

The State of Virtual Training Technology

31 Trends, Technologies &
Tactics to Maximize Software
Training ROI in 2022

A 2021-2022 Industry Report



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Executive summary

In this report we investigate the state of training technologies in 2021, so that organizations can make informed decisions when planning their training budgets and plans for 2022. By breaking down our investigation into trends, technologies, and tactics, the report presents the ultimate insights-based guide for choosing the right technology for your training operations.

The report highlights the emergence of a new virtual norm. Virtual software training is playing a significant role not only in overcoming challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic but in providing the exceptional user experiences that are now expected by customers.

Virtual training is here to stay, and it's bringing about a focus on digital experiences, greater integrations, and self-paced learning. Whether it's to improve interactive user experiences, avoid scheduling conflicts, or facilitate more flexible approaches to software training, organizations will greatly benefit from embracing the new virtual norm.

Introduction

The Three Ts: Trends, Technologies and Tactics

The pandemic has left organizations with new challenges to solve. Chief among those is customer training in a new remote world.

Training technologies for customer education continue to play a vital role moving forward. But getting technology spend right, identifying which training solution is best for you, and convincing the relevant stakeholders to provide the green light isn't always easy.

This comprehensive guide is here to help. Spanning the top training trends, technologies, and tactics you need to know, this is the ultimate guide to maximizing training ROI in 2022. We'll present 31 pieces of wisdom to help you achieve your training technology objectives.

Without further ado, let's dive into **the Three Ts: Trends, Technologies, and Tactics**, and start building your strategy for success



The top training trends in 2021

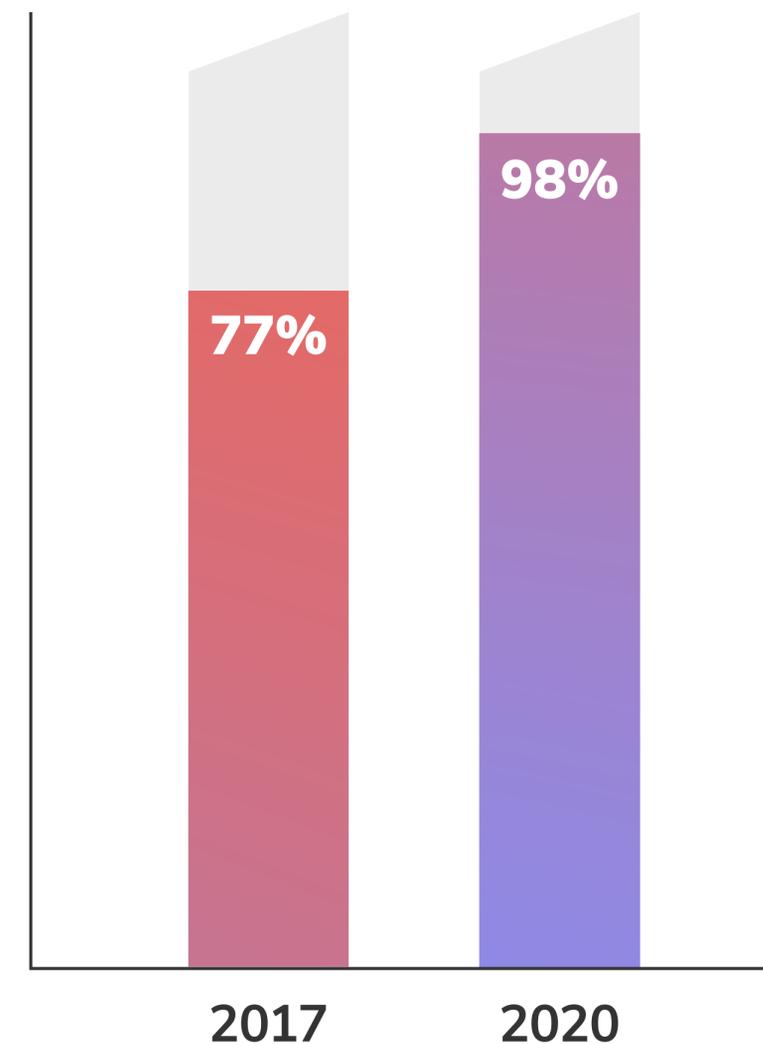
TREND 1

The continued rise of virtual training

Today's most prevalent training trend is the emergence of what we're calling "the new virtual norm". Training has been moving into the virtual realm as the appetite for remote working has grown. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it reached a new peak and looks set to stay.

In 2017, 77% of companies leveraged virtual training. By 2020, this increased to 98%.

% of companies with virtual training



A report from Ken Blanchard Companies illustrates [why virtual training is set to stick around](#).

It can be far more effective and efficient than other modes, reducing instruction time by up to 60% and costing 50% less than classroom training.

Virtual training software has established itself as a key fixture in organizations today – just as email, productivity apps, CRM, and ERP have in the past. More and more business leaders are realizing virtual training’s invaluable role in a mobile, remote workplace.





The top training trends in 2021

TREND 2

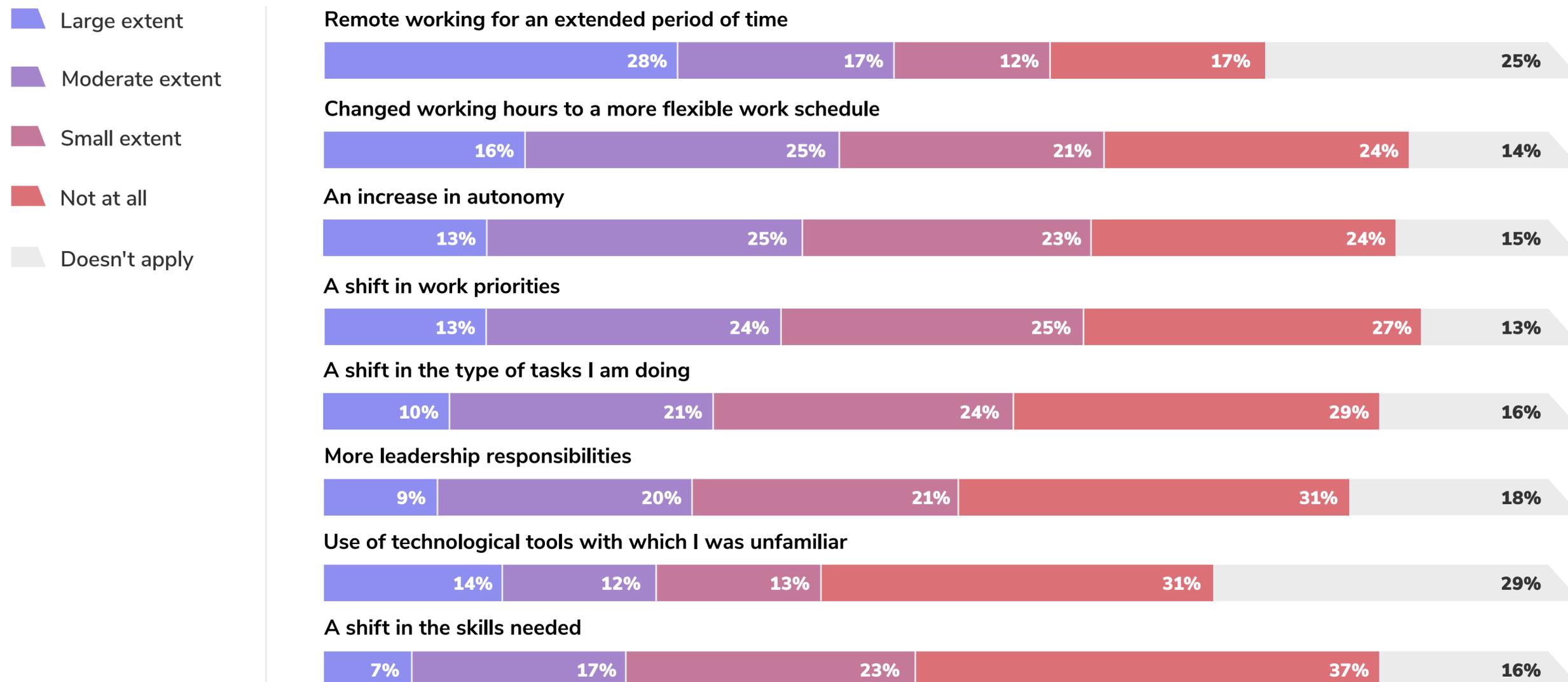
Pandemic-related transformation requires lots of training

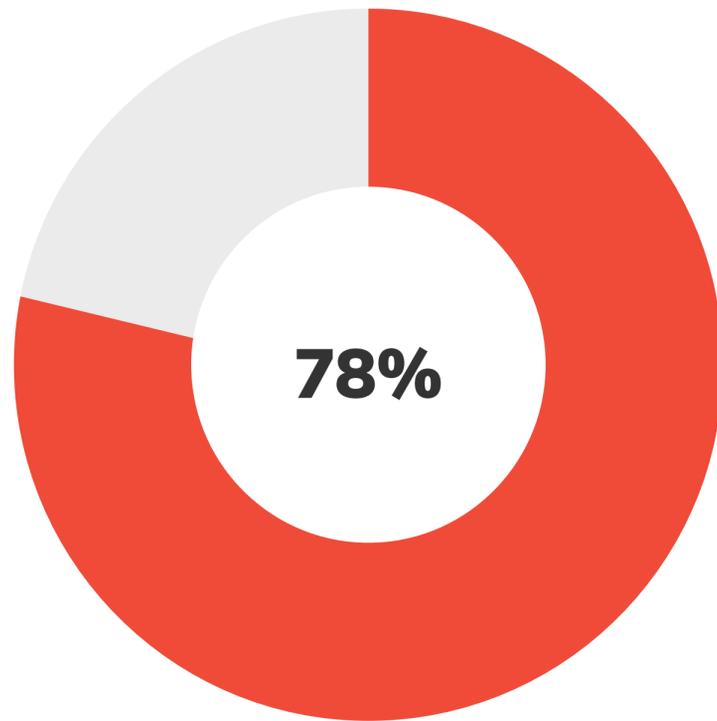
Microsoft CEO, Satya Nadella remarked that Microsoft underwent [two years of digital transformation](#) in the first months of the pandemic. As digitization accelerates, so too does software training, as it's required to help users leverage new technologies.

The other side of that coin is confirmed by employees, with [six in ten](#) respondents to one study stating they have built new skills since the pandemic. Similarly, research from Deloitte found that 55% of workers say their day-to-day work has changed.

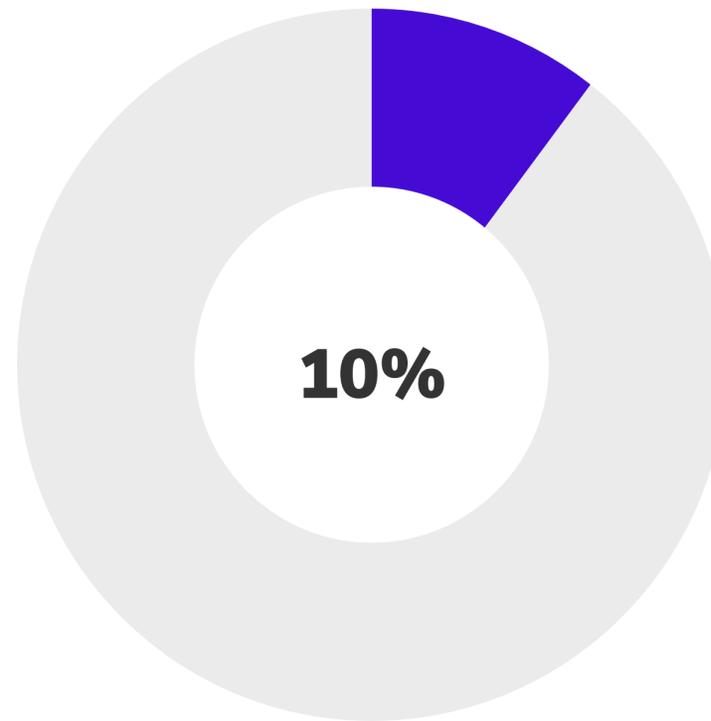
Covid-19 Has Brought Several Changes in Employees Working Lives

To what extent have you experienced the following to date as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?

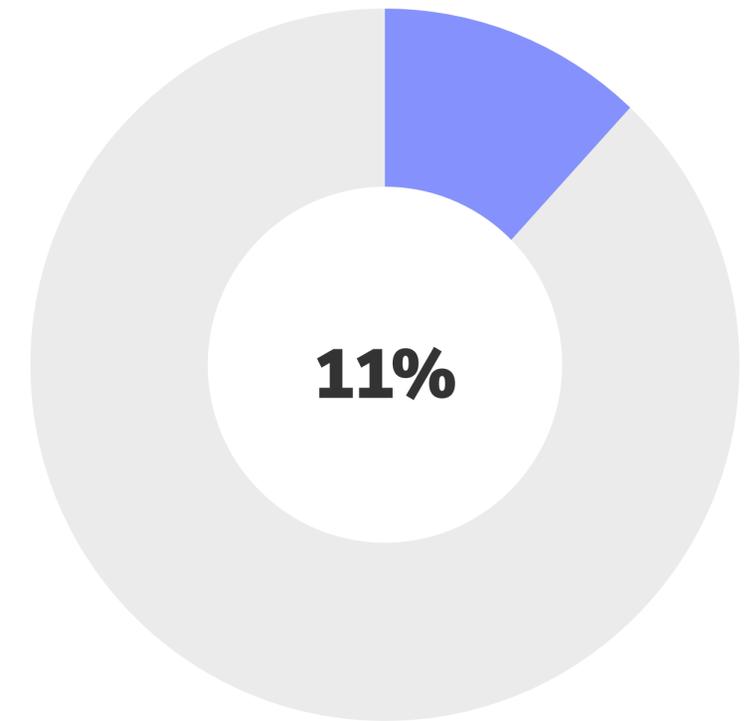




At least one change experienced at a moderate/large extent



Experienced changes only to a small extent



No changes at all

This increase in the need for training is driving technology spend upwards, and it will continue to do so in the short and long term.

The top training trends in 2021

TREND 3

Technology rollout during 2020 was rushed and now needs to be fixed

Due to the unprecedented nature of a COVID-19 pandemic, much of the recent investment in virtual training was reactive. This has meant many deployments were rushed, limited in scope, and poorly planned.

Now that we are moving into a different phase, the new virtual norm demands more from training organizations. Here begins a new era of investment in training technologies, as organizations look to apply quick fixes, optimize training performance, and further improve training experiences.





The top training trends in 2021

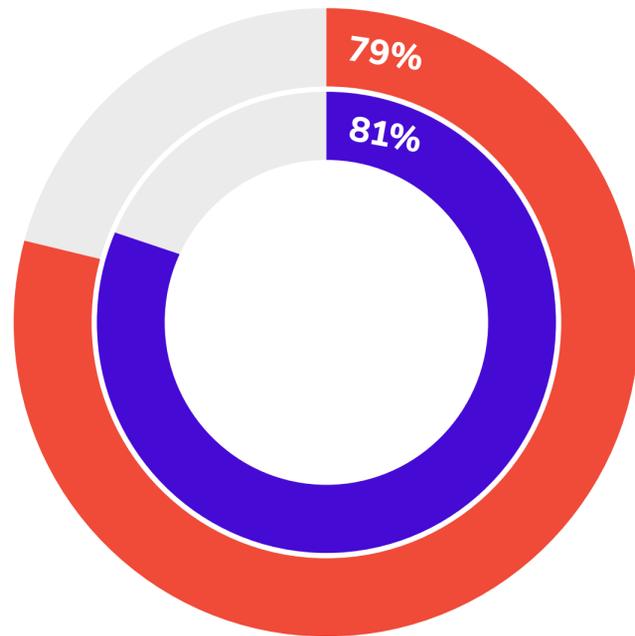
TREND 4

Delivering exceptional experiences is essential

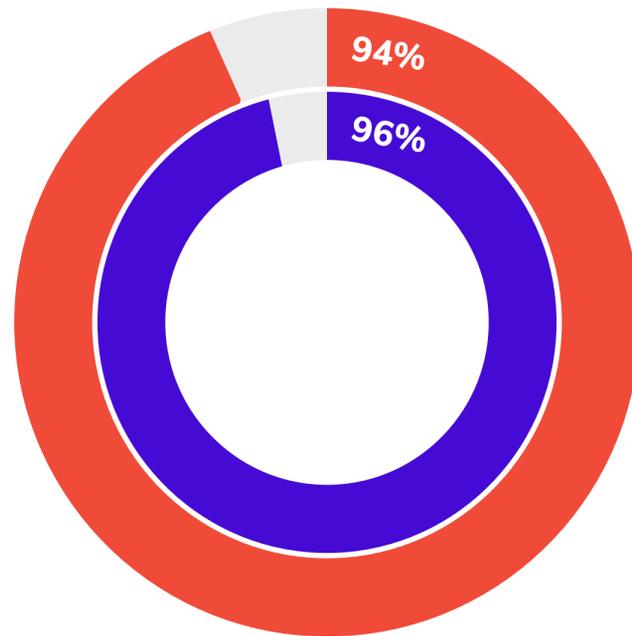
Experiences are today's most important currency. A Salesforce study found that 67% of people reported that their standard for "good experiences" is greater than ever before. And 80% of customers said experiences are as important as products and services.

Customers Push Companies to Do Better

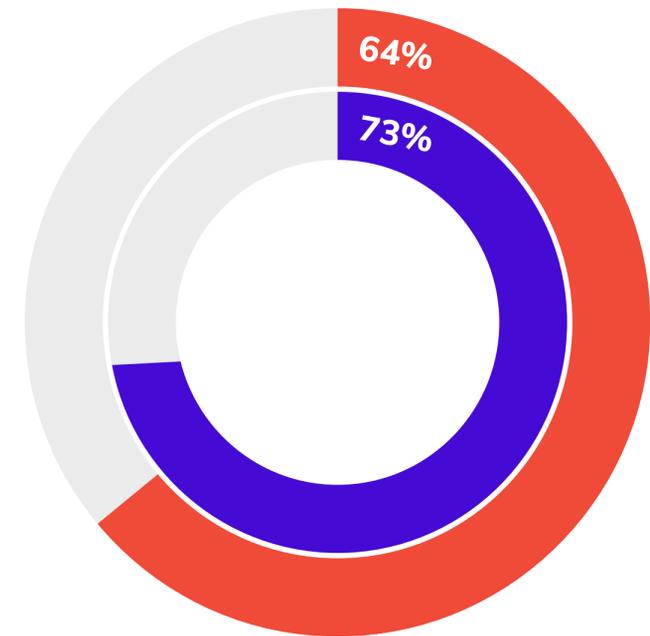
CONSUMERS BUSINESS BUYERS



80%
of customers
say the experience a company
provides is as important as its
products and services



95%
of customers
say they are more likely
to be loyal to a company
they trust



67%
of customers
say their standard for
good experiences are
higher than ever

In the new virtual norm users expect the same standard of digital experiences as in other areas of life – whether they're trainees, instructors, or administrators. Poor experiences lead to poor levels of engagement, less effective learning, class dropouts, poor competency of customers, and increased overhead on support. Ultimately, this can lead to reduced customer satisfaction and retention, resulting in customers turning to the competition.

The top training trends in 2021

TREND 5

The best experiences are always interactive

Listening to a lecture. Watching a webinar. When it comes to software training, these are no longer enough. In a world where more and more training experiences are active, it's time to abandon passive training for far more immersive methods – such as virtual hands-on training.

For many organizations, low levels of engagement have been a perennial concern. This has been heightened during the pandemic, due to the inability to “keep a close eye on things.” Low adoption and user engagement can fast-track organizations to diminishing ROI, and when it comes to training, disengaged users result in poor knowledge retention, and a failure to upskill in key areas.



The top training trends in 2021

TREND 6

Time to overcome integration challenges

Technology integration has long been a weak spot for training organizations. The number of different technologies available is vast – and continually growing – but these technologies are often not designed to integrate with other solutions. The result is difficult, disjointed, and disruptive experiences.

Better integration offers the ability to scale operations, provide access to learners regardless of location, and continuously improve outcomes.

80% of training organizations use more than four different technologies. 38% use more than eight. But with only 10% of organizations saying they're confident in training technology integration, this is a problem.

The [IMG Global Learning Consortium](#) has developed a Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) specification. The LTI hopes to ensure integration capabilities are built into training technologies, and these include single sign-on, instant integration with learning management systems (LMS), and shared analytics. It's a standard for training technology providers to follow – and for training organizations to look out for.



The top training trends in 2021

TREND 7

Cloud agnosticism enables better training

As organizations increase their cloud spending to meet remote work challenges, they're investing in services from a variety of cloud providers. Known as "multi-cloud," this is another characteristic of the new virtual norm.

But there's one problem. Many training platforms lack multi-cloud integration. This needs to change in 2022, and vendors are adapting to meet this demand. Still, many training technologies fail in this regard. If your IT environments are multi-cloud, finding technologies to accommodate your needs must be a priority.

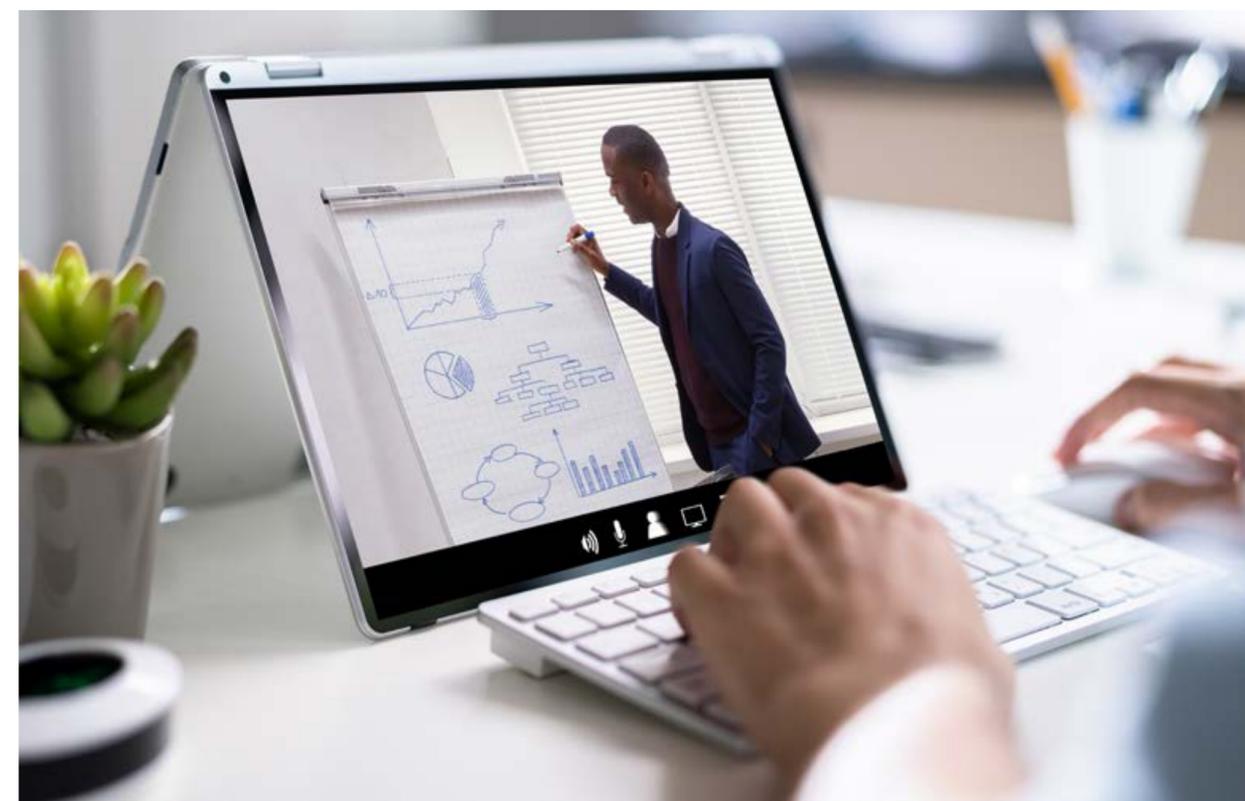
The top training trends in 2021

TREND 8

Hybrid training offers the flexibility modern users demand

Training organizations must facilitate both in-person and virtual training. But should you offer blended or hybrid learning? Many use the terms interchangeably, but these are two separate approaches.

The goal of hybrid learning is to find a flexible balance of online and offline that creates flawless experiences for everyone. This flexibility makes it incredibly useful for modern business [users](#). People want or need to work from home – and this means [taking part in training there](#) too.



Some trainees prefer to be in a physical location with the instructor present. But this won't be possible for everyone, due to geographical and scheduling issues. Hybrid learning can facilitate this, but it also opens opportunities for growth due to its scalability. You can cater for trainees all over the world, all taking the same program, wherever they are – and ensure exceptional experiences and outcomes for all.

The top training trends in 2021

TREND 9

VILT surpassed ILT in 2020

In-person instructor-led training (ILT) became impossible during the pandemic. Naturally, we saw an embrace of virtual instructor-led training (VILT).

A report from [Ken Blanchard Companies](#) highlights this. Once the pandemic hit, the prevalence of in-person classroom training dropped from 63% to 9%, while virtual instructor-led training increased from 10% to 53%.

The added value of an instructor is substantial. But what's fascinating now is how different technologies are facilitating different methods of training – whether for interactions with instructors or for trainees “going it alone.”



The prevalence of in-person classroom training dropped from 63% to 9%, while virtual instructor-led training increased from 10% to 53%.

The top training trends in 2021

TREND 10

Self-paced learning continues to grow

The use of self-paced training rose from 14% to 24% during 2020. It's also taking up more space in training organizations' budgets. Technavio reports that between 2020-2024, the self-paced learning industry will grow by \$6.71 billion.



One reason for this is its ability to overcome one of virtual training's main challenges: scheduling. If trainees are located across different time zones, it can be difficult to get everyone in front of an instructor at the same time. In many cases, self-paced learning is the best way – or indeed the only way.

What's more, exceptional training experiences involve a degree of autonomy over how users take part in the training. Self-paced training offers the flexibility, personalization, and autonomy that is fast becoming an expectation rather than a differentiator. Microlearning and mobile-first training are also on the rise; both go hand-in-hand with self-paced learning.



The top training trends in 2021

TREND 11

Microlearning is as popular as ever

Microlearning offers bite-size learning that is consumed at the user's leisure. [It can blend](#) into traditional and non-traditional training touchpoints. For instance, microlearning allows training to be incorporated into a wide range of scenarios and day-to-day workflows. A good example is customer onboarding. A new starter can be presented with bite-sized content to support their initiation into the company. They don't need to look at it then and there, but it's available when needed.

According to CommLab India, microlearning leads to a [17% improvement in knowledge transfer](#). Think of the success of platforms like Duolingo. Duolingo was successful not just because of its gamification, but because it was effective in building vocabulary. Microlearning is fun but, more importantly, it works.

The top training trends in 2021

TREND 12

Mobile-first is must-have

Training software that is mobile-ready has long been viewed as acceptable. Desktop users have remained the primary audience, but it's probably no surprise that a mobile-first approach is now being heralded. Are you reading this on your phone? Perhaps that says it all.

By 2025, reports [CNBC](#), 72% of people will only ever access the internet via their phone. But it's not just consumer habits that are driving this; mobile-first training has its own benefits. [eLearning Industry](#) state that mobile learners study an additional 40 minutes per week.

When training technologies are mobile, training can be completed anytime, anywhere. If training organizations are to deliver exceptional experiences, mobile-first solutions are essential.





The top training trends in 2021

TREND 13

Data is driving everything

There's a growing need for analytical reporting to justify expenditure. Investment must be backed by data. If you cannot demonstrably prove ROI, you're not going to get buy-in to finance your preferred training technologies.

Perhaps more importantly, data can be leveraged to improve efficiency and performance. By tracking what's working and what isn't, you can optimize training to reduce costs while boosting outcomes. But that's not all. Data can be the driving force behind personalized experiences. When training activity can be tracked, and trainee engagement analyzed, learner analytics can dig out insights to tailor training journeys and provide hyper-personalized experiences.

Training budgets are on the up

To round off our top technology trends, we must look at the bigger picture and, in particular, how these trends might be reflected in the appetite for investment. It seems that there is such an appetite. The Training Industry magazine reported in 2020 that training budgets are on the rise:

56% of companies were retooling their training programs.

62% of businesses affected by changes due to COVID-19 were spending more on training in 2021.

Here, we have outlined the most prominent trends in the industry. By understanding the current training trends, you gain a better idea and clearer picture of what to spend your budget on. It also demonstrates the different avenues available for ambitious organizations looking to meet the demands of the new virtual norm. Ultimately these insights can guide your decision-making and improve your training ROI.

Now let's look at the technologies out there >>



Training technologies 2021

There's a smorgasbord of training technologies available in 2021. With so much choice, it's difficult to know what's right for your organization.

Here is a clear, comprehensive catalog of the technologies that matter most. We'll also highlight emerging technologies making an impact. And we won't shy away from the technologies on the way out, nor those yet to realize their potential.



Training technologies 2021

TECHNOLOGY 1

Learning Management Systems (LMS)

It's only right to begin with LMS, the traditional backbone and bastion of business education technology. There are areas where LMS remains a world-beater. Tracking registrations and course completions, documenting compliance, and managing training costs are all territories where LMS outshines other options.

The question is: with users demanding interactive, personalized, and self-paced learning, can LMS be complemented with a more engaging technology to fit the requirements of a new virtual norm?

LMS may be the incumbent, but it is transforming to meet modern demands, largely through offering greater integration. The leading cloud-based LMS now offer improved integration, mobile features, social learning, and more. By integrating with technologies that boost engagement, you can deliver training experiences that cover all bases.

Training technologies 2021

TECHNOLOGY 2

Learning experience platforms (LXP)

LXP is generally considered to have evolved from LMS. The idea was to add extra functionality beyond administering, tracking, and hosting training courses. Instead, it would meet an emerging set of user demands that have now come to characterize what we have called “the new virtual norm.” These include greater flexibility, more autonomy/choice over learning, and better-integrated experiences. The LXP approach can perhaps be boiled down into these core features:

- A single-point-of-access
- Integrated consumer-grade technologies
- Interactive experiences, e.g., virtual hands-on training
- Employee-driven learning
- AI-powered
- Analytics

Every LXP will differ in terms of its built-in functionality. But the drive for exceptional experiences – often referred to as “Netflix-like user experiences” – is what sets LXP apart. Essentially it means a modern look and feel, but also the freedom and flexibility to control learning pathways. LXPs are also scalable in a way not possible with LMS, offering the modern competitive pricing models of the subscription economy.

Framing this discussion as “LXP vs LMS” is an oversimplification, as integrations mean the two are often used to complement and enhance each other. One advantage of LXPs is the unified platform. As exceptional experiences guide the LXP philosophy, a unified platform that provides consistent experiences at every stage of the user journey is essential.

Training technologies 2021

TECHNOLOGY 3

Data analytics

LXP is generally considered to have evolved from LMS. The idea was to add extra functionality beyond administering, tracking, and hosting training courses. Instead, it would meet an emerging set of user demands that have now come to characterize what we have called “the new virtual norm.” These include greater flexibility, more autonomy/choice over learning, and better-integrated experiences.



Training technologies 2021

The LXP approach can perhaps be boiled down into these core features:

Descriptive analytics in training, means mining through historical data to look for patterns of behavior. In particular, it's effective at providing insights about engagement and performance. With this information, you can make data-driven insights to optimize training programs – an essential tool in delivering exceptional experiences.

Predictive analytics is the power behind personalized learning. This method also searches for patterns in data but then uses these patterns to make predictions. Powered by machine learning, its algorithms provide automated solutions (in the form of recommendations) to solve problems, e.g., what content would help a specific trainee reach their goals?

Prescriptive analytics is built into leading LXPs and micro-learning platforms, as these technologies seek to

help individual trainees create unique learning pathways. The result is more than just better experiences though, as learners will discover relevant and useful content quicker, therefore making training more efficient.

Now onto the tools themselves

Analytics tools come in different shapes and sizes. Some are built into specific training technologies and often strip analytics down to its basics. Others will prioritize data visualization, offering easy-to-use and dynamic dashboards with real-time updates. Also available are analytics tools that are more hands-on, powerful, and require a specialized skill set to get to grips with. In many ways, the tools that are best for you will depend on your current technology infrastructure and the skillset within your organization. What's more, certain data sets require specific tools to mine and make sense of the data. If your data has been acquired from surveys or other text-based means, then it is likely to be unstructured data. Text mining and sentiment analysis are analytics tools required for these specific scenarios.

Tip: To help guide you through the most important metrics to measure in customer education, [here's a quick Training ROI checklist](#)

Training technologies 2021

TECHNOLOGY 4

Gamification

Employing a series of methods to engage users and make learning fun, gamification incentivizes habit-forming behaviors. Unlocking achievements, levels, badges, points, and privileges all add to the fun – and are crucial to developing long-term learning commitments. But you probably know this already; gamification is everywhere.

But what's lesser known is just how effective gamification can be in certain contexts. Google improved employee compliance by 100% after implementing a gamified Travel Expense System. 90% of Spotify employees participated in its gamified annual reviews. And, in a training context, one report found that gamification increased time spent on learning by 370%.



On the surface, gamification makes it fun to learn by offering extrinsic rewards. But the real prize for trainees is the intrinsic reward of achievement, personal development, and self-worth. In this context, it would be a customer achieving their business objectives with your software due to them having a greater understanding of how your software can help them.

The extrinsic side of gamification was already in place at the start of the decade. But the quest to deliver intrinsic rewards goes on – not least because self-fulfillment is difficult to measure.

Training technologies 2021

TECHNOLOGY 5

Microlearning platforms

Microlearning is seen as the perfect tonic for “death by PowerPoint” – a chronic and persistent ailment that has blighted corporate training for decades. Microlearning offers small bite-sized chunks of learning for users to consume at their own pace. It ticks many boxes, including self-paced and personalized learning. But is it effective?

It’s certainly modeled closely on consumer app experiences, as it mimics the short, impactful content that flourishes on social media. The real benefit of microlearning is the control and freedom that trainees have as they carve out their learning pathways. According to RPS, microlearning improves focus

and knowledge retention by up to 80%. Similarly, Software Advice reports it can boost engagement by more than 50%.

But there’s more to microlearning than reducing the size of content. Not only is curriculum curation crucial, but analytics are required to impact performance and training efficiency, as explained above. Analytics gathers the data to predict what might be a useful next step. Then AI can develop a personalized learning path. The mistake many organizations make is to jump on the microlearning trend without investing in analytics and AI to make it truly valuable.

Training technologies 2021

TECHNOLOGY 6

Immersive tech, e.g. virtual, augmented, and mixed reality

Virtual, augmented, and mixed reality, often known under the umbrella term “immersive tech” have been recognized as potential game-changers for years. However, it can be argued that it is yet to fulfill its potential in offering organizations tangible benefits and ROI.

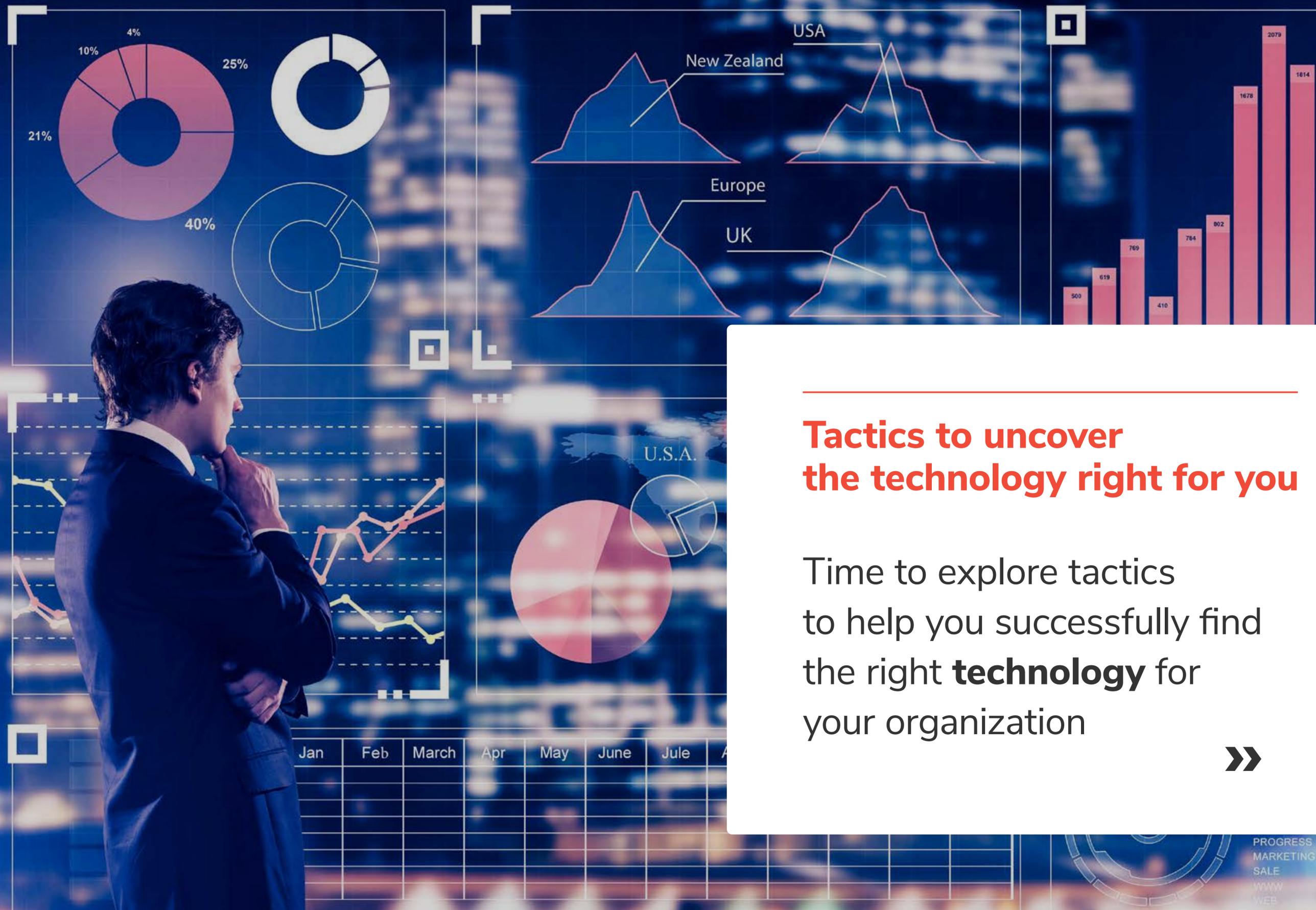
Nonetheless, this doesn't mean it's not suitable for certain scenarios. For instance, it can offer real value in engaging young students, who can interact with information rather than reading a textbook. However, for software training, a question mark remains over its practical uses.

But the industry continues to grow, if at a slower rate than previous years. Yet, according to the IDC, when broken down into market segments, the picture is more



complicated. For instance, purchases of VR head-mounted displays (HMD) continue to increase significantly. And the VR educational games segment is one of the fastest-growing, with a CGR of 51.9% up to 2024, though more suited for school than software training.

However, immersive tech should remain in the minds of decision-makers at training organizations for future breakthroughs.



Tactics to uncover the technology right for you

Time to explore tactics to help you successfully find the right **technology** for your organization



**TACTIC 1**

Identify your organization's core business objectives

It's important to start by looking at the bigger picture. Think: what are the specific business objectives your company is striving for? This will provide the basis for your strategy. Perhaps your organization is aiming to boost retention this quarter. Once that is identified it will steer you in the right direction by providing a more tangible framework to work within. In this example, it might mean looking at technologies that provide unified experiences across the entire customer journey. Essentially, this first tactic narrows the focus and gets you asking the right questions.

**TACTIC 3**

Focus on business benefits

Adopting the right mindset is key. Remember that the end goal isn't the technology; it's to help your organization achieve its objectives. You need to skip the hype and focus on the business benefits as they relate to your organization and its goals. Acknowledging this can help you proceed with a laser-sharp focus. Improve engagement, provide more integrated experiences, increase knowledge retention – these are examples of benefits. It can be too easy to get bogged down in features and functionality, but what's more important is to guarantee a solution will help you achieve your goals.

**TACTIC 2**

Prioritize your training technology requirements

Now write down your training objectives. If your goals are to increase engagement in your ongoing customer training programs make sure “engagement” is at the forefront of your thoughts. But go even further than this and outline desired outcomes, criteria for success, and how you will measure and report progress. This might be percentage increase in number of users attending the training programs, to give one example. Finally, jot down how your training goals fit in with your organization's wider objectives, e.g. greater engagement will lead to greater retention.

**TACTIC 4**

Outline who will benefit, how, and why?

To help pin down your training objectives, think about your users. Who is going to be benefiting from the technology? What are their pain points? Are your customers going to be training virtually, because then their pain points might be around ensuring they can access your training programs on any device or they may have scheduling issues due to being based in a different time zones. To be accurate it can be best to reach out – surveys can be hugely beneficial.


TACTIC 5

Start your research to identify potential candidates

At this stage, it's presumed you have a good understanding of the general landscape – you have your hands on this report after all. But there are many technologies to choose from. The first step is to make a list of must-haves; then a shortlist with the technologies/vendors that hit the mark. Be ruthless. Deloitte suggests creating a [“Kill List”](#), which highlights (or rather “eliminates”) those that don't make the cut.

After this, dig deeper into the potential candidates. Write down the strengths and weaknesses of each. Cover all angles – not just features, benefits, and price, but also integrations, implementation effort, support options, and longevity.


TACTIC 6

Measure against your business and training objectives?

Now it might seem obvious, but it doesn't hurt to be overly prescriptive here. Align the technologies and business objectives. Take the comparisons, weigh them up, and ask yourself: how will this technology help us to achieve our objectives? Which solution suits our requirements best? If your goals are highly specified, such as to improve value enhancement by ensuring customers receive engaging hands-on training at the onboarding stage, this might involve looking for a solution that is geared towards delivering those kinds of experiences.

Create a checklist, including the technologies on top and business/training objectives down the side. Then either check the boxes or give each a score out of 10. Now you have a visual asset identifying which technologies are most suited to your requirements.





Think about how the technology will fit your organization

Is the proposed technology a good fit for your organization? This can be a culture issue, i.e. does it fit in with your organization's brand and how customers experience your brand. But perhaps more crucially it should be a technical one. For instance, some organizations may not have the infrastructure in place to make full use of certain technologies like artificial intelligence. In that instance, investing in AI with the goal of achieving immediate ROI will be fruitless.



Examine how each technology is rated and reviewed

Is the technology highly recommended? This is a common tactic we all use when making purchase decisions. In many ways, this is the most insightful research you can do. Take a sneak peek behind the mask of marketing and sales to discover the true value of what's on offer. There are two avenues to pursue here. Reviewing sites and industry-leading publications can offer trusted impartial advice. However, it is also a good idea to contact the vendor directly to ask for a reference.



Consider the long-term value and futureproof

If the pandemic has shown us anything, it's that dealing with change is essential. Agility, flexibility, scalability – these are the foundations of business continuity. Check how each proposed solution will scale, adapt, and grow with your training organization. Carrying out what-if scenarios can really bring this to life. It's not unusual for organizations to establish business strategies planning three, five, ten years ahead. It makes sense to do this for technology investment too.



Use benchmarks as a guide, not gospel

Technologies will produce different outcomes for different organizations and industries. Benchmarking is an invaluable tool to gain a comparative viewpoint. But your requirements are unique to your organization. This is particularly the case post-pandemic. Deloitte recommends using benchmarks as a guide, not gospel, because what your business needs is unique to your business.

**TACTIC 11**

How to convince stakeholders

Getting buy-in, sign off, and making the case for your budget is the final hurdle. Always demonstrate how the technology will support your organization's business objectives. But you can tailor your approach even further. For CEOs, focus on business objectives; for CIO/CTOs, integrations and implementation; for CFOs, the financial benefits. CMOs and Sales want to know about customer experience, customer education, and how technology can speed up the sales cycle. For CHRO, cover employee experiences, personal development, and HR processes like onboarding.

**TACTIC 12**

Plan how you will measure success

Choosing the right technology is just the beginning. Technology investment should never be seen as a one-off initiative. Implementation and adoption must be successfully navigated too. And its ultimate success will be defined months and years into the future. But what you do now is critical in ensuring its ongoing success.

You need to create a plan to measure your KPIs at specified times in the future. This way you can see if targets are being achieved – both in terms of your training objectives and the wider business objectives. Create regular reports featuring key metrics around engagement (attendance, session times, drop-off rates, test scores if applicable etc.) and then present these to key stakeholders. This also includes following up on implementation and adoption.

Now, time to boost training outcomes

Reading this guide was your first step to training technology success. We hope you have found it insightful.

By drawing on the guidance presented across the Three Ts, you can now better understand the **trends** shaping the industry, the **technologies** that have emerged to meet the challenges of the new virtual norm, and the **tactics** to help find the right solution for your unique requirements.

It's time to fully embrace the new virtual norm and discover how your organization can offer the kinds of exceptional experiences that customers have come to expect. Customer education offers an invaluable opportunity at various points across the entire customer journey to add value, drive customer satisfaction, retention, loyalty, advocacy – you name it. Whichever your organization's main objectives are, embracing the technologies outlined in the report is essential.

Now it's time to get out there and realize the potential of the training technology market today.



About CloudShare

CloudShare is a leading software experience platform that helps software companies increase customer acquisition and retention by creating highly engaging hands-on virtual POCs, demos, and training environments in minutes.

Our virtual environments are easily replicated in the cloud and purpose-built to generate user engagement that ultimately impacts key business metrics such as customer retention, repeat purchase rates, lower support costs, higher win rates, faster sales cycle, and more.

We are proud to serve leading organizations such as Palo Alto, Atlassian, Motorola, Salesforce, ForgeRock, and SAI Global.

For more insights into the training technology landscape and how to make sure your technology spend helps you achieve your organization's wider business objectives



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