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Kevin Bowlen, technology training manager,
City of Bloomington, Indiana



City of Bloomington relies on cost-effective online video instruction

Set amid the rolling hills of southern Indiana about an hour's drive south of Indianapolis, the City of Bloomington employs 900 workers dedicated to serving more than 60,000 residents. Home to the flagship campus of the Indiana University system, the city affectionately called "B-town" features a thriving arts and music scene, sporting events, a wide variety of restaurants, and more than 30 annual festivals.

Challenge: deliver cost-effective, on-demand training

Approximately 800 Bloomington city employees, or 89 percent of the municipal work force, use computers or mobile devices on the job. These employees are dispersed across nearly 20 facilities, and also work in the field.

In the past, the city relied on classroom-based, in-person training sessions to educate employees about new technologies. But that proved increasingly challenging, so the city sought a new approach.

"We were having trouble getting employees to attend classes regularly," said Kevin Bowlen, Bloomington technology training manager. "Often, they felt as though they couldn't take the two hours out of their workday to attend. This was especially true when they just needed to learn, or just wanted to learn, one aspect of a software application. For example, if a Microsoft Word mail merge was all they really were interested in."

Financial concerns also precipitated a fresh approach to training. Like many local governments, Bloomington wrestles with a tight budget. This was exacerbated in recent years following statewide reforms that reduced property tax revenue available to cities and counties.

Bloomington needed to provide workers with a training resource available to them anytime, and to deliver it in a cost-effective manner.

BENEFITS

- Makes cost-effective training available to everyone
- Provides unlimited access, on demand
- Helps employees to be more productive

Solution: lynda.com video instruction

After evaluating several web- and video-based training providers, Bloomington in early 2009 chose lynda.com.

"With lynda.com, we were able to offer employees the ability to watch whatever video they needed to watch," Bowlen said, adding that lynda.com had the most relevant, comprehensive, and fastest-growing tutorials library.

Employees quickly turned to the service for a wide range of courses—from HTML and business skills fundamentals to advanced instruction in Microsoft® applications, Google Apps™, computer-aided drafting (CAD), and more.

A year after purchasing lynda.com, the city doubled its license count in response to heavy demand.

One longtime employee used lynda.com to close skills gaps, Bowlen said. "We introduced some new systems she was not familiar with. I was able to point out some courses she needed to take. One of them was a simple introduction to computing. I did this at the request of her supervisor. It helped her do her job and probably helped her keep that job. She might have been looking at losing the position."

Over in the city Engineering Department, where CAD software applications are used extensively, employees turn to lynda.com to keep up with the latest software upgrades, Bowlen said. "They are big on watching those tutorials and then being able to take advantage of new software features."

lynda.com also helped Bloomington with a large software migration—a widespread rollout of Google Apps with Gmail®.

"That was a big change for everybody," Bowlen said. "We took away Microsoft Outlook email, and employees were a little bit intimidated. But lynda.com had the right tutorials—not only the basics, but also how to be a power user. We watched the videos and discussed them. And employees had the opportunity to immediately put what they learned into practice because they had computers right there in front of them."

Results: improved skills and added productivity

Because lynda.com is available anytime, employees can train at their own pace when it's convenient. In addition, they can watch full courses or view short portions for quick answers to specific questions.

"All the content is just right there," Bowlen said. "Employees can watch lynda.com at their desks and be back at work being productive in 10 or 15 minutes. And the instructors do an excellent job."

City Clerk Regina Moore updated her software skills: "lynda.com is a tremendous resource to have at my fingertips. One of the biggest

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benefits is the ability to study one aspect of a program exactly when you need the help. Also, the ability to browse for software programs you don't know. It's great, because lynda.com presents information in a non-threatening manner."

As training manager, Bowlen said lynda.com helps him perform better in his own role.

"Nobody can be an expert in every software upgrade," he said. "For example, we're still running for the most part Microsoft Windows XP. Some of us have Windows 7. A few of us have Microsoft Office 2010, and we're even now starting to see a few editions of Office 2013.

"Having lynda.com training courses available on these applications and such a broad array of other subjects has been very helpful. If someone has a question, I can go in and watch a video before I help them. Or I'll say, 'Watch this, and if you have any questions afterward let's discuss it.'"

As employees boost skills, the city government becomes more efficient and productive, Bowlen said.

Looking ahead

Before Bloomington switched to Google Apps, the city couldn't effectively support employee use of mobile devices. But following that software migration, workers have used mobile devices more and more. Because of this, Bowlen said he expects employees to increasingly consume lynda.com training on smartphones and tablets.

Bloomington employees also will benefit from the ability to follow custom learning paths created using shareable lynda.com course playlists. Bowlen said he expects the city to embrace the feature. It lets users give a playlist a name and description. They can then email a link to colleagues or post it to Facebook®, Twitter®, or LinkedIn®.

"On a human resources level, custom playlists are going to be really great for enhancing the employee onboarding process," Bowlen said. "I can see management using them, and myself as well. I'll be able to put together course lists for different departments, or for people who are regularly asking about certain subjects. I will be able to go in and start creating playlists for specific departments and then just push out that playlist to them."

"lynda.com is amazing," Bowlen said. "I would certainly advise anybody that's not using it to at least take a look."