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The 4 Key Challenges for SaaS Training

What you need to worry about when designing training for SaaS applications

Software as a Service is gaining ground

As software giants like Oracle, Microsoft and Salesforce lead the way by shifting their operations to predominantly cloud-hosted and SaaS models, the trend away from on-premise solutions within the IT industry is rapidly gaining ground. With many software vendors jumping on the SaaS bandwagon, the global SaaS market is forecasted to reach $71.2 billion in 2018 according to Crozdesk's SaaS and Cloud Startup Report 2018. Furthermore, 75% of SMBs and 69% of enterprise organizations polled in a recent industry survey believe that at least 80% of their applications will be SaaS by 2020.

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SaaS is not going away and for good reason. SaaS applications offer distinct advantages over on-premise applications:

- **No upfront costs**

- **Immediate and frequent availability** of new features

- **Easy access** from a wide range of devices and from any location

- **Elastic scalability** with the flexibility to easily change subscription packages as businesses grow or change

However, the very features that make SaaS applications advantageous, also give rise to a host of challenges for SaaS vendors who need to find ways to get their customers trained and up-and-running with their software as quickly as possible.

Unique training challenges for SaaS vendors

The **rapid pace of change** and inherent lack of **stickiness** in the SaaS model places a demand on vendors to create training offerings that are easy to update, simple to use, and highly effective.

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Challenge 1:
Offer training solutions that can be readily changed or updated

In the fast-moving world of SaaS, recorded training courses or video tutorials struggle to stay relevant and rapidly become obsolete. **Maintenance** is one of the biggest challenges in designing training for SaaS. The ability to change, upgrade and roll-out new versions of training quickly and efficiently is one of the major contributing factors to the success of SaaS training offerings.

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Challenge 2:
Get customers up to speed with complex technology fast

The lack of upfront investment in the SaaS model means that vendors need to work harder to keep customers committed. The subscription model makes it that much easier for clients to shop around and change suppliers as soon as they encounter problems. If customers are not trained quickly, following best practices, and attaining the maximum value from your SaaS application, they will be less than fully satisfied and at risk of churning to a competitor.

> **Vendors will want to leverage their existing cloud infrastructure and monetize training offerings to further enhance profits.**

Challenge 3:
Leverage existing cloud infrastructure

Since SaaS applications already utilize a cloud infrastructure, it is understandable that SaaS vendors will want to leverage it for their training programs to keep them cost-effective. However, without specialized features to enhance the instructor and student experience, and to gain relevant management insights, the basic cloud infrastructure used for SaaS applications is not enough.

Challenge 4:
Monetize training offerings

While customers expect a variety of free training material, they are also willing to pay for high-value training, whether as part of a subscription package or one-off instruction. Don't forget that it is also in the best interest of customers to adopt the new features that can enhance their business and operations. Training doesn't have to be a cost center. In fact, training departments are multimillion dollar profit centers at many successful companies.

Answering the SaaS Training Challenges

So if you want to provide training that best answers these 4 challenges, what do you do?

SaaS vendors will have to invest significant efforts and creativity in their training portfolio to offer customers compelling, effective, and versatile training solutions.

Industry leaders recognize that a variety of **different modalities, or blended learning**, is key to successful training. Whereas a straightforward webinar or a self-study course may suffice for teaching simple functions, for training customers or partners in the use of complex software solutions, a live, instructor-led event (either virtual or in-person) will be far more effective.

While they should look to leverage existing cloud infrastructures where possible, it is just as important to offer high-value interactive training features that can be monetized.

The Case for Hands-On Virtual Instructor-Led Training for SaaS
Complex learning is most effective when enhanced by interaction between teachers and students.

While it shouldn't be the only mode of training you provide for complex SaaS applications, there are many reasons why hands-on virtual instructor-led training should be a key offering in your SaaS training portfolio.

Just like SaaS vendors have moved their application to a cloud-hosted infrastructure to take advantage of all the benefits of cloud, the same logic applies to the advantages of virtual training. Virtual instructor-led training enables SaaS companies to provide interactive remote training at scale.

> **In order to succeed, the ideal virtual classroom must be able to offer the same instructor/student experience as the best physical classrooms.**

Because the training is live, it is always on the latest version of the application. The instructor is able to pass on information about the latest features and best practices.

In addition, classes conducted on an interactive platform allow instructors to answer questions and interact with students in real time and allow students to interact with one another.

An interactive platform also allows instructors to see what the students are doing and assist when appropriate. Interactive training enhances engagement and helps ensure a positive and effective learning experience.

The Key Benefits
Enhances Knowledge Transfer and Retention

Current educational research demonstrates that information acquisition is most effective when enhanced by interaction between instructors and students and amongst students themselves. This is especially true for advanced learning situations where students need to rapidly assimilate complex information. Those attempting to learn in a static environment, where they simply receive information without interacting, absorb less information and are more likely to switch off.

Ensures Training on Your Latest Version

When you provide live hands-on training, you can be assured that you are always training on the current version of your SaaS application. As long as your instructor is familiar with all of the latest features, your customers will be too. You will however have to make sure that you keep users constantly updated to features released after the initial training.

Promotes Faster Onboarding and Customer Retention

An effective training solution which helps customers quickly learn how to get the most from complex applications and follow best practices will be critical in keeping customers committed to a vendor and its products over the long-term.

Provides High Value for Monetization

Hands-on, instructor-led training is the cream of the crop of training modes, facilitating faster and more successful adoption of new materials than other modalities. Therefore, especially for vendors of complex software solutions, instructor led training (virtual or in-person) provides greatest monetization opportunities.

> SaaS vendors should look for a solution that will enable them to **leverage their platform** while providing the same important features that have made **virtual instructor-led** training for on-premise applications so successful.

Why relying on your SaaS infrastructure alone is not enough

While SaaS vendors can provide students with a real-world environment simply by provisioning new users on existing infrastructures and broadcasting training to multiple users simultaneously, they will find that lack of interactivity and management features make this type of solution less than ideal.

Effective virtual instructor-led training requires specialized features, including the ability for instructors to see what each user is doing and help them out when needed. In addition to the hands-on activities which have proven critical to learning and adoption, instructors also need the ability to easily setup and breakdown classes, invite students to class and track ROI. The lack of such features will hamper attempts to bring users up-to-speed with complicated SaaS applications and make administering training time-consuming and inefficient.

> The lack of **specialized training** features on generic SaaS cloud infrastructure will **hamper attempts** to bring users up-to-speed with complicated SaaS applications.

It makes little sense for SaaS vendors to try and develop their own bespoke, fit-for-purpose training platform when a targeted solution, developed by proven experts in the field, already exists. In-house development of a designated training solution by SaaS vendors is an inefficient use of developer time and resources. Instead, SaaS vendors should look to a turnkey training solution based on best practices and tailored to the needs of their training organization.

Summing up

SaaS vendors face unique challenges which need to be addressed promptly to ensure the healthy growth of the industry.

With the growth of the SaaS market, the importance of training for SaaS applications is emerging as one of the hottest topics in the software industry. Indeed, the leading industry association for software trainers, CEdMA (Customer Education Management Association), has focused its entire 2018 spring leadership conference on the impact that the Software as a Service model has on the world of customer education. Even software vendors who have yet to roll-out their SaaS offerings are well-advised to start examining their possible options.

About CloudShare's Training Solution for SaaS

SaaS applications vendors can now enjoy all of the features that have made CloudShare the **#1 virtual training lab vendor** for leading software and cybersecurity organizations.

CloudShare makes it easy for instructors to set up, manage, deliver and track their online courses from any computer. CloudShare's training solution can be launched from any modern browser and requires no plugin and no modification of computer settings.

CloudShare's training solution for SaaS applications makes it simple to:
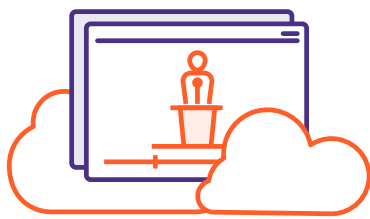
Set Up
online classes

Invite students
to join classes by clicking on a single URL

Supervise
an entire class from a single screen

Track attendance
and see who is logged-in at any time

Assist students
in real-time on their environments

CloudShare's solution takes the complexity out of tracking and analyzing performance data. Pre-built dashboards display important information immediately, while rich analytics capabilities allow managers to delve into data on length of class, number of students, instructor hours, class engagement, and more. In addition, providers receive all information needed to refine and improve training offerings and calculate ROI as they go along.

> **Learn how CloudShare's Training Solution for SaaS can help you deliver highly-effective and simple-to-use training for your SaaS applications.**
>
> **Talk to us!**

About CloudShare

Since 2007, CloudShare has been the leading supplier of virtual IT labs in the cloud, with specialized solutions designed to meet a wide variety of business needs – including training, sales enablement, and sandboxing for testing and support.

Offering unprecedented ease-of-use and efficiency, CloudShare's advanced technology and features turn cloud-based resources into true cloud solutions.

CloudShare customers include:

SOPHOS   ATLASSIAN   paloalto NETWORKS

DELL   hp   FORGEROCK

and many more software, cybersecurity and technology vendors.

To get started, contact us today!

🌐 *www.cloudshare.com*   ✉ *sales@cloudshare.com*