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The Five-Minute Training Trend



Wouldn't it be great if you could train your reps like Keanu Reeves' character, Neo, was trained in *The Matrix*? Just plug them in and download exactly what they need directly into their brains within a matter of minutes? More and more companies are doing just that. Not plugging them in, of course, but giving their reps three- to 10-minute bursts of instruction that address exactly what they need when they need it. It's called "nano" learning, and it's transforming the way sales organizations approach training.

Ken Cooper, a partner at sales development firm ej4 (www.ej4.com), says he saw the nano learning trend begin to evolve when customers started suggesting that ej4's 30-minute training programs were too long. "We got a lot of pushback with 30 minutes so we went to 20 minutes," he recalls. "We still got pushback so we went to 10 minutes and we've found that 10 minutes is the outer limit." Now ej4 breaks down every training topic into segments of 10 minutes or less and delivers it using broadcast-quality video in multiple mediums that reps can view during short periods of down time. The trend is boosting training participation and, as a result, boosting sales.

For instance, when ej4 customized its proprietary, four-step Quick Sell program for Starbucks employees, it compressed the information into a five-minute, information-rich video segment. Baristas could watch the program on a break then return to the counter and put the training to immediate use. When Sprint added GPS software to its phones, it deployed training videos to its reps' Treo phones rather than pulling those reps out of the field for a day of training. "The Sprint reps would get five minutes in a lobby or sitting in their car and they'd dial in and get the training," says Cooper.

It's all about having the information you need right when you need it. "Sales training is always delivered at Point A and doesn't get used until Point X," says Paul Russell, an ej4 partner. "Now you can deliver the training at Point X, right when you need it."

Every training program can be broken down into nano learning segments. Pepsi Co.'s extensive conflict management program, which teaches its reps how to deal with upset customers, is now a five-part series, each no more than 10 minutes long. Ej4's personality styles training is also a five-part series – an overview plus four short programs, each dedicated to one personality style. One ej4 client with a complex sales process used to schedule two-and-a-half days for on-site training to teach new reps their precisely-structured process. Ej4 broke the five-step process into 14 component pieces and created 14 training modules, which reps can fit between appointments and practice on visits to real customers.

The bottom line is that sales reps today are always pressed for time, and customers expect them to be more informed and more effective than ever. The solution is to train constantly, and to do it in short segments that are

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both manageable to fit into busy schedules and that can be absorbed right before they're needed. That's nano learning in a nutshell.

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