

Effectively Using Distance Education

What the group has used:

- 1) Director certification program utilizing self-study methodology.
- 2) Contract to have a business course on line.
- 3) E-yellow pages.
- 4) Public school K-12 evaluation of education programs in Minnesota.
- 5) Student co-op network website as a forum to connect isolated young cooperative presidents. Serves as an information exchange.
- 6) CD-Rom for credit union director training. Uses a self-study pretest and sequential modules that must be passed in order to progress to the next.
- 7) Website has tutorials, articles, job aids and used to provide additional support for classroom training programs. Tutorials are available to any web-user.
- 8) University courses are providing materials on line and uses an interactive aspect.
- 9) Discussion groups are used.
- 10) Links to other cooperative education programs are included in website programs, but must be kept in current.
- 11) Satellite access instead of land-lines. In Tanzania, the World Bank has helped establish regional study centers that utilize satellite links to bring students together and study with on-line programming.
- 12) The internet equalizes all participants utilizing programs (we cannot tell if you are Einstein or Joe Co-op).

What are setbacks to distance learning?

- 1) Can you really transfer the value of face-to-face learning to an online medium?
- 2) Does distance education have enough relevance to diverse geographic areas and diverse memberships?
- 3) Do all members have high-speed internet access and computers?
- 4) There is a member reluctance to use distance learning methods in lieu of face-to-face methods.
- 5) Must be conscientious of the depth of materials and how they are delivered.
- 6) Must be marketed well.
- 7) Chat rooms seem to be less effective for adult learners. There may be some reluctance if typing and spelling skills are weak.
- 8) There seems to be cultural acceptance in some markets (North Dakota) where distance learning is promoted widely.
- 9) Technology does fail, and as per Murphy's Laws, it will fail while you are doing it.
- 10) Must establish a "trust factor" to have people use the programs.

Effectiveness

- 1) Is distance learning really cost effective? Do you need to have both print and online? Is access to technology for delivery a constraint?
- 2) Distance learning will require significant investment in infrastructure.
- 3) Must have a means of motivating people to learn. They need to be interested in trying a new way to learn.

- 4) Athabaska University in Canada offers an executive MBA program that is very popular. It has a mandate to conduct distance education. It has very good support built into the system.
- 5) Retention (of information) by using the internet is lower.

Strategies for achieving greater success

- 1) Establish protocol in advance for teleconferencing, interactive programs, etc.
- 2) Listening skills will be improved.
- 3) Adopt a “game culture” as a presentation methodology---younger generations are accustomed to this.
- 4) Set clear objectives at the onset of the online or distance programs.
- 5) Start with a younger, computer-savvy group as the target audience. It is an investment in the future.
- 6) Courses on cooperatives should not be created or reinvented by each cooperative. We should have a clearinghouse of cooperative education programs available on line. This could be part of a coordinated effort to determine which group develops sequential cooperative programs (distance learning) such as co-ops 101, 202, 303, etc.
- 7) Must include a built in feedback and evaluation mechanism.
- 8) Must have a comprehensive marketing plan to drive people to use the distance learning modules (predominantly web).
- 9) Form teams with participants in different locations. Require the teams to have discussion and decisions to encourage interaction and acceptance of technology (distance learning).
- 10) Use the distance education programs to link and surf the web. This will encourage students to open up and explore the web. This is an improvement over CD-Rom programs, which are more static, where one module sequentially follows the next.
- 11) Create a culture to learn within the cooperative.
- 12) Encourage the cooperative to set up learning stations on site to encourage the use of distance education programs.
- 13) “Blended Learning”, use distance education as one component of education programs. Use as many techniques as possible for adult learning.
- 14) Be willing to have a “help desk” with distance learning programs (on line or in person).
- 15) Distance learning can be used as follow-up to “keep you close to the material and people with whom you shared a learning experience”. This reinforces learning.

Maura Schwartz facilitated this discussion. If you have questions, please call or email:
651.228.0213
maura.schwartz@wfcmac.coop