

# Off-the-Shelf Content

YOUR SECRET TO OPTIMIZING EMPLOYEE TRAINING





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# Where Do You Start?

You have employees that need to be trained. Or, more importantly, you have employees who want to learn and improve performance. Where do you start?

How is learning content defined in your organization?

Do you have a learning content strategy?

How do you plan to organize the content your organization needs to deliver to employees?

How do you plan to deliver the content to employees?

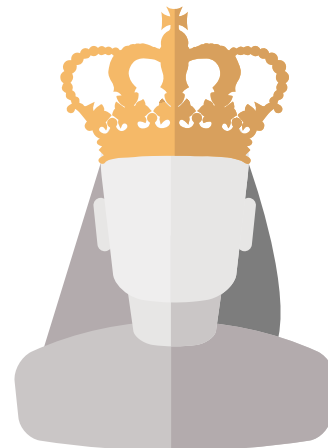
Each of these are critical questions that deserve serious consideration and deliberate answers. You need a strategy that accurately reflects the current workplace realities of pace, change, complexity, and demographics. A single-minded reliance upon traditional learning techniques will not be effective in meeting the needs of today's employees.

While content is king, context is queen. This is where organizing content is crucial. Content curation provides a context and structure so employees can quickly find content and apply that content to meet their workplace needs or answer questions at the moment of need.

## CONTENT IS KING



## CONTEXT IS QUEEN



# Learning Technology

The importance of curation leads us directly to the delivery of your learning content. Technology-enabled learning is not a luxury in today's work environment. It's the price of admission for organizations determined to keep pace with the competitive demands of the marketplace and the learning and performance demands that come with this current marketplace. A simple learning management system probably won't meet the needs of your newest employees without the ability to serve content on mobile devices.

## There are three critical elements to getting started with delivering online content to improve employee performance:

- Employees willing to learn and improve performance
- Learning content - assets and resources
- Technology platform to deliver the content to employees

"Our job isn't to help participants learn; it's to help them solve real-world problems. The starting point for design should be what you want people to do when they leave. We can't ignore the desired business outputs; the trick is to find a balance between what learners need and what the business expects."

- **Sebastian Bailey**, "The Best and Worst of Bite-Size Learning"

# Content Choices



**BUILD**



**BORROW**



**BUY**

## BUILD

You can build your own content, or have a third party build it for you, and many organizations do exactly that. Building content is a great choice for many topic areas. For instance, you might want to build content that is unique to the subject matter expertise of your organization. Content about your own products, content linked to your organization's culture, or competitive differentiators is likewise great content to build.

The disadvantage to building content is that it's difficult to build all of the content organizations need to really see performance improvement across a broad cross-section of employees. Building content can also be cost-prohibitive for many organizations; think about the core skills that most organizations need training on: leadership and management, communication, sales, customer service, compliance, IT, desktop computing, and safety.

Very few organizations can build enough fresh, up-to-date content in each of these topic areas to impact improved performance across all of these important business skills topics. That's where borrow and buy come in.

## BORROW

Many organizations look to fill this content gap by borrowing content. There are many resources available on the web today where employees might already be looking for training content. YouTube offers an amazing volume of content on an endless variety of topics. There are blogs, newsletters, and a whole host of other sources where organizations and employees alike can find content to fill gaps in learning.

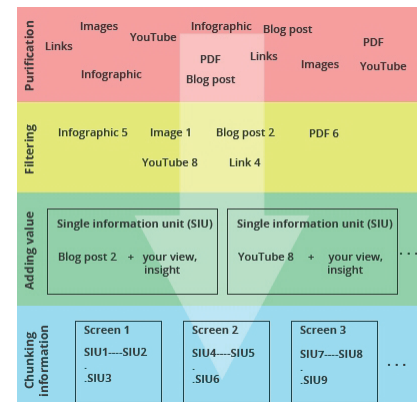
The challenges with borrowing content are primarily twofold: quality and reliability. When people simply search online for something, there's no guarantee that what they find is accurate or relevant. Oftentimes it's been developed by someone with no subject matter expertise or instructional design experience.

“The goal is not (and probably it never was) to learn or memorize all of the information available out there. It’s just too much even if we focus only on the very essence of it. The goal is to learn how to learn, to know where to look for something, and to be able to identify which parts of all the information available are most relevant to learn or achieve a certain goal or objective.”

- **Robin Good**, “Content Curation for Education and Learning”

## What do content curation, chunking information, and microlearning have in common?

Click on the image to check out this great article by Tadej Stanic. In the article, he presents a framework to help educators make a shift from designing long, information-based online courses to microlearning.



## BUY

This brings us to the third choice - buying content. Off-the-shelf (OTS) content collections can meet the learning and training content needs of just about every organization, if the organization approaches the use of the OTS content wisely and with reasonable expectations. The advantages of off-the-shelf content are:

**Variety:** You can generally find content on a wide variety of topics.

**Speed:** OTS is ready now, so you don’t have to wait to develop, test, and deploy. Speed also applies from your employees’ perspective. With a large OTS library of content, your employees can find and absorb the content they need without waiting for new content to come to them or to be built.

**Quality:** If you partner with a quality vendor, the content will be developed in accordance with sound design principles, good production values, and updated on a regular basis to ensure accuracy and relevance.

If you're looking for highly specialized content, this option probably won't work as well as building it yourself. But when you're in need of training on lots of different topics and skills, this is going to be your most effective and economical option.

# The Evolution of Off-the-Shelf Content

Online training content has changed in the last 20 years. When eLearning first appeared, the content was primarily slideshow inspired. The user would sit at a desktop computer and “interact” with the content in some way. The interactions ranged from clicking on screens to answering questions embedded within the courses. Many courses were four to six hours in duration. These first-generation courses were generally linear in design, meaning that no matter what choices the user made, the course progressed in the same order. Sometimes feedback and scores would be different, but the course content remained static.

Over time, online courses grew more sophisticated. Interactions evolved to the point where some courses offered learners immersive simulations where the content might have changed based upon the responses to the content from the user. But seat time remained long, and the underlying technology didn’t progress much.

Research about human brain science, adult learning theory, and the effect of video on learning and information retention coalesced around a new generation of learning content.

**Today’s best-in-breed online content is almost all video-based, and the length of video is much shorter than previous training content.** Research proves that humans retain only a few minutes of information in their short-term memory on a single topic before committing that information to long-term memory. Research has also shown that video is highly effective for training. That’s why today’s top-of-the-line OTS collections are primarily composed of short-form, video-based content.

Click the image to view an infographic on why video is better for employee training!

[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)



# How to Use Off-the-Shelf Content

Once you've made the decision to partner with an OTS content provider, you might be wondering what to do next. How do you get started? What are best practices in applying and using these powerful and flexible employee training tools?

Like any other learning technology, OTS content takes some thought, planning, and time to master. Unlike the technology platforms that host and deliver the content, the best practices for using the OTS content itself derive from our experiences as learning professionals and instructional designers.

## There are two strategic uses for OTS content:

- Standalone learning resources
- A learning resource within a blended learning solution

To get started, it's important to note that these two uses are not mutually exclusive. As we dive into the variety of ways you can make great use of your OTS content, this will become clear. The one thing you should bear in mind as we explore the current best practices for OTS content is that these best practices will evolve and change over time. If we've learned just one thing about learning technology, it's that change and evolution are a certainty. Just a few short years ago, the "push and play" slideshow form of eLearning was deemed state of the art. Today, it's short-form video. Stay tuned. We know for certain more change is coming...

Click the image to view an infographic on creating the right learning content mix!

**DOWNLOAD NOW**



## LEARNING CONTENT

Which is the right mix for your organization?



## These are three excellent use cases for OTS content as a standalone learning resource:

- To build foundational knowledge or skills
- To teach high-level or broad-based skills
- To meet specific compliance or certification requirements

Off-the-shelf learning content works well to develop foundational knowledge or skills because you are not trying to delve deeply into complex learning or applied learning situations. The objective is to give the employee a working foundation of knowledge or skill from which the employee can begin growth into a job role.

An example of foundational knowledge or skill might be for newly promoted managers and supervisors. As we promote employees into supervisory roles, there are core supervisory skills and knowledge needed. Off-the-shelf content can help that newly promoted manager build skills in areas like delegation, performance management, emotional intelligence, decision-making, etc.

It would be up to the newly promoted employee's manager to ensure these skills or knowledge bases are being applied properly, but the basics can be taught and learned using OTS resources very effectively.

## How to Use Standalone Learning Resources

Additional topic areas where foundational knowledge or skills can be taught and acquired using OTS content include: sales, customer service, communications skills, interviewing skills, business writing basics, and desktop computing.

Off-the-shelf content also works well when the objective is to develop high-level or broad-based skills. The learning objectives are generally linked to developing an understanding of a business discipline or area such as accounting, human resources, or P&L statements.

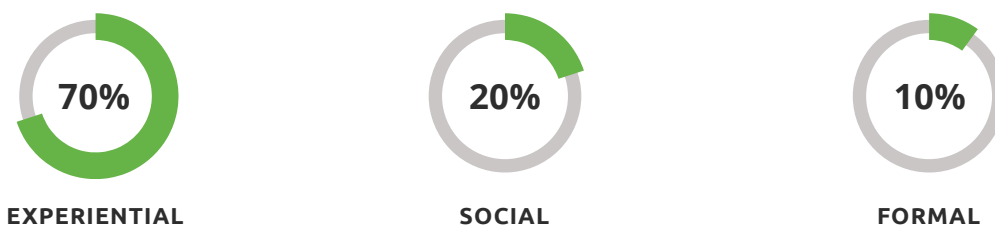
Self-paced study in these areas will improve the professional capacity of employees. For instance, improved HR knowledge will assist managers with employee relations issues. A generalized understanding of business accounting might help client services and sales professionals make better business cases with prospects and clients. But these types of training topics are usually not targeted to specific performance improvement areas.

Compliance and certification training are other areas where off-the-shelf resources are effective learning tools. In both types of training circumstances, employees and employers may need records of the training. Online, OTS content with the accompanying technology and reporting meets the compliance and certification business need for record-keeping and reporting.

Additionally, for many employees, the classroom delivery of some compliance training has long outlived its effectiveness and utility. Self-paced, online, OTS content offers many advantages that include:

- **Cost Savings** - Online availability means less time to travel.
- **Less Work Disruption** - Employees can complete training on their time schedule and remain as productive as possible.
- **Improved Effectiveness** - Online content shows higher rates of retention and better on-the-job application.
- **Variety** - With a best-in-class OTS collection, your employees may have multiple options for completion of annual compliance training, so they do not have to repeat the same course each year.

The final use case for OTS content is performance support. The "70-20-10" rule of employee learning states that employees only learn about 10 percent of what they need to effectively perform their jobs in formal training contexts. That means that training professionals who rely solely on traditional, formal approaches to learning are accepting that their programs are irrelevant to 90 percent of employee learning. That's a troubling thought, isn't it?



Traditional learning strategies and approaches rarely – if ever – really examined how we could improve employee performance right at the moment of need. That's where a combination of great OTS content and a technology platform can flip that traditional approach to employee development on its head.

Employees learn all the time away from work. They access information instantly, on demand, on any device, at their exact moment of need. In today's continuously connected world, organizations have to pay attention to employees' learning needs, which includes making content available on any device, at any time.

Performance support works perfectly to fit new preferences for accessing learning. Assume an employee is working on a project using Excel. The project requires a pivot chart. If they don't know, how would they learn to insert a pivot chart into an Excel file?

If you answered, "They'd Google it," you're probably right. They'd also most likely go to the video result Google returned, and the video they'd watch would probably be no longer than 2-3 minutes. Why can't you provide that same type of performance resource with vetted, professional, authoritative content? You can with an OTS content solution.

# How to Create a Blended Learning Solution

**There are three basic ways to implement OTS content into a blended learning solution:**

- Flip the classroom
- Embed the resource into an instructor-led session
- Provide the content as follow-up or refresher training

Just like use cases we outlined for off-the-shelf content as standalone resources, the use cases that are emerging for a blended solution continue to evolve and change. For instance, the flipped classroom is a relatively new concept, but it's a powerful idea that can really amplify the impact of both elements of content – online and classroom.

In a flipped classroom, the online content is assigned before the classroom session. Each participant is expected to complete the online portion of the content before participating in the instructor-led session. This allows the classroom time to move beyond a lecture to explain basic concepts and go straight to applying the basic concepts to complex situations.

For more on the case for a flipped classroom, check out this TED Talk from Salman Khan, "Let's Use Video to Reinvent Education."

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



The next use case is really a traditional use for online video and that is to embed the content right within the instructor's session. Great classroom instructors know how to mix up sessions to engage participants. They find a variety of exercises to bring the participants into the content and engage their minds. Using video as discussion pieces and as natural breaks in classroom sessions is an excellent use of OTS content.

Video embedded into classroom sessions can spark conversations, provide a break in delivery, and provoke reactions. Depending upon the content, you can also use video to open meetings to get conversations going and make for a more lively session.

After an instructor-led classroom session, OTS content is perfect for keeping your content top of mind for participants. One of the most challenging aspects of any training program is ensuring that the lessons taught are learned and then applied to improve performance. Sending along short-form videos to reinforce learning after classroom sessions is a great way to keep the ideas and concepts fresh for employees.

# Selecting an Off-the-Shelf Content Partner

It can be daunting to look at all the options available from off-the-shelf content providers.

When you answer a few questions to see what you really need most, the choice becomes much easier to make. For one thing, the questions you have to ask yourself are not as complex as you narrow down your choices. The simple chart below should offer guidance as you look for the best off-the-shelf content solution for your organization.

TOPIC AREAS	QUANTITY	QUALITY
<p>What are the most important topic areas for my organization?</p> <p>Common Topic Areas: management skills, supervisory skills, leadership, desktop computing, IT skills, HR, compliance, sales, customer service, soft skills, workplace safety</p> <p>Do we need specialized or industry-specific content?</p>	<p>Are there enough courses available to provide variety on main topics?</p> <p>Does it accommodate a variety of learning styles and preferences?</p> <p>Are there filters, ratings, and recommendations to help learners find what they need?</p>	<p>Who builds the content and how is it vetted?</p> <p>How often is new content added or updated?</p> <p>How is the production quality? Is the content mobile-ready?</p> <p>How is access and learning tracked? Can I get data and reports on usage?</p>



# Are You Ready to Get Started?

Off-the-Shelf Content is a great addition to any employee training program. Very few organizations have the time, resources, and in-house expertise to build content on the large volume of topics that employees need to access for success in today's business environment.

Today's best-in-class OTS collections provide the breadth and depth of content most organizations need to maintain up-to-date learning resources - they cover everything from IT and compliance to becoming an agile learner and improving emotional intelligence.

The key to successfully using OTS content, however, is not to simply buy a collection and then turn employees loose to find courses on their own. Allowing employees to search for courses is a great thing, but you'll also need strong functionality on the administrator end to curate and assign content to teams and individuals as needed.

When you find an OTS collection with thousands of resources, it can seem overwhelming at first, until you see just how much you can do with it to provide and encourage employee learning.

With the complexity of today's business environment, an off-the-shelf content library isn't just a luxury or "like to have" for training. It's a necessity for any organization looking to build a culture of learning and be an industry leader.

## About BizLibrary

BizLibrary is a leading provider of online learning for growing organizations. Our award-winning microlearning video library engages employees of all levels, and our learning technology platform is a progressive catalyst for achievement. Partnered with our expert Client Success and Technical Support teams, clients are empowered to solve business challenges and impact change within their organizations. To learn more, visit [www.bizlibrary.com](http://www.bizlibrary.com).

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