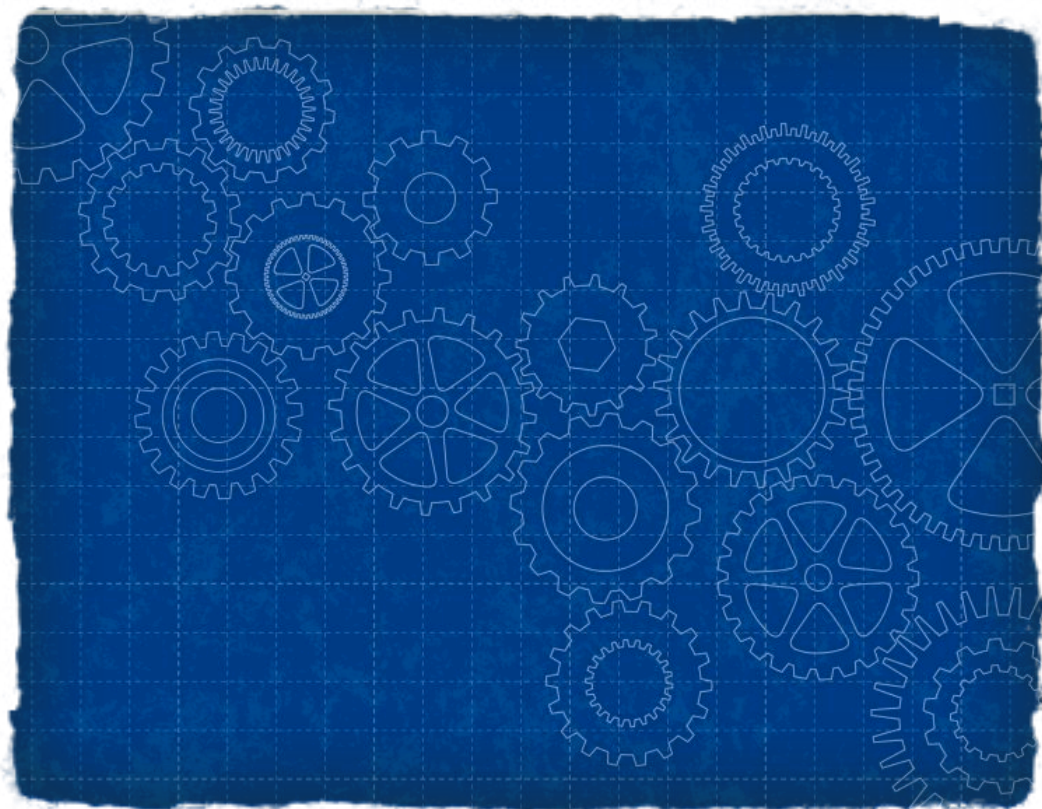


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Training and the digital age; Ten ways you can automate

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Does corporate training embrace IT?

Despite the vast majority of us having both feet firmly in the digital age, it would seem that certain industries are less accepting than others, and the statistics would suggest that the corporate training arena falls into the 'less keen to embrace IT' camp.

Two of our own research polls launched on LinkedIn back in May 2011 and in December 2010, revealed that only 38% of companies have a dedicated training management system, and, alarmingly, that a fifth (21%) still use a combination of Excel, Outlook and Word to manage the administration of their training business.

When it comes to booking and payment, only 57% of training companies accept online booking, while a quarter (25%) admitted to not even having the most basic of web forms for potential clients to fill out.

And, when you consider that the Office of National Statistics (ONS) revealed last year that nearly 60% (30.1 million) adults in the UK access the internet everyday – a figure which has doubled in the space of four years – it becomes clear that industries not making use of modern technology are distancing themselves from massive pools of potential business.

The ONS also reported that 31 million adults in the UK shopped online in 2010, banishing any traditional views that would suggest the UK still is not tuned into the digital age.

So, when the software available today can automate so many different areas of the training management profession, why are the statistics for IT use among providers so low?

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What are the common misconceptions?

...And do they ring true with you?

There are certainly some misconceptions floating around in the training world that could be responsible for some individuals and companies refusing to embrace the incredible amount of automation that is possible with technology today, and one of these key misconceptions is connected to losing the personal touch.

Purists may feel that the only way to generate effective results when it comes to training and development is to conduct that learning face-to-face.

But, over the past ten years the way we communicate, or more to the point, the channels of communication that we are comfortable to

use, have transformed. Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, along with video technology have become commonplace in society, so why shouldn't they be used in learning and development as well?

The CIPD reported that just 2% of organisations use social media sites frequently to support their learning and development, which is incredible considering the number of people actually communicating to each other via these sites.

Cost is also a misconception that should be cleared up, because the cost associated with training management software, when applied correctly, can be saved via the technology. So, if a training business can automate the creation of

booking confirmations, happy sheets, and invoices for each attendee, instead of having to hire an administration worker, costs will be saved.

Lastly, while there is nothing stopping businesses from building their training management software in-house, experience is everything – and not something that should be underestimated.

Here at accessplanit we've been building and developing software for ten years, and many of our clients have come on board after trying and failing to go it alone.

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No matter what industry you work in, at some point technology will revolutionise the way things get done.

Just as satellite navigation edged the fold-away road map into the back of the car boot, and email saw off the carefully penned holiday postcard, training executives within companies large and small, as well as training providers, must accept that new software has opened up doors to a new world.

For the companies that embrace the value that technology can bring, the opportunities to cut costs and reduce time are incredible, for those with luddite tendencies who fear change and want to hold on to the way things have 'always been done', great challenges and competition lie ahead.

In truth, the vast majority of individuals working in a training capacity know the impact that technology can have, but what many do not have a firm grip on, is just how many areas of the business new software can automate.

So, we have compiled a top ten list of areas that offer up automation opportunities...

Payment and booking

Believe it or not, the days of picking up the phone and taking a booking for a training course are gone. Today, software allows people to go online, select the programme that is right for them, click through to a booking page, and pay for the course there and then.

It saves time, effort and you'll never miss an opportunity because the booking system will be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Communication

There's nothing worse than a last minute venue change, especially when you have 30 people coming along to a course that starts in five minutes.

Today, you can automate contact with anyone coming along, because there is software available to ping a quick SMS text message to everyone's mobile phone.

One click and everyone knows where the event is taking place. You could even use this technology to get in touch with delegates the day before, with a reminder of what to bring and start times.

Invoices

Invoices are generated automatically after an individual books a place via the online booking form, so you don't have to go into Microsoft Word, pull up a template, and enter all the details in.

Once programmed correctly, the training management software can create personalised invoices for all clients, keep a track of what has been generated, and even send them out to the relevant parties.

Summary box: Key Training Software Misconceptions:

- 1. Cost**
- 2. Lose personal touch**
- 3. Dilutes effectiveness**
- 4. Cheaper to build in-house**

"It saves time, effort and you'll never miss an opportunity because the booking system will be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Thank-you

Staying in touch with clients is crucial, and thanks to new technology that doesn't have to involve making hundreds of phone calls every month or sending individual emails out.

The email software available today allows trainers to automate when thank-you emails are sent after an event, and where they are sent to. The emails can be personalised to each recipient and can also be monitored so the sender knows who has opened the mail and when.

"Gone are the days of chalking up potential new business on the office blackboard. Today, advances in technology mean that you can see at glance, where the opportunities exist going forward."

Website updates

Today new technology even automates the updating of websites when a news event or course date is added into the system, which means that trainers need only add the event once, and can finally sever their ties with those expensive web designers who charge every time they add new content to the site.

Leads

Gone are the days of chalking up potential new business on the office blackboard. Today, advances in technology mean that you can see at a glance, where the opportunities exist going forward. You will be able to easily see who has opened the majority of your correspondence, who clicked links through to your site to 'read more', and who has given a high rating to your training programmes.



Essentially, an online system has the ability to identify then categorise potential new clients, or employees within a business, where there is a training need.

Happy sheets

With a training session of 40 or more delegates, the last thing you want to contend with at the end of the programme is collating the results of 'happy sheets' that were handed out at the end. Inevitably, some were filled out in a rush and are illegible, so completely useless.

Online training manager software today allows you to collect this information online. With answers typed instead of written they are all legible, and the technology also has the capacity to collate answers and provide at-a-glance data results, ie 25% of delegates rated the informal discussion as 'excellent'.

Case study 1: Mace Business School

Before working with accessplanit and incorporating the Course Manager software, the Mace Business School was managing the courses it provides through a number of internal systems including email and spreadsheet packages. These processes were not just labour intensive for the business school staff, but inefficient too.

Day-to-day administration, the processing of course bookings, tracking of candidate progress, and management reporting were just some of the tasks that the business school wanted to automate and increase efficiency around.

Zoe Peters of The Mace Business School, explained: "After two years of trading we realised that our in house systems weren't going to cope with our planned growth. Far too much time was spent on administration and reporting, this stopped us doing the things that really mattered."

The accessplanit Course Manager software automated the entire process for Mace Business School, bringing in maximum efficiency by streamlining every aspect of the administration process.

Certificates

While some trainers continue to use templates for certificates or accreditation, others have moved into the digital age and simply use fully joined-up training manager software to complete the task. Once a delegate is registered in the system, the correct certificate will be assigned and generated once the course is complete. No room for human error.

Learning

All of the points made so far have been connected to time-heavy administration tasks, but it is important to remember that the learning process can be automated in parts too. The purists will argue that the training must be conducted human-to-human if the results are going to reflect the investment, but this simply is not the case.

Technology can be used to speed up the learning process through screening individuals to identify individual problems and then addressing those problems with appropriate learning. Software has the ability, when used correctly, to increase the effectiveness of learning.

Reporting

By automating the reports that you receive, daily, weekly or monthly, organisation need not be at the mercy of human error.

Reports can be run automatically with statistics on the latest sales figures or details on which courses are under-booked and need filling. Software can automate emails into your inbox at regular interval with all the information you require.

About accessplanit

Award-winning software house accessplanit was established in 2001, and is dedicated to the development and support of learning and training management solutions.

Now in its tenth year in the software market, the service and products have been designed to ensure its clients enjoy the maximum ROI, supported by a hassle-free front end customer experience.

Using the latest web based technology, accessplanit deliver flexible solutions across a diverse range of sectors including privately owned companies, large corporations and local authorities.

Author

David Evans is commercial director at accessplanit, the provider of Course Booking Software, which is designed for any trainer or training-based business. David joined accessplanit in 2007 as sales and marketing manager and has overseen the rapid expansion of UK sales.

In 2009, David invested in the business to become commercial director.



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What our clients say:

"They have a great attitude to their system. We wanted to tailor our system to suit our clients. By working closely with Accessplanit we were able to achieve this".

"The service has been fantastic, it feels personal and we have never come up against any issues that have not easily been resolved".

Zoe Peters, Mace Business School

"The service is great! Everyone you deal with at accessplanit knows you, and is willing to please. The welcome to the AccessPlanit family has been great, and we look forward to many years of mutually beneficial business."

"We were really impressed with accessplanit's prompt response to our web contact request, and their willingness to engage with us. It was this drive and passion that ultimately carried weight in our decision to purchase Course Manager from accessplanit".

Russell Steyn, Foster Melliar