

WHY TRAINING IS CRITICAL

How to Maximize ROI
on Your Software Investment

Why Training is Necessary

When a company purchases new software, they expect a significant return on its investment. Just as acquiring a car does not make a person a competent driver, the purchase of a new software application does not make users instant experts. Instead, those experts are created through software training and experience. When considering training to attain a maximum return on investment, a company should understand the benefits of training, consider where that training can come from, know when users should be trained and appreciate the unique training needs adults have.

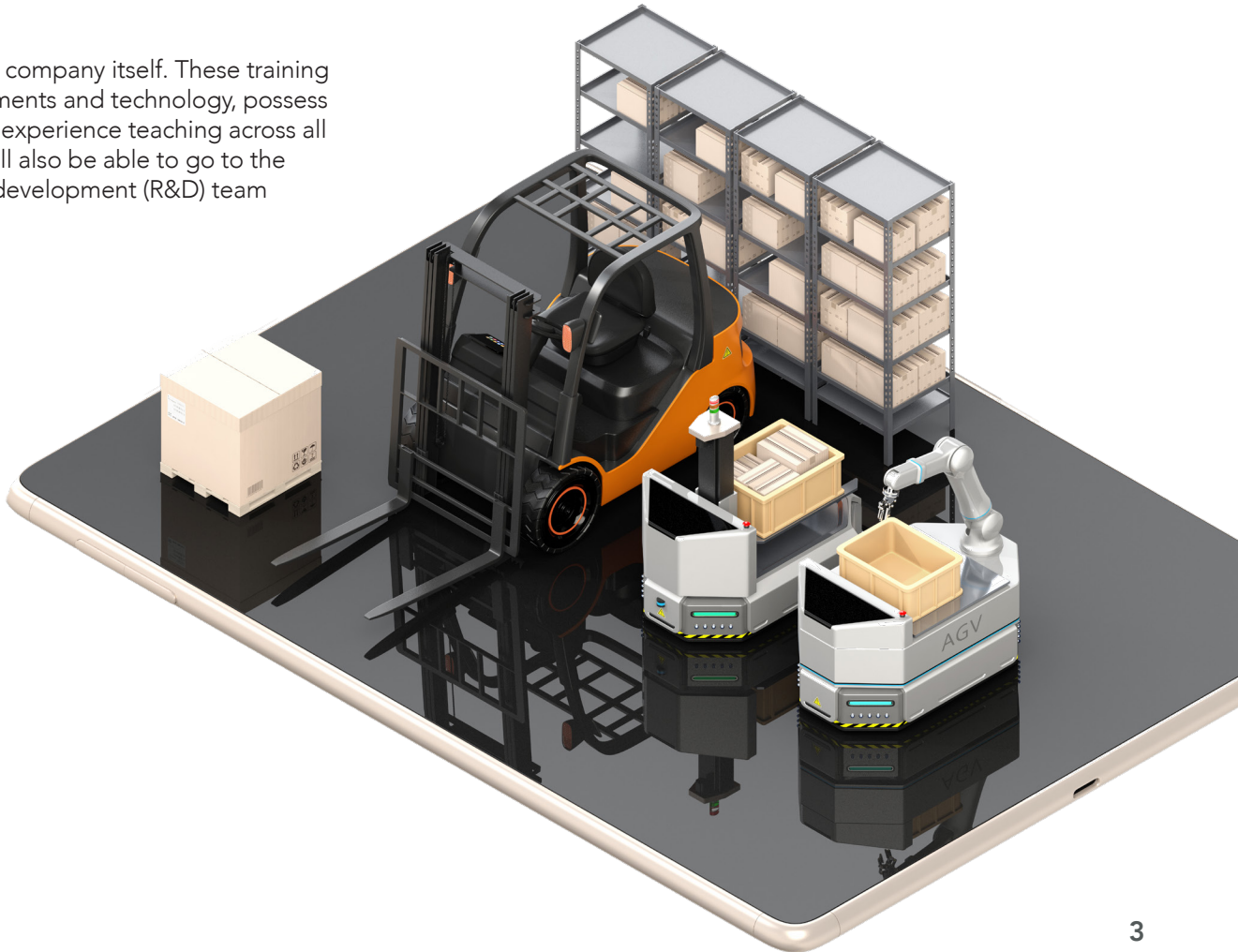
Software training is beneficial to both companies and their employees. Users who receive training are more productive because they have experience with the system and do not have to learn in a live work environment, where the stress and stakes are higher. Training also leads to higher rates of employee retention (Ahmad, 2013). When a software user feels valued, which occurs when their company chooses to engage in employee development, they are happier at work and thus more inclined to stay where they feel appreciated. Training shows users the right way to do something. Rather than rely on incorrect methods and errant tribal knowledge passed down through an organization, training provides a consistent level of quality. Users and their employers alike benefit from these advantages.



How to Receive Training

There are two places where a company can get training on its new software application – in-house or from the software provider. With new software implementations, in-house training is generally not an option because the in-house team does not yet have the knowledge, training environment, or materials they will need to successfully lead their teammates. Further down the road of the implementation process, in-house experts will be able to create training programs to ramp up new team members, using their newly developed skills and customized materials. However, these things are not in place to effectively support an initial implementation.

The other option is training provided by the software company itself. These training teams will have access to the newest system environments and technology, possess a plethora of product knowledge, and will have prior experience teaching across all industries their software has served. These trainers will also be able to go to the subject matter experts, as well as their research and development (R&D) team when complex or non-intuitive questions arise.



What is the Best Time for Training?

Another consideration when it comes to training a workforce is the timing of training. Should training occur before the project begins, during the implementation process or right before go-live? The short answer is: It depends.

Introductory training works best before the implementation process begins. Immediately after a contract is signed, and before design begins, an introductory training course can teach users the terminology and capabilities of the base system. This frees up the design team from having to teach these concepts and allows the customer design team to start the process with a solid understanding of the new software capabilities. This means they can start having knowledgeable conversations with their implementation team from day one. Think of learning a new spreadsheet system. If a user already knows what a cell is and the term doesn't have to be defined and navigation to a cell doesn't have to be practiced, then the user is learning about pivot tables that much sooner.

When should a team learn how to configure software? The best time is right before they're going to start the configuration process. Configuration training assumes a basic understanding already exists, which allows learners to quickly deep dive into the system. There's no benefit to learning this weeks or months in advance. When that happens, a lack of practice can cause a user to forget what they have learned. Instead, training delivered just in time will teach learners how to configure the system so they can do it immediately, with fresh knowledge that enables them to practice the correct methods.

Some products are complex and require technical training to support it. This is typically reserved for system administrators or those users who get the call when something goes wrong. Technical training teaches learners how to troubleshoot and maintain the back end of the solution. Due to the nature of this type of course, it can be taken after go-live. Learners may or may not have a functional understanding of the system – it is helpful but not necessary. As software moves to SaaS, and is cloud-hosted by the provider, technical training for the customer is required less often.

Finally, in the weeks before go-live, end-user training should be leveraged to teach employees how to complete their jobs in the new system. This training allows users to learn the new system through practice before they see it in a work-pressure situation. The timing ensures they remember what they learned in their training.

Getting the timing right in training allows a user to know what they need to know when they need to know it. Training is then followed up by whichever step in the implementation is next – be it design, configuration or go-live. This is another contributor in maximizing a company's return on its software investment.



What Does Proper Training Look Like?

With an understanding of why training should be used, who should deliver training and when it should occur, the next subject to consider is what training should look like.

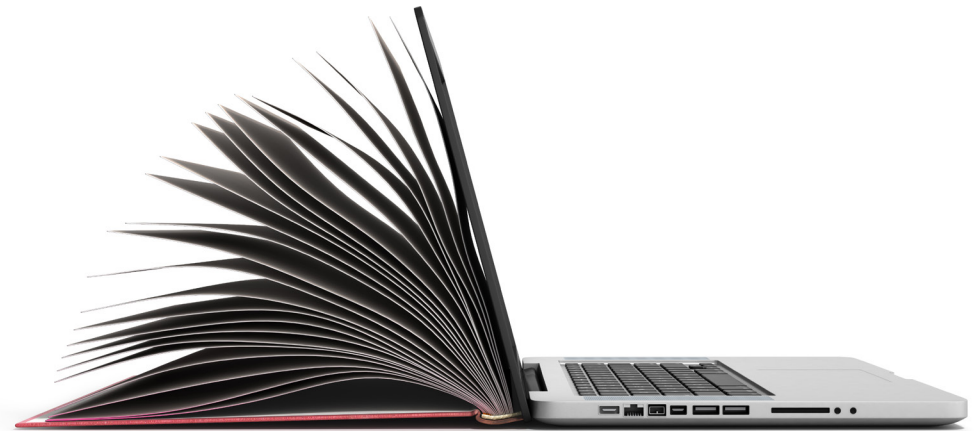
The training for a software implementation should use Adult Learning Theory, which recognizes that adults learn differently than children (Western Governors University, 2020). The methods used in training adults should consider key differences in the way adults think. Adults bring work experience when they come to training, which should not be ignored, but respected. While users' future experiences will change because of the new software, that does not negate what they already know. Professional trainers will engage with that prior experience as they address these changes. Many new users come eager to learn. They recognize that the new software is going to make a significant impact on their jobs and they want to have a full understanding of it. Professional trainers want to help with this transition and will act as a guide rather than an authoritarian teacher.

Adults learn in a variety of different ways. To accommodate the four types of learners – visual, auditory, verbal and physical – a combination of various teaching methods is necessary. In software training, this equates to diagrams to explain complex concepts, well-written training manuals, engaging slides and activities that users complete in a simulated environment, with a competent professional trainer to explain along the way. Additionally, the learner needs to feel safe asking questions related to clarification and curiosity.

By allowing users to receive the instruction, materials and hands-on experience they need to fully understand their new software, a company creates confidence in their users while strengthening its investment in the software.

The best way to protect and maximize your software investment is to engage in training for all software users. Not all training is created equal, so you should consider the benefits of training – as well as a variety of other factors – to determine the best possible training available. By understanding your options of who can provide training, when training should occur relative to the project plan, and what training should look like, you can equip your decision-makers to make the right choices and train your employees in a way that maximizes their capabilities.

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Bibliography

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