

Build, Buy, Borrow, or Bot:

A Practical Guide to Sourcing Training Content

BIZ LIBRARY

INTRODUCTION

Which One for What?

Every training need eventually raises the same question: where is this content going to come from?

For most HR and L&D teams, the answer has to fit inside a schedule that's already full. 57% of HR professionals say their department is understaffed. When LinkedIn asked about the biggest barriers to career development, 50% said managers lack proper support, 45% said employees lack support, and 33% said talent teams themselves lack support. Meanwhile, fewer than 1 in 3 employees strongly agree that someone at work encourages their development.

57%

of HR professionals say their department is understaffed.

SHRM, 2025 State of the Workplace

50%

say managers lack proper support for career development.

LinkedIn, 2025 Workplace Learning Report

FEWER THAN

1 in 3

employees strongly agree that someone at work encourages their development.

Gallup

Put together, those numbers describe one problem. Nobody has spare hours to create training from scratch, and employees are still waiting on development that feels relevant to their jobs.

The strongest training programs don't commit to a single content source. They match each need to the source that fits it best.

YOUR OPTIONS

Four Ways to Source Content

There are four options to choose from. Most programs use at least two.



Build

Create content in-house, with your own team and subject matter experts.



Buy

License a ready-made library from a content provider.



Borrow

Curate existing content from outside sources.



Bot

Use AI tools to help create, adapt, or practice with content.

This guide covers when each option fits, what it costs in time and money, and how to combine them into a program your team can keep up with.

AI is a useful fourth option, but it's an optional one. Every principle here works whether or not generative AI is part of your toolkit.

AT A GLANCE

The Four Options at a Glance

Here's how they compare.

	Build	Buy	Borrow	Bot
What it is	Content created in-house by your team or SMEs	A licensed off-the-shelf library	Existing content from outside sources, such as articles, videos, and industry associations	AI tools that help draft, adapt, or personalize content and power practice
Speed to launch	Slow (weeks to months)	Fast once implemented (often about 30 days, but it varies)	Fast to find, slower to vet	Fast to draft, but human review is still required
Upfront cost	High in time and SME hours	Predictable subscription	Low or free	Varies; often bundled into platforms
Control	Full	Moderate, depending on customization options	Low	High, when people define what "good" looks like
Best for	Onboarding, proprietary processes, products, culture, your leadership model	Compliance, safety, soft skills, leadership fundamentals, software skills	Industry news, emerging topics, supplemental learning, discussion starters	Drafting custom modules faster, role-play and practice scenarios, personalized paths
Watch out for	SME availability and keeping content current	Generic examples and large libraries with no curation	Accuracy, recency, and usage permissions	Accuracy, source quality, and employee trust

OPTION 1 OF 4 · BUILD

Build: When Your Organization Is the Expert

Generic training teaches people how things generally work. Custom training teaches people how *your* things work. When a topic only makes sense in the context of your organization, building it yourself is usually the right call, because nobody else has the knowledge to do it well.

When to Build

- **Company-specific onboarding.** The day-to-day details only your team knows, like where supplies are kept, how to update records in your systems, or how to submit a request. For broader onboarding topics, customized off-the-shelf content can often do the job.
- **Proprietary systems, workflows, and SOPs.** A general course can teach how a tool works. Only you can teach how your team uses it to get your results, like the exact steps to process an order, close out a shift, or route a customer request.
- **Internal policies that differ from industry norms.** Building lets you say exactly what you mean, the way you mean it.
- **Leadership programs tied to your competency model.** If you've defined what leadership looks like at your organization, your training should reflect that framework.
- **Role-specific performance scenarios.** Practice built around your products, customers, and real situations is where the strongest skill transfer happens.
- **Highly specific compliance requirements.** Some regulatory or geographic requirements are too narrow for broad off-the-shelf coverage.

What Building Really Costs

The price of custom content shows up mostly in time. Every module needs someone to scope it, write it, gather input from subject matter experts, review it, and launch it. SMEs are usually busy doing the work you're training people on, so their availability often sets your timeline.

There's also an ongoing cost. Anything you build, you own, which means you're responsible for updating it when a process, tool, or policy changes.

20–30%

That's why most programs reserve custom development for the 20 to 30% of content that matters most to how the organization operates and competes. Other options can cover the rest.

You Don't Need a Full Design Team

If you have instructional designers, building everything from scratch is rarely the best use of their time. Their expertise goes furthest in strategic work: running needs analyses, finding gaps across departments, curating content from all four sources, designing blended learning paths, and measuring impact.

If you're a team of one, custom content can still be within reach. Relevance matters more than production value. A five-minute module that uses your terminology and reflects your actual process can do more for employees than a polished generic course.

Build it if...

- ✓ Your organization is the only source, or the best source, of this knowledge.
- ✓ Getting it wrong would hurt performance, safety, or culture.
- ✓ You have the SME time to create it and a plan to keep it current.

OPTION 2 OF 4 · BUY

Buy: When the Topic Is Universal

Off-the-shelf content isn't a fallback for organizations that can't afford to build. For a wide range of training needs, it's the best option available. If almost any organization would train on a topic the same way, there's little reason to create it from scratch.

When to Buy

- **Compliance and safety.** Harassment prevention, OSHA, cybersecurity, and HIPAA all follow standardized guidelines. Quality providers also update their courses when regulations change, so your team doesn't have to track every revision.
- **Professional skills.** Communication, time management, customer service, and software skills don't need your logo on them to be effective.
- **Leadership fundamentals.** New managers need a foundation in feedback, delegation, and difficult conversations before they're ready for a program built around your leadership model.
- **Self-directed development.** A library gives employees a menu of learning options they can explore on their own.
- **The universal layer of onboarding.** Off-the-shelf content covers what every new hire needs, while your custom content covers what's unique to you.

29%

In 2025, U.S. organizations increased spending on outside training products and services by 29%, to $16 billion.

Training Magazine, 2025 Training Industry Report

Why It Works

It's ready to go.

There's no development time and no review cycles. Once the platform is set up, you can start assigning courses right away.

Experts build it.

Reputable providers employ specialists to create and regularly update their content. That expertise would be expensive and slow to replicate in-house.

It scales.

Subscription pricing is almost always more affordable than custom development for broad topics.

It keeps records.

For compliance and certification training, completion tracking and reporting give you the documentation auditors ask for.

Off-the-Shelf Works Inside Blended Programs Too

Purchased content doesn't have to stand alone. You can assign a short course before an instructor-led session, so classroom time goes to discussion and application. You can play a video during a session to spark conversation. You can also send a refresher afterward to keep key ideas fresh.

Customizing Off-the-Shelf Content

Some providers let you adapt their content so it feels like your own. You start with a solid, expert-built foundation and add just enough of your organization to make it recognizable. Common options include:

- Adding your branding, including logos, colors, and messaging.
- Updating titles and descriptions so employees see how a course connects to their role.
- Layering in company context, such as policies, examples, and "here's how we do it here" moments.
- Editing quizzes and interactions to test what your employees actually need to know.

This approach works well when a topic applies broadly but execution varies at your company, or when you need to move fast without settling for generic.

What to Watch For

⚠ Generic examples

Broad content can feel disconnected from an employee's actual job. Customization and short introductions from managers help close that gap.

⚠ Libraries with no curation

Thousands of courses can overwhelm employees. Assign learning paths by role and goal instead of leaving people to search on their own.

Buy it if...

- ✓ Most organizations would teach this topic the same way.
- ✓ You need it live quickly.
- ✓ It needs regular updates you don't have time to make yourself.

OPTION 3 OF 4 · BORROW

Borrow: When Good Content Already Exists

A lot of useful learning content is already out there, often for free. Industry articles, expert videos, podcasts, and resources from professional associations can fill gaps quickly and keep your program current. Borrowing means finding that content, checking it, and putting it in front of the right people.

When to Borrow

- **Industry news and trends.** Sharing articles and reports keeps employees current on what's changing in your field.
- **Emerging topics.** When a subject is too new for formal courses to exist yet, curated articles and expert commentary can bridge the gap.
- **Discussion starters.** A short video or article works well to open a team meeting or kick off a group conversation.
- **Supplemental learning.** Borrowed content can deepen a topic employees are already studying, or give curious learners somewhere to go next.
- **Software how-tos.** Many software companies publish their own tutorials and help guides, which are often the most accurate source for their tools.

Where to Find It

- Professional and industry associations
- Reputable publications, journals, and research organizations
- Software vendors' help centers and tutorials
- Government agencies and regulators
- Expert-led videos and podcasts

What to Watch For

Borrowed content is cheap to get, but it isn't free to use well. The real cost is the time it takes to find, vet, and organize it. Without that step, employees can end up learning from content that's outdated, inaccurate, or created by someone with no real expertise.

Permissions matter too. Linking to a public article is usually fine. Downloading a paywalled report, or re-hosting someone else's video in your LMS, may not be.

Before you share it, check:

- [ ] Who created it, and do they have real expertise on the topic?
- [ ] When was it published, and is it still accurate?
- [ ] Does it match how your organization works, or will it confuse people?
- [ ] Are you allowed to share it the way you plan to?
- [ ] Does it fit a specific learning need, or is it just interesting?

Borrowing Works Best as a Supplement

Borrowed content rarely makes a good foundation for a training program. It's hard to track, it can disappear when a link breaks, and its quality varies widely. Use it to round out what you build and buy, not to replace them.

Borrow it if...

- ✓ The topic is new, fast-moving, or supplemental.
- ✓ A credible source already covers it well.
- ✓ You can share it legally and have time to vet it.

OPTION 4 OF 4 · BOT

Bot: When AI Can Speed Things Up

The newest option on the list uses AI tools to help create, adapt, and practice with training content. Learning measurement expert Lori Niles-Hofmann describes capability building as a supply-chain decision: for every skill an organization needs, leaders choose whether to build, buy, borrow, or bot. Bot rarely works alone. It's usually a faster way to do one of the other three.

When to Use AI

- **Drafting custom content faster.** AI can turn your SOPs, policies, and process documents into a first draft of a training module, which shortens the slowest part of building.
- **Creating quizzes and job aids.** Turning existing material into knowledge checks, summaries, and quick-reference guides is a strong fit for AI.
- **Practice and role-play.** AI-powered scenarios let employees rehearse conversations, like giving feedback or handling a difficult customer, before they face the real thing.
- **Personalizing learning paths.** AI can recommend content based on a person's role, goals, or skill gaps.

37%

37% of organizations used AI in training in 2025, up from 25% the year before.

Training Magazine, 2025 Training Industry Report

What AI Should and Shouldn't Do

AI is good at speed, scale, and pattern recognition. Moments that require nuance should stay with people. That includes coaching, performance feedback, and ethical decisions. A useful rule: **let AI accelerate preparation, and let people own judgment and accountability.**

AI Is Only as Good as Its Source Material

An AI tool can't tell you what "good" looks like at your organization. It needs a standard set by people: expert-approved content to draw from, and clear criteria for judging performance. Without that, its output and feedback aren't reliable.

QUALITY MATTERS AS MUCH AS SPEED

> **If people think human-created learning is boring, imagine what they'll think of AI-generated slop.**

Heidi Kirby, instructional design strategist

What to Watch For

Accuracy

AI can produce confident, wrong answers. Every piece of AI-generated content needs a human review before it reaches employees.

Data privacy

Know what information you're putting into AI tools, and where it goes.

Employee trust

Be open about where and how AI is used in your training. People engage more with tools they understand and trust.

You Don't Need AI to Run a Great Program

Most organizations aren't using AI in their training yet, and plenty of them run excellent programs. Relevant content, clear goals, practice, and reinforcement drive results, whatever tools you use to get there. AI can make some of that work faster. It can't replace it.

Bot it if...

- ✓ You have solid, expert-approved source material for AI to work from.
- ✓ Someone will review the output before employees see it.
- ✓ Speed or scale is your biggest constraint.

A SIMPLE DECISION FRAMEWORK

How to Choose

When you're looking at a long list of training needs, three questions will sort most of them quickly.

1

Is this topic universal or specific to us?

If almost any organization in your industry would train on it the same way, that points toward **buying**. Safety fundamentals, communication skills, and software proficiency don't need your voice to be effective.

If it only makes sense in the context of how you operate, that points toward **building**. Your onboarding, your SOPs, and your leadership model should all sound like you.

2

What's at stake if the training gets it wrong?

Lower stakes: a mistake slows someone down but is easy to correct, as with communication, time management, or general software skills. Off-the-shelf content is efficient and sufficient, and borrowed content can fill in around it.

Higher stakes: a mistake could lead to an injury, a compliance violation, or a lost customer, as with safety steps for your equipment, your internal policies, or your regulated processes. That's where custom content earns its investment, because it's built around your exact expectations.

3

How fast does it need to launch, and how often will it change?

If you need it live soon and the topic is universal, buy it. If the topic is brand new or changing monthly, borrow from credible sources until something more permanent makes sense. If it's specific to you and you need it fast, AI tools can shorten the build, as long as someone reviews the output.

QUICK REFERENCE

Matching Needs to Options

Training need	Build	Buy	Borrow	Bot
OSHA and safety basics		✓	○	
Harassment prevention		✓		
Cybersecurity awareness		✓		
HIPAA and standard industry compliance		✓		
Company onboarding	✓	○		○
Proprietary SOPs and processes	✓			○
Internal policies unique to you	✓			
Leadership fundamentals		✓		
Leadership tied to your model	✓			○
Soft skills		✓		○
Role-specific customer scenarios	✓	✓		○
Industry trends and news			✓	
Software how-tos		✓	✓	

Legend ✓ Primary choice ○ Can help

EXAMPLE: NEW MANAGER TRAINING

Putting It Together: One Program, Four Sources

Most strong programs mix their sources within a single initiative. Here's what that might look like for new manager training:



Buy

Foundational courses on feedback, delegation, and running meetings.



Build

A short module on what leadership looks like at your organization, with a welcome from a senior leader.



Borrow

A recent article on managing through change to kick off a cohort discussion.



Bot OPTIONAL

A set of AI role-plays where new managers practice a tough conversation before they have one.

Each source does the job it's best at, and none of them has to do everything.

PRINCIPLES FOR EVERY SOURCE

What Makes Any Content Work

Whether you build, buy, borrow, or bot, the source matters less than how the content is designed and delivered. These principles apply across all four options.

01 Start With the Behavior You Want

Before choosing content, decide what people should do differently afterward. “Complete the harassment prevention course” is an activity. “Recognize and report inappropriate behavior” is an outcome. Starting with the outcome helps you choose the right content, and it gives you something real to measure later.

02 Let People Practice

Watching and reading have their place, but people learn more when they actively work with the material. That means answering questions, working through scenarios, making decisions, and getting feedback.

ABOUT **6x**

In a Carnegie Mellon study of an online course, each interactive activity students completed was associated with about 6 times more learning than each video watched or page read.

Koedinger et al., 2015

This applies to every source. Bought content with built-in interactions, custom scenarios you build yourself, borrowed videos followed by a team discussion, and AI role-plays all give people a chance to do instead of just watch.

03 Reinforce Over Time

People forget new information quickly, and forgetting is steepest in the first day or two after learning. Research on memory going back to the 1880s shows this pattern, and it held up in a modern replication. A single training session, however good, won't stick on its own.

Short follow-ups help counter that drop-off. Review questions, quick refreshers, and manager check-ins in the days and weeks after training keep key ideas active.

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04 Keep It Short and Close to the Work

Not every need calls for a full course. Often a job aid, a quick video, or a checklist at the moment someone needs it does more good than a 30-minute module nobody asked for. Smaller, focused pieces are also easier to update, reuse, and mix across sources.

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05 Organize It So People Can Find It

More content doesn't automatically mean better learning. A large library, a folder of borrowed links, or a stack of custom modules only helps if employees can find the right piece when they need it. Group content by role, goal, or skill, assign clear learning paths, and give people a central place to look.

Questions to Ask a Content Partner

If buying is part of your mix, choosing the right provider matters as much as choosing the right courses. These questions help you compare options and spot gaps before you sign anything.

Start With Your Own Needs

Before talking to vendors, get clear on a few things internally:

- What topics and skills do employees need training on most?
- Do you need specialized or industry-specific content?
- Are you filling a few gaps, or looking for a full library that supports self-directed development?
- Who will manage the program day to day, and how much time do they have?

Then Ask Providers About...

Coverage

- How many courses are available on the topics that matter most to us?
- Is there more than one option per topic, so employees don't repeat the same course every year?
- Do you offer industry-specific content, such as compliance by state or sector?

Quality

- Who creates the content, and how is it vetted?
- How often is content updated, especially for compliance and regulations?
- Does content include interactions, practice, or knowledge checks, or is it mostly passive?

MORE QUESTIONS FOR PROVIDERS

Learner Experience

- Can employees access content on any device, including phones?
- Is content short and focused enough to fit into a workday?
- Are there search filters, recommendations, or learning paths to help people find what they need?

Administration and Reporting

- How are completions tracked, and can I pull reports for audits?
- Are reminders and recertification alerts automated?
- Are there built-in tools to reinforce learning after a course?

Flexibility

- Can we customize content with our branding, examples, and quiz questions?
- Can we upload or create our own content in the same platform?
- If you offer AI features, what source material do they draw from, and how is our data handled?

Support

- How long does implementation typically take?
- What support do we get during setup and after launch?
- Does the platform integrate with the HR systems we already use?

CONCLUSION

Bringing It All Together

There's no single right way to source training content. The organizations that get it right don't pick one approach and force every need to fit it. They ask what each need requires and choose accordingly.



Buy for the topics every organization shares.



Build for the knowledge only you have.



Borrow to stay current and spark conversation.



Bring in AI when it can speed up the work, with people setting the standard for what good looks like.

And whatever the source, design for practice, reinforce over time, and make content easy to find.

You don't need a large team or a big budget to do this well. You need a clear view of your training needs, and the right tools to match them.

ONE PLATFORM, FOUR SOURCES

How BizLibrary Helps

BizLibrary brings all four options together in one place, so you can manage your whole content mix without juggling separate vendors.

Buy

A library of 13,000+ expert-authored courses on compliance, skills, and leadership, with options to customize content with your branding and company context.

Build

Create your own custom courses right in the platform. If you want to move faster, BizCreate adds AI-powered content creation.

Borrow

Add links to articles, videos, and other outside resources into your courses and learning paths, so borrowed content is tracked alongside everything else.

Bot

BizReady gives employees AI-powered practice and coaching for real-world conversations.



All of it lives in one platform, with the tracking, reporting, and reinforcement tools to show what's working.

See How It Fits Your Program

Request a demo to explore how BizLibrary can help you build, buy, borrow, and bot your way to a stronger training program.

Request a Demo →

About BizLibrary

BizLibrary is an award-winning, best-in-class learning and development provider helping organizations engage, upskill, and retain today's workforce. Its curated catalog includes more than 13,000+ training videos covering leadership, compliance, industry-specific training, and essential business skills. BizLibrary equips employees with the skills they need for today's roles while preparing them for tomorrow's challenges.

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