

## **When Should You Outsource Training?**

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The "make vs. buy" decision is one that will frequently surface when an organization is faced with the need to update employee skills. The "make" decision involves creating a training program from scratch, in-house. The "buy" decision relates to a variety of purchase options which may include a complete program already designed, or the custom-design of materials strictly for your organization's use.

While many organizations suffer from the "not created here" syndrome, it's likely that you have neither the time nor the money to create a program that already exists or that would be suitable for your organization with a minimal amount of tailoring. To help you make the "make vs. buy" decision, consider:

- Cost
- Time
- Content
- Internal capabilities

Any one of these four issues can, in and of itself, be a make or break decision regarding whether or not to outsource, and to whom. Together, they provide a list of criteria to help you qualify your decision. Let's take an in-depth look at each of the criteria.

## **Cost**

The design of an effective training program requires a considerable investment in time - and, as the saying goes, time is money. You'll often find it is much more economical to purchase an intact training program or to send your trainees out to a public offering on the topic. It is always more cost-effective to buy training when the topics you need are relatively generic, such as customer service, sales, or time management or for topics that are regulated such as sexual harassment awareness, OSHA, or hiring practices.

## **Time**

Given the speed at which businesses operate today, there often is little time to design training in-house. You may find that the buy decision is frequently the most effective way to get training out to the field in a timely way.

Another aspect of time to be considered is the longevity of a program. If the topic is one which will be delivered on a frequent basis to your employees, such as customer service skills or new supervisory skills, you may choose to develop the topic in-house because the development and delivery costs will be reduced over the life of the course, and the course will be enhanced by a degree of organizational customization. On the

other hand, a topic which will be offered to your employees only once, perhaps advanced negotiation skills, may be more economical to purchase.

### **Content**

Appropriateness of the training content to your organization is the third decision factor. A generic topic or skill is most easily outsourced. Topics that are specific to your organization however, will require customized creation or perhaps tailoring of an off-the-shelf product.

### **Internal Capabilities**

In some cases you will find that a topic which is beyond the capabilities of anyone within your organization to create. For example, a maker of printed circuit boards for the telecommunications industry wanted a generic course on the history of telecommunications and how their product supported the industry. Since there was no course available for purchase on this very specific topic, it needed to be created in-house; but there was no one who worked for the organization who had the knowledge to design such a course, either. The organization ended up hiring an instructional design consultant to research and write a custom training program on the topic, which was then delivered.

You may also find that a training vendor is more appropriate to *deliver* a topic to your organization. For example, even if an advanced negotiation skills training course was developed in-house for your sales department, is there someone with enough credibility in-house to deliver it? You may be able to prevail upon an individual with the appropriate skills from within your organization or you may need to contract someone who possesses the skills and credibility you need.

The next time you and are faced with whether or not to develop a training solution in-house or outsource it to a vendor or consultant, remember that time is money and these days, we never seem to have enough time to accomplish all our business goals. Use the four criteria discussed in this article to help you determine the best use of your organization's resources.

Author Credit:

Dr. Miner is the founder of the non-profit support group The Accidental Trainer; created to help all trainers who have found themselves "thrust" into the role. This article is based on ideas from her book by the same name, *The Accidental Trainer*, (c) John Wiley & Sons, Inc., (2006).