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Interactive Video Instruction: A Training Tool Whose Time Has Come

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Interactive Video Instruction: A Training Tool Whose Time Has Come

Abstract

Training employees in the hospitality industry to meet guests' expectations is a critical element to success. Unfortunately, this element is often ignored. This article explores an exciting training method (interactive video) and its advantages over other training approaches.

Keywords

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Interactive Video Instruction: A Training Tool Whose Time Has Come

by
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and
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Training employees in the hospitality industry to meet guests' expectations is a critical element to success. Unfortunately, this element is often ignored. This article explores an exciting training method (interactive video) and its advantages over other training approaches.

Many paradoxes are associated with training in the hospitality industry. Even though trained personnel can reduce operating costs and increase sales, training is not given a priority in the business. There are practical and cost-effective ways to plan and implement training activities, but they are frequently overlooked for a more spontaneous, unplanned "buddy system" model. Corporate and property-level officials think that training activities are conducted within their areas of responsibilities, but typically do not know "what" and "how much." Another fast-emerging paradox involves technology which is available to improve training efforts but is largely ignored.

One type of "high-tech" training—interactive video—uses a computer (frequently connected to a touch-screen monitor) and a video disc player. In an optimal training situation, a trainee (or group of up to four employees) seated in front of a monitor is given a pre-test applicable to the subject matter and then participates in a self-directed training activity. These activities may involve the use of computer graphics or video segments, simulations, and quizzes. For example, the trainee may watch a video segment that demonstrates how to handle guest complaints, then answer questions about what was seen.

In an interactive simulation that follows, the trainee may practice

handling guest complaints. The video segment might show a guest voicing a complaint. Then the trainee would have to select the best response from among several provided. In this way a front desk trainee could practice handling guest complaints—always a sensitive issue—before actually talking to guests.

For reinforcement, the presentation may explain why correct answers are correct, or show what is likely to happen if an incorrect response was implemented. For further remediation, the presentation may include a segment that provides more background about the topic.

After a series of similar training exercises, a post-test can be given. Information then becomes available for the trainer to assess what the trainee knew at the beginning of the training, what the trainee knew at the conclusion of the training, and, what, if any, additional training might be helpful.

Who Uses Video Interactive Training?

Video interactive training has been used with increasing frequency during the last decade by the manufacturing, banking, and insurance industries.¹ Likewise, the United States military uses interactive video training in several different applications.² Academic institutions also have incorporated interactive video in numerous ways in various programs at several educational levels.³ However, organizations in the hospitality industry have only recently begun to make limited use of this training technology.⁴ Another paradox has, therefore, been identified: Capital-intensive industries that generate significantly higher sales revenues per employee (manufacturing, banking, insurance) use high-tech training methods much more frequently than their labor-intensive counterparts (the hospitality industry).⁵

Proponents of interactive video training cite numerous advantages to their use, including the following:

- **Interactive videos make learning fun:** Interactive video programs are designed to be easy to use; they are user-friendly. Employees do not need to be computer literate (although many—especially young people—today are familiar with computers, video games, audio-disc players and other equipment which is similar to that which can be used in interactive video systems).

They provide a motivating, interesting, entertaining way to learn. Trainees become active—not passive—learners, and they can often control the training topic presented and the sequencing of training sessions. This helps make training more relevant to them.

Attitudes toward the organization and training in general are improved. Trainees generally appreciate knowing that their employer cares enough about them to invest in high-tech training and, using this methodology, organizations overtly communicate the priority they place on their staff members.⁶

- **Interactive videos create a risk-free learning environment:** Interactive video training provides a safe way to learn new

information. There is no fear of failing in front of others such as in a classroom or during an on-the-job training activity because the trainee can use the interactive video program individually.

The training is non-judgmental; trainees can make mistakes and receive consistent, objective feedback/explanation about their errors and the correct responses to problems/situations which were presented.

There is an "artificial reality"; realistic situations can be presented and worked through in a timely manner. Neither trainees, other employees, nor guests will be negatively affected by training as it evolves.

- **Individualized learning becomes possible:** The trainees have direct control over the learning situation. They can decide what to watch, what to by-pass, and what sequence to use for the learning process.

Individual needs can be identified through pre-tests.

Trainees can determine the amount of time to spend on various training exercises.

Remedial training can focus on specific needs of the individual trainee.

Trainees need not waste time (and become frustrated) learning subjects that they already know.

- **Self-paced learning is emphasized:** Fast learners don't become bored; slow learners can be realistically challenged.

Training begins with the basic steps and employees only move through the training as they master the earlier foundational information.

Trainees can be self-sufficient during the training. No direct supervision is required as the interactive video training evolves.

Supervisors can review post-tests at a time convenient to them, since the data is stored in a computer file, and individualize the next step in training to meet specific needs of each trainee as indicated by post-test results.

- **Training opportunities can always be available:** If the equipment is accessible, training can take place 24 hours per day.

Training can be provided when it is appropriate for the employee; it is not necessary to wait until a trainer has time or the next group training session is conducted.

Equipment can be located in areas which are accessible to personnel in several or all of the property's departments.

- **Interactive videos provide standardized training:** All trainees will receive identical training content; there is consistent instruction for all staff members, and variables such as instructor bias and differences in training sites are eliminated.

- **Interactive video programs are flexible:** They can be used

for new employees and for upgrading the knowledge/skill levels of currently employed staff members.

When new training information is required, revisions to a computer program are generally easier than changing written documentation and/or retraining instructors.

Less time is generally needed to implement a purchased instructional video program than to develop an in-house instructor-led course. Generic resources are generally very effective for issues such as guest relations, sanitation, telephone courtesy, and other topics in which differences between properties are unlikely.

Less time and labor costs are involved in the roll-out of revised training materials.

Some Disadvantages to Interactive Training Do Exist

Interactive video training systems are not likely to be effective for all properties. Among the potential disadvantages are the following:

- **Cost:** The high cost of required hardware must be considered. Currently, properties may need to invest from \$6,000 to \$10,000 for the equipment, depending upon the type of computer and video-disc systems selected. Likewise, purchase costs for interactive video programs can be high. Prices range from \$800 or more for an approximate one hour generic program to tens of thousands of dollars, or more, for custom-designed packages. The costs for equipment and programs are decreasing as the use of this technology becomes more widespread.

Trainers must assess the payback time for equipment costs. Decreased training time for trainees and trainers may mean that employees become productive more quickly and that managers are able to devote more time to supervising others. Cost-effectiveness of interactive video training is, of course, a relevant concern and many recent studies have addressed this issue.⁷

The increased quality and consistency of instruction must also be related to the training costs which are incurred. Unfortunately, in many instances, this judgment will need to be subjectively—rather than objectively—based.

- **Equipment incompatibility:** Many different components—computer, video-disc player, and monitor—must work together. Systems must be compatible; currently, equipment manufactured by one company may not interface with that of another. Also, equipment for interactive video training must typically be dedicated to that purpose. It is generally thought to be impractical to use equipment for training and, at other times, for reservations, back-office systems, or other purposes.

- **Service and obsolescence problems:** Manufacturers continually try to incorporate the latest technology into their equipment and, in the process, often abandon old equipment. With the fast-

changing nature of equipment, some trainers find it difficult to obtain service, repair parts, and secure other compatible hardware components when necessary.

Also, some organizations may be afraid that today's state-of-the-art technology will soon become obsolete. Interactive video-disc systems have been available for about 10 years, so it is logical to assume that something new, and better, is "just around the corner." This is a realistic concern. Purchasers of equipment should be aware that it is unwise to buy at the beginning or end of the life cycle of a new technology. According to this thesis, interactive video equipment is currently at the midpoint of its life cycle; this may, therefore, be the best time to buy.

• **Limited application:** It is true that not all topics can be taught by interactive video. In fact, it works best in those situations where trainees must learn and practice interactive and concrete judgmental skills, where the trainee may benefit from a video demonstration of the topic, where material or programs are not subject to change, and where large numbers of employees need to be trained. By contrast, topics such as math, the learning of which may not be improved by a video, may be better taught in a more traditional manner.⁸

There are many topics relevant to the hospitality industry which can be effectively taught using interactive video technology. In addition to guest/employee interaction, basic supervisory knowledge/skills, and techniques required for food production/service, front desk operations and housekeeping can easily be taught with this methodology.

What is Next?

The potential advantages and disadvantages to the use of interactive video training must, of course, be assessed by each individual hospitality organization. Currently the industry is, perhaps, at the same point it was 15 years ago in assessing the potential utility of video training. Today, of course, that medium is widely used for training. Will interactive video be a common training methodology tomorrow? No one can say with certainty. The industry, however, will remain labor-intensive, will continue to be service-oriented, and will need to compete with other organizations for employees and guests.

A problem cannot be solved until there is an awareness of it. Likewise, problem resolution tactics typically involve a definition of all possible alternatives. The problem—how to most effectively train employees—is well known. One possible solution—the use of interactive video to facilitate training—is just becoming identified. The dissemination of information about the topic will provide a foundation of decision making for hospitality trainers of today—and tomorrow.

References

¹For information about typical applications in these industries see Marisa Bowe, "Attack of the Gigabytes Part One," *Video Times*, (Fall 1990), pp. 63-68, and "Interactive Video: User Views," *Present Products Magazine*, (May 1989), p. 30.

²See, for example, Beverly Geber, "Simulating Reality," *Training*, (April 1990), pp. 41-46.

³A discussion about interactive video use in educational institutions is found in Beverly Geber, "Goodbye Classrooms," *Training*, (January 1990), pp. 27-35. "Illinois Workshop Explore Multimedia in the Classroom," *IBM: Multimedia Solutions*, (September 1990); Ric Gentry, "The Human Factor: Where does it fit?" *Corporate Video Decisions* (September 1989), pp. 29-31.

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⁵"Who Did the Best and Worst Among the Service 500," *Fortune*, (June 4, 1990), p. 301.

⁶This observation is based upon input from more than 30 hospitality employees involved in a research project currently being administered by the Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Motel Association. Detailed findings will be reported when the research project is completed.

⁷Readers desiring to review some of these studies are referred to Beverly Geber, "Goodbye Classrooms," *Training*, (January 1990), pp. 27-35; Barbara J. Beard, "Front Office Training Environments: The Challenge for Today's Managers," *Lodging*, (February 1989), pp. 48-50; Anne W. Miller and John W. Irving, "A Pragmatic Approach to Interactive Media Training Programs," *Journal of Interactive Instruction Development*, (Summer 1988), pp. 25-29; "Image Capturing Systems," *Acronyms*, (June 25 1990), pp. 9-15; Regina Cornwell, "Interactively Speaking," *Millimeter*, (July 1989), pp. 83-92.

⁸Nancy W. Kenworthy, "Interactive Video-disc Isn't Always the Best Solution," *Instruction Delivery Systems*, (January/February 1988), pp. 6-8.

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