**
- **Better connection to customers to anticipate needs**
- **New opportunities to upsell**
- **Improved innovation**
- **More efficient delivery of new products and services**
- **Better relationships with suppliers**
- **Shortened product and sales cycles**
- **Fewer customer support calls**
- **Stronger after-sale relationships³**

To put it simply: increasing the reach of your product training can have a huge impact on your business.

But before you can get started reaping the benefits, you must understand the technical challenges associated with distributing your training content to third-party systems outside of your LMS.

1. Brandon Hall Group, *“Extended Enterprise Learning: Generating Revenue and Adding Value,”* March 2017.

2. Brandon Hall Group, *“Extended Enterprise Learning: Generating Revenue and Adding Value,”*

3. NetDimensions, *“Gain the competitive advantage with extended enterprise training,”* December 6, 2016.

Technical considerations

1. How your courses are delivered

Sharing your training content across multiple audiences likely means that you will be relying on a variety of systems to deliver your courses beyond your internal LMS. As you take learning outside of your system, you will need a strategy for delivering content to client LMSs, directly to learners or via alternate distribution methods.

Internal training is generally straightforward – pop the course in the LMS, assign to relevant employees and go.

But when it comes to training external audiences, things get harder.

Does your partner have a way to deliver training to their people? If so, is your courseware compatible? How do you know if the training is actually getting used?

If their company has an LMS, do you want to use that to connect them to your courses? Learners are more likely to use the platform they already know and your partners don't have to worry about managing separate login credentials. The added

plus for them is that they have all of the reports about what their employees are doing with your content, in line with their other reporting.

What about your customers and partners that don't have a training platform in place?

If you determine that you'll need to provide your customers with a platform to access your training, it's best to clearly define what that platform will or won't do to help keep you from unintentionally pivoting into becoming an LMS provider (unless that is truly on your roadmap). Some options here might include licensing an off-the-shelf LMS or even building out a training portal that allows you to deliver your training directly to users.

2. The importance of up-to-date information

Things move fast and product training must keep up. It is inevitable that new versions of your courses will be released to keep up with the new product features, best practices and regulations. It is therefore critical that your employees, customers and partners have access to the most current and accurate information.

You will want to consider how to manage the distribution of courseware so new versions can be shared across a variety of systems.

3. Visibility into content utilization

Training content only works if it's used. But in many cases, it's not so easy to keep track of who is actually engaging with the tools you have created, especially if you are relying on third parties to deliver the courses.

Having insight into the actual usage of your training content helps you validate that you are building the right tools and they are properly serving your audience. 87% of organizations say reporting and analytics is the most important factor in extended enterprise technology.⁴

It's critical to know how your training is impacting business. You will want to understand what's happening as you deliver content, and whether your objectives, such as reduced customer care calls or improved sales, are being accomplished.

“
How do you manage your courses across so many systems without losing your mind?”

A wide variety of content consumers

So where does this leave us? Extending the reach of your courses is becoming more essential as product distribution channels continue to increase. When you consider the various groups accessing your training, you'll likely discover that you are engaging with a wide variety of systems. This increases the complexity of identifying the best way to deliver and share your training content. You can see an illustration of what your ecosystem might look like in an extended enterprise model in Figure 1.

The good news is that working across multiple LMSs and training platforms is possible and not as hard as you might think. While it may require extra work, there is great value in having your training delivered through each partner's "system of record."

Deciding how you connect the users to your courses is one aspect, but the bigger question becomes: how do you manage your courses across so many systems without losing your mind?

4. Brandon Hall Group, "Extended Enterprise Learning: Generating Revenue and Adding Value."

Figure 1: Training Ecosystem



Connecting the content to the platform

Now that you know where you want your courses to go, it's just a matter of getting them to each system and keeping up with them. While some folks will argue that it's easier to only deliver your courses through your platform, and make your partners and customers come directly to you, we've already noted that usage is far more likely to happen if we remove any additional steps for users.

Historically, you would send your courses to each LMS or platform that was delivering the content. So if you have twenty partners, that means you're keeping up with twenty course distribution tasks - not to mention your own LMS (or LMSs) that you use for internal employees or direct access by channel partners. You can see an illustration of this distribution model in Figure 2.

When you consider the amount of times you update your courses and add on potential complexity of offering the course in multiple languages, you can see that content administration becomes incredibly unwieldy.

Figure 2: Old Model

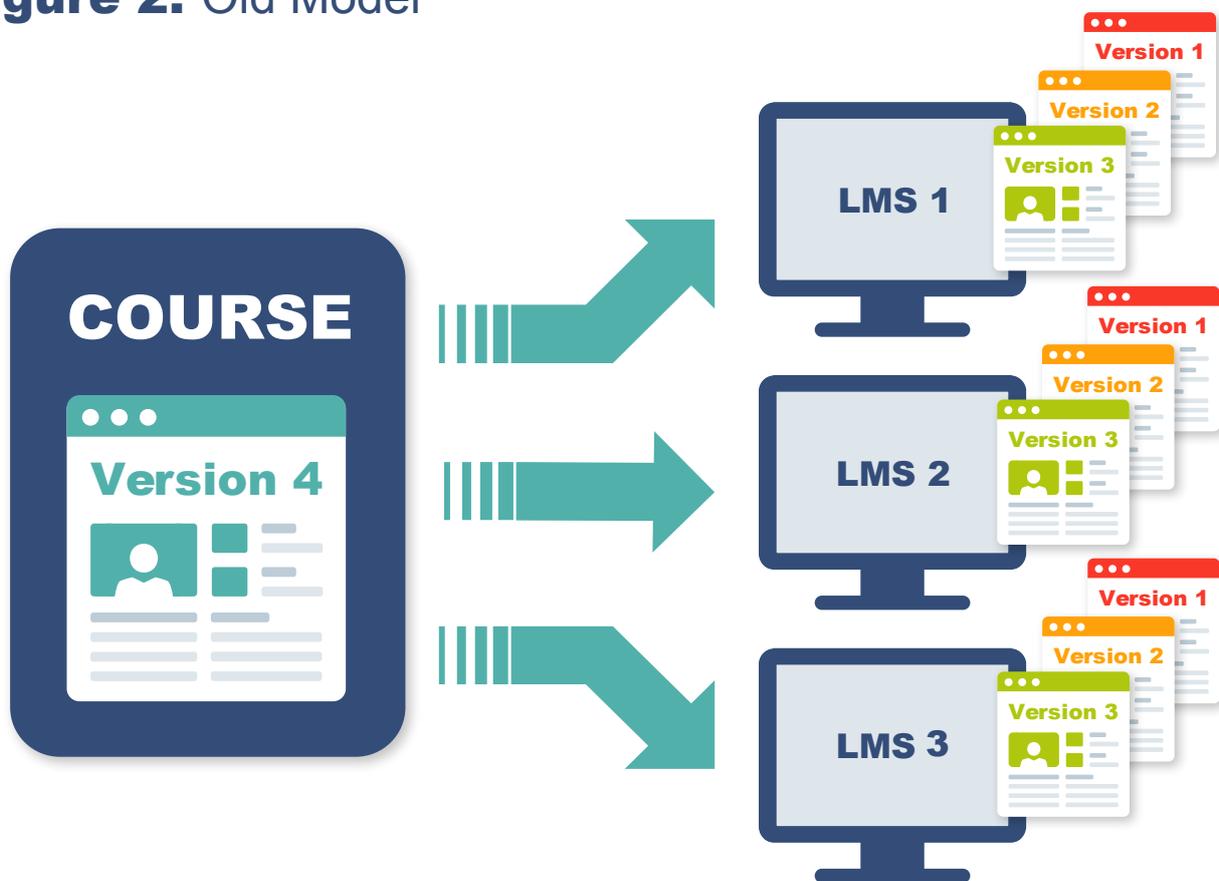
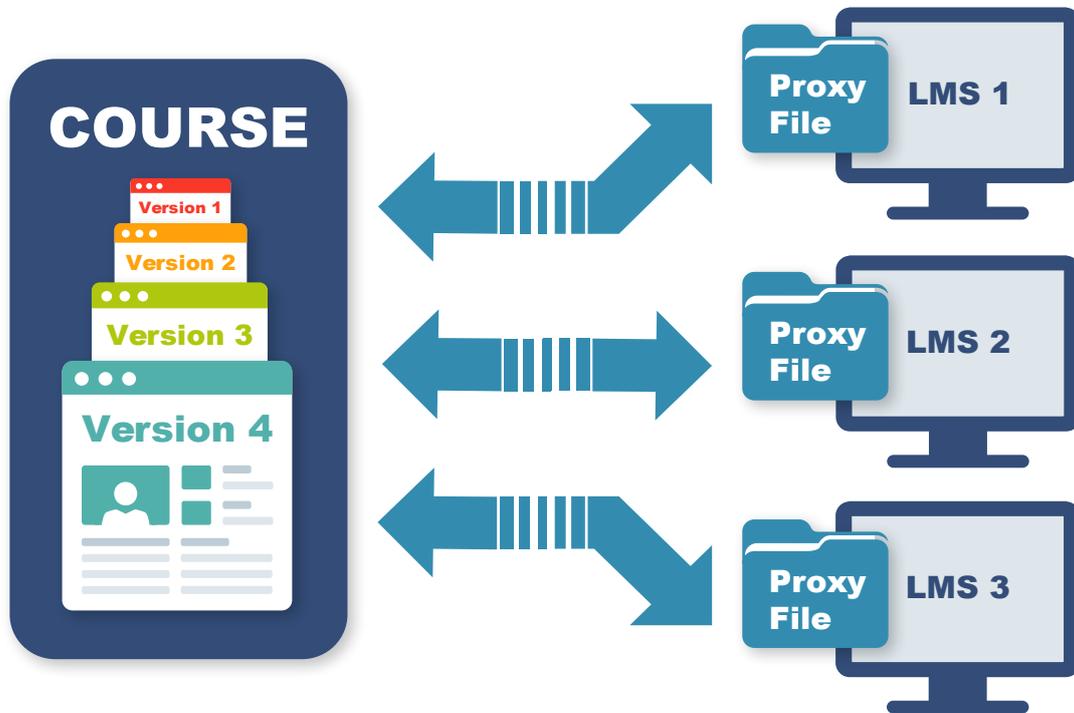


Figure 3: New Model



Sharing content vs. handing it off

One way to combat the burden of dealing with various distribution points is to manage your training content from a single, central location and simply share access with systems. As you can see in Figure 3, this is more efficient than the traditional online training distribution model of having your courses managed by each separate LMS or platform.

What does that mean?

Think of central hosting as a hub and spoke model, where the course is the hub and each system is a spoke that has the ability to send learners directly to the course. Rather than bringing your content to each learner, the learner is actually coming to your courses.

By allowing users access to a single copy of courses from your central location, you can easily maintain content. Updates can be delivered in real-time rather than requiring you to chase down each of your partners to ensure they upload a new version of your course.

Extended enterprise benefits

Rethinking how you manage product training can be a real game-changer for your company. If you were historically put off by the previous, cumbersome distribution model that was too admin-heavy to consider, it's time to take a look again.

Remove the friction of accessing training

Offering a wide variety of entry points to your courses helps you ensure each audience has access to the system they are most inclined to use. By centrally hosting your courses, you can share the content with one LMS or hundreds. Plus, there is little to no additional overhead for the ongoing maintenance of courses across multiple systems.

Ensure training accuracy

The best way to protect the integrity of your product, and the training that supports it, is to be the sole provider of the content and corresponding updates. Keeping your courses in one place ensures you are the source of truth at all times and users are only accessing the most current version of content. Centrally hosting content also removes the risk of old course copies floating around – or, worse yet, partners creating their own version of product training that might not fully align with your goals and accurately explain the products.

Gain valuable insights into your business

Understanding how users are accessing your content allows you to assess corresponding business impacts on a much larger scale. Keeping your courses in one place gives you complete visibility into who is taking what, where they get stuck and what topics your course library may need next. Compare how each partner uses the resources you provide, see what product manuals customers are accessing most frequently and correlate insights with support ticket metrics to see which departments and teams are up to speed.

Increase the value of your training investment

Centralizing your content helps you reach a larger audience, inform more people of new products and services and improve external customer satisfaction.

In some cases, you may even discover an additional revenue stream if you decide to commercialize your training and certification programs for external groups, with surveys suggesting that 40% of corporate learning organizations now earn revenue from external training.⁵ Almost a third recoup more than half of their LMS costs through learning for non-employees and remote and distributed workers.⁶ Of those that do, more than half have an “a la carte” pricing model, with 24% offering a subscription offer and 22% working on a bundled package of content.⁷

5. Brandon Hall Group, [“Extended Enterprise Learning: Generating Revenue and Adding Value.”](#)

6. Expertus, [“Full Speed: Extended Enterprise Learning.”](#) 2017.

7. Brandon Hall Group, [“Extend Learning Beyond Your Enterprise.”](#) October 17, 2016.

Creating the right system architecture

While the provision of external training presents a number of technical considerations, successfully implementing programs outside of your existing LMS is a rewarding process.

Studies have found that extended learning programs result in everything from improved compliance and increased awareness of products, to maximizing client retention and reducing customer support costs.

It's not as hard as you might think.

To ensure your success throughout and beyond the process, Rustici Software has a team of technical experts who have a great deal of experience in helping clients take training beyond their LMS.

About Us

Rustici Software helps companies in the eLearning space work well together. As the world's leading eLearning standards experts, we provide the tools and knowledge to help companies convert, distribute and play eLearning content. Since 2002, we have assisted hundreds of LMSs, authoring tools, content providers and organizations conform to specifications like SCORM, the Experience API (xAPI), cmi5 and AICC. We continually strive to improve and evolve the standards and have actively supported development in partnership with ADL, IMS Global and other industry organizations.

Learn how to take training beyond your LMS

Interested in learning how you can execute an extended enterprise training approach in your organization? Email us at info@scorm.com. We'd love to talk about how to technically set you up for success.



Contact Us

info@scorm.com

(866) 497-2676

www.scorm.com

www.experienceapi.com

www.rusticisoftware.com