

Ideas & Insights from

expertus®

TrainingIndustry, Inc.

***2009 Study on Learning Portals &  
Informal Learning Technologies***



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## STUDY OVERVIEW

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In March 2009, Training Industry, Inc. and Expertus partnered to conduct a study on learning portals and informal learning technologies. We asked training professionals whether they have a learning portal, what benefits they've experience, how they're using the portal, and how they track and enable informal learning.

For this study, learning portals are defined as websites where learners find, buy or simply get access to training.

Readers can use these results to better understand how to use a learning portal and how to maximize the value of informal learning technologies.

This survey was completed by 194 training professionals from mostly medium to large corporations and government agencies. All major industries were represented, but the largest number of respondents came from Technology (14%), Education (13%), Banking and Finance (12%), and Healthcare (11%).

## KEY FINDINGS

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### Finding #1:

**Almost all respondents' learning organizations use learning portals.**

Over 93% of respondents' learning organizations have learning portals. Training organizations that train internal employees are by far the most frequent users of learning portals. However, two-thirds of those who train customers and over half of those who train channel partners or vendors also use learning portals.

### Finding #2:

**A majority plan to launch a new portal or upgrade their existing portal.**

Within the next two years, 45% of respondents say they will upgrade their existing learning portal and 14% plan to launch a new learning portal.

### Finding #3:

**Most portals are home to a large array of learning tools and technologies.**

Most respondents use all of the twelve major learning tools and technologies listed on the survey in their portals. These include blogs, online coaching, polls, self-study programs, communities of practice, and more.

**Finding #4:**

**The most important benefit of having a learning portal is improving learner satisfaction.**

Improving learner (and customer) satisfaction was cited by 68% of respondents as a top benefit of having a learning portal. The other two top benefits are tracking and enabling informal learning and helping to integrate learning technology.

**Finding #5:**

**The vast majority view informal learning technology as important.**

50% of respondents said that including informal learning technologies in their learning programs was critically important and 39% reported that it was somewhat important. Less than 5% said that it was not important.

**DETAILED FINDINGS**

**Question 1: For which groups does your training organization provide training? Check all that apply.**



Over 96% of respondents provide training for employees. A surprisingly large amount of these organizations provide training for customers, channel partners or vendors (46%). More training organizations provide training for customers than channel partners.

**Question 2: From which groups does your training organization generate revenue? Check all that apply.**



The majority of survey participants' training organizations (52%) do not generate revenue from training. Among those who provide training to the groups listed in question one:

- Only 15% of those training organizations that train employees generate revenue
- 67% of those that provide customer training charge for the training
- All of those that train channel partners generate revenue
- 19% of those that train vendors collect money from them

**Question 3: For which groups does your training organization provide learning portal(s) (i.e., website where learners find, buy or simply get access to training)? Check all that apply.**



Virtually all of respondents already have some sort of learning portal in place, particularly for employees. Among those providing training to the groups listed in question one:

- 91% of those who provide training for employees have a learning portal.
- 66% of those who provide training for customers have a learning portal.
- 56% of those who provide training for channel partners have a learning portal.

- 57% of those who provide training for vendors have a learning portal.

**Question 4: Which tools or technologies does your training organization use? Check all that apply.**

	Inside Any Portal(s)	Outside Any Portal
Online books	69.0% (60)	44.8% (39)
Self-study programs	91.6% (152)	38.0% (63)
Performance support materials and programs	85.7% (126)	40.1% (59)
Communities of practice	75.9% (66)	40.2% (35)
Expert directories or information repositories	79.2% (76)	44.8% (43)
Blogs	80.0% (48)	31.7% (19)
Online coaching	82.1% (32)	23.1% (9)
Forums or discussions	80.4% (78)	37.1% (36)
Ratings and comments	83.6% (56)	28.4% (19)
Polls	81.2% (56)	36.2% (25)
Social profiles	60.0% (21)	54.3% (19)
Ability to measure the use of any of the above	89.9% (62)	27.5% (19)

Every learning tool and technology listed on the survey resides inside most respondents' learning portals.

Among these, the most prominent is self-study programs (which usually means e-learning). The least prominent tool is social profiles, which are more likely to reside outside of the portal. In training situations, social profiles are used for finding subject matter experts who can provide training, mentoring, or answer questions. Online books are also less likely to reside inside portals.

**Question 5: Please give an example of how your learning organization best uses technology to enable or measure informal learning.**

Here are a few examples of the more innovative ways that respondents' described how they use technology for informal learning:

- One week after our instructor-led training ends, each student begins a self-directed, twelve-week reinforcement program. We send weekly e-mails that include a content review and an application assignment. Local managers are copied so that they can monitor

progress, and every four weeks after that, students do an online self-assessment to measure their progress.

- We allow our customers to access our professional staff through the learning portal rather than face-to-face in our brick-and-mortar location. The result has been an increase in overall participation by more diverse groups that include organization leaders.
- Our LMS has the ability to register informal learning activities. Also, learning plans are completed as a part of the performance development process. When the learning plans are expressed as objectives, we can also track that.
- We enable informal learning through a number of enabling technologies. SharePoint is leveraged to support blogs, wikis, and communities of practice. Our corporate employee portal is used to support a Facebook-like internal application and we have a beta site that supports YouTube-like user-generated content.

**Question 6: How important is it that you include informal learning technologies in your training programs?**



89% of respondents thought it was either critically important or somewhat important to include informal learning technologies in their training programs. Among the 50% of respondents who said informal learning was critical, their primary reasons are that, compared with formal training, informal learning:

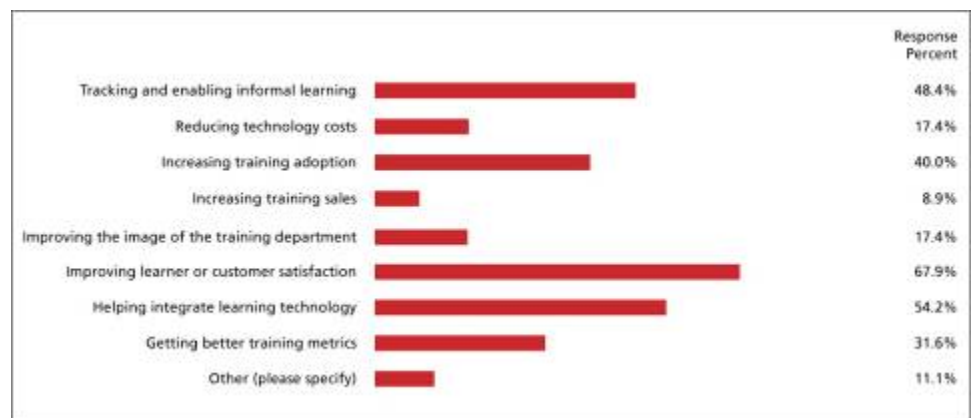
- Enhances learning by making it more integrated with a job and reinforces formal training
- Accommodates learner’s schedules, geographic locations and learning styles
- Takes less time
- Saves money
- Is how most learning is done anyway
- Provides immediate access to information
- Leads to better participation in learning
- Is expected by younger workers

- Is sometimes easier to get buy-in or support

The following represent their comments:

- Formal training is only the beginning. It has to be reinforced in many different ways for it to stick.
- There is a limited amount of time and money for formal classroom training and we know that much is learned outside of the classroom. If we can't enable and monitor informal training practices, then we cannot ensure that the training is accurate or going in the right direction. We must use all of our resources to ensure that the information our employees get is accurate, consistent and immediately available.
- Two trends that we see are: 2) Cutbacks in training budgets, which means less money for training groups to facilitate informal learning without relying on technology. 2) Introduction of Generation Y to the workforce, who expect more online (technology driven) and informal learning via social networking, wikis, blogs, etc.
- We want to combine learning with work. Informal learning and 'learning-on-demand' is critical in today's fast-paced work environment. Employees need to get information when they need it - and quickly.

**Question 7: What are the top three benefits of a learning portal? Choose only three.**



According to the respondents, the top benefit of learning portals is improving learner or customer satisfaction (68%). Other important benefits include:

- Help in integrating learning technology (54%)
- Tracking and enabling learning technology (48%)
- Increasing training adoption (40%)

Interestingly, only 9% of respondents thought that increasing training sales was a top benefit.

**Question 8: What was the primary factor supporting funding for the launch of your learning portal(s)?**

A multitude of factors were used to obtain approval for learning portal funding. The most frequent responses were:

- Centralized and consistent training repository
- Our customers or learners demand it
- Anticipated cost reduction
- Easy access to self-paced e-learning
- On-demand and just-in-time training
- Ability to reach a large global workforce and partners
- Ability to track learning usage and the status of compliance training

Here are some representative comments about reasons to justify funding for portals:

- We needed one-stop-shopping and a centralized training repository.
- Minimum cost, maximum exposure!
- It's necessary to provide remote, just-in-time training access with consistent messaging and reduced travel costs.
- We needed to create a portal that would simplify learner access, increase learner satisfaction, reduce costs and better integrate learning technologies.

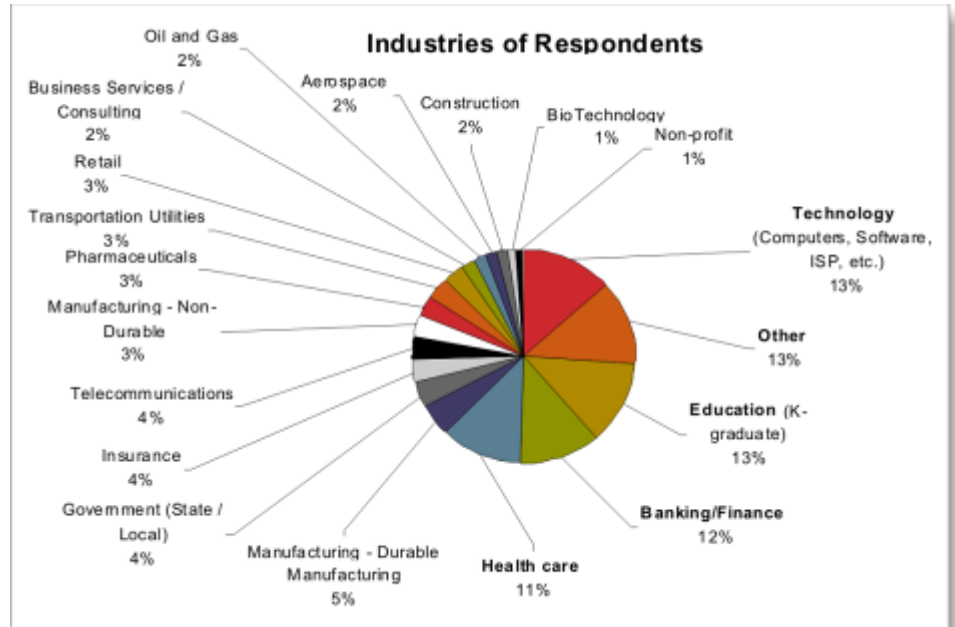
**Question 9: Do you plan to launch a new learning portal or upgrade your current portal within the next two years?**



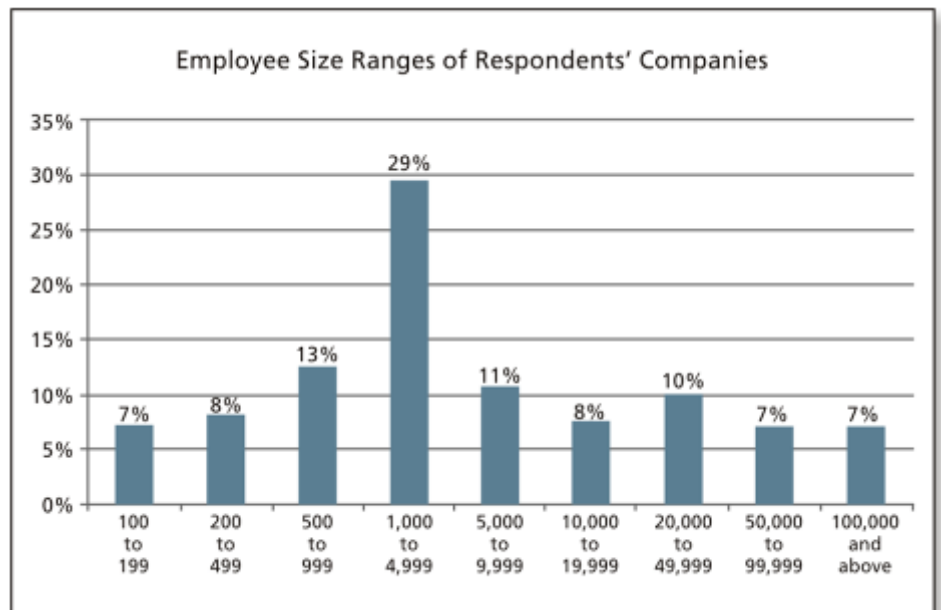
59% of respondents plan to either upgrade or launch a new learning portal within the next two years. Almost half of the respondents are planning to upgrade their current learning portal within the next two years, which illustrates how fast learning portal technology is evolving and the attractiveness of the new features that have been developed.

**ABOUT THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

**Question 10: Please indicate your company's industry and company size.**



A wide variety of industries were represented in this study, with the most common industries (in bold) being Technology, Education, Banking/Finance, Healthcare, and Other.



## About Expertus

Expertus is the leading global provider of services that optimize the business impact of learning. For more than a decade, the firm's 500+ learning management professionals have defined and implemented plans, processes and technologies that transform training organizations – creating measurable value for the world's most successful corporations. Clients include ADP, Cisco, ConocoPhillips, EMC, NetApp and Schlumberger. Every day at these and other companies, more than a million employees, customers and business partners are educated as a result of Expertus' innovative business strategies, outsourcing services and technology-rich solutions.

Based in the Silicon Valley, Expertus serves its clients from offices in the US, UK and India. For more information, visit [www.expertus.com](http://www.expertus.com), or call toll-free 1-877-827-8160.

## About Training Industry, Inc.

Training Industry, Inc. is an objective and trusted expert on the marketplace for learning. Its mission is to make the marketplace more efficient through the world's largest online community of training communities and through services such as Training Industry Conferences, Training Industry Quarterly Ezine, Training Industry Webinars, and Training Industry Research. Through these channels, Training Industry, Inc. provides news, articles, strategies, practices, and processes.

For more information, go to [www.trainingindustry.com](http://www.trainingindustry.com) or contact us at [info@trainingindustry.com](mailto:info@trainingindustry.com).

## About this Research

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