The Synchronous Trainer's Survival Guide

Facilitating Successful Live and Online Courses, Meetings, and Events

Jennifer Hofmann

Pfeiffer
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About This Book

Why Is This Topic Important?

Live online learning is no longer just a "hot trend"—it is a training delivery method that is here to stay. The ability to interact with people all over the world in real time has become a critical success factor for training and education. While the technology has reached an early stage of maturation, best practices on how to utilize the technology have not been established. Trainers are faced with a new set of challenges: How do you actively engage participants who are in remote locations? How do you minimize their feeling of isolation? How do you effectively utilize the collaboration tools available in the virtual classroom? This book provides practical, real life tips and techniques to assist trainers in delivering successful synchronous events.

What Can You Achieve with This Book?

Let's face it—almost ALL synchronous trainers are new to the medium. And after organizations spend tens of thousands of dollars on technology, they want synchronous events up and running in a short period of time. Using the tips, techniques, and resources discussed in this book, the length of time to mastery can be drastically reduced. The practical guid-ance will help trainers feel good about the medium because it provides information that they can use immediately to make synchronous events successful.

How Is This Book Organized?

The book is divided into seven chapters. After introducing the concepts, technologies, and collaboration tools associated with the synchronous classroom, the author addresses such topics as synchronous facilitation, team-teaching, communicating at a distance, technology management, instructional materials for the synchronous environment, working with synchronous participants, and the differences between training events and other types of synchronous interactions.

About Pfeiffer

Pfeiffer serves the professional development and hands-on resource needs of training and human resource practitioners and gives them products to do their jobs better. We deliver proven ideas and solutions from experts in HR development and HR management, and we offer effective and customizable tools to improve workplace performance. From novice to seasoned professional, Pfeiffer is the source you can trust to make yourself and your organization more successful.

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Essential resources for training and HR professionals

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I tell you and you forget.
I show you and you remember.
I involve you and you understand.
—Eric Butterworth

Preface

I have been working with Internet-based synchronous (live and online) learning technologies since 1996—truly an old hand for a field so new! During this time I've had the opportunity to utilize many different software platforms and watch this niche of the training market grow. The technology has been catching up to the potential of the delivery medium, and these "virtual classrooms" are becoming not only accepted but expected as part of an organization's training offerings.

As a traditional instructional designer and trainer I was frustrated by the lack of direction given to new online trainers. The fact that different skills and techniques were needed to succeed in this environment was often overlooked, and trainers had no learning opportunities besides "point-and-click" software training. Everyone was learning by experience—often hard-fought—and there did not seem to be any single place for capturing best practices and lessons learned. Another issue seemed to be that organizations were treating synchronous implementations as technology initiatives and not as change initiatives.

I often refer to *The Synchronous Trainer's Survival Guide* as my "diary of things that went wrong and how I fixed them for the next time." I captured my team's real-life lessons learned and documented the techniques. As the training community learns and develops

best practices, this guide will be updated. If you would like to contribute to future publications, please complete the feedback form at the end of the guide.

Acknowledgments

No project is the result of a single person's effort. This guide represents collaboration and teamwork over several years.

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My family keeps trying but still doesn't understand quite what I do every day. Perhaps this guide will help them to figure it out.

Finally, I would especially like to thank my clients who, over the years, have allowed my team to experiment and have trusted that we would find the best training solutions.

May 2003 JENNIFER HOFMANN

Introduction

The primary audience for this guide is trainers and other group facilitators who are beginning to deliver content using a synchronous classroom. One goal is to provide information that you can use immediately to make your synchronous events successful.

When discussing Internet learning technologies, "synchronous" refers to training that is delivered to a geographically dispersed group of participants at the same time. Once the evolution of synchronous training technologies kicked into high gear during the late 1990s, the face of training and education changed forever. We now have the ability to deliver live, interactive training to anyone with access to a computer and a phone line. Collaborative tools allow for engaging interaction among experts, trainers, and participants. The interface of the "virtual classroom" becomes much more than a substitute for a live trainer—it represents the nature of the content and the participants in ways that can be creative and educationally sound. It reduces the need for travel to training events, and it can save an organization a substantial amount in expenses.

The technologies have a much wider reach than the classroom. Conference calls are quickly being replaced by "eMeetings." The same principles that can make synchronous learning events effective apply to these meetings as well. Dispersed teams can communicate and collaborate with a visual interface at a relatively low cost. This type of interaction can make online meetings much more