

# White Paper:

## Getting Results from Virtual Instructor-Led Training

How to Develop and Deliver Successful Engagements





## Introduction

Virtual Instructor-Led Training (VILT) offers the promise of saving companies hundreds of thousands of dollars each year by slashing the cost per trainee. There are no flights to book. No rooms to reserve. And more trainees can join each session.

The eye-catching savings of VILT is often a false positive. Do companies really save bundles of money when only 20% of online training is deemed "very effective" by those who deploy it? In the world of learning and development (L&D), this question matters.

The volume of VILT increased by 25% last year, it was included in 27% of all trainings delivered, and it will only continue to grow.<sup>1</sup> Executives have to get VILT right.

To do so, consider:

- Which situations are best suited for VILT and which ones are not?
- How can instructors in a virtual environment overcome the #1 challenge of engaging their audience?
- What realistic goals can organizations set for VILT and what steps will lead to those goals being realized?

This white paper promises to guide L&D decision makers through the best approaches to VILT. In the end, you will understand what actions you can take to deliver the promised benefits of this rapidly growing delivery mode of L&D programs.

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<sup>1</sup> General Physics Corporation Survey 2010 n-114 Learning Professionals. Also the source of the "Fast Facts" incorporated in this paper



## The Facts: Why VILT is the Next Beachhead for Executive Learning

A recent research report sponsored by General Physics Corporation explored the use of VILT across multiple industries and company sizes. It confirmed VILT is one of the fastest growing L&D approaches.

The study reported that the use of VILT grew 25% last year and that it is being incorporated in 27% of all training efforts (blended with e-learning, self-study, instructor-Led, face-to-face, and printed support materials).

Companies reported that reduced travel costs and the ability to "reach" more people were the main reasons for adoption and use. Given the economic pressures on most industries and businesses, this information makes perfect sense.

### Fast Fact:

Instructors who use the full VILT functionalities may have a higher rate of effectiveness than those who use basic webcasting.

This suggests that VILT is attracting a great deal of attention and interest from L&D professionals and supports the notion that VILT is emerging as a new category for delivering learning solutions. This rise in interest increases the importance on finding the "best" application for VILT.

### The Effectiveness of VILT

The study found that 20% of respondents rated their VILT experience as "very effective."

These respondents attributed the effectiveness to the generous use of tools such as live conversation, polls, chat, and quizzes during and after the learning session. Additionally, the respondents felt that facilitation skills and subject matter expertise along with the technology's ease of use were the keys to the VILT program's success.

L&D professionals want to see a very high percentage—in the 80% range—of trainees saying a session was "very effective." VILT falls well short of this number, with 80% of respondents reporting such training was less than "very effective."

It is not surprising that L&D professionals are seeking new approaches, such as VILT and other "distance" L&D modes. After all, the promise of VILT is very appealing and timely given the



advance of web-based delivery technologies and the increased focus on efficiency in the delivery of L&D solutions. However, the effectiveness ratings of VILT must improve if broader adoption is expected.

The results of the research suggest a growing interest in testing VILT and reveal a significant opportunity to improve its perceived effectiveness.



## The Business Situation – A Story

Not long ago an L&D manager from a global company contacted me with a problem. He wasn't sure how to train his marketing personnel to use a value-based pricing model (instead of a cost-plus one). He also wasn't sure if such training could be justified.

As you consider the value of VILT for yourself, these two concerns need to be in your mind as well:

1. How can I make a training program work to deliver business outcomes?
2. Can it be viewed as an investment and not as an expense?

The prospect and I went over a number of items to answer the above concerns.

### #1: Is there a business case for this training?

In this instance, the answer was yes. Value-based pricing could increase profitability. It would also help differentiate the company—something the L&D manager's internal clients had to do. His organization had more and more global competitors to fend off and customers were having more and more trouble seeing a difference between his organization and the competition.

#### Fast Fact:

Customer/product training (58%), professional development (54%), and sales training (42%) ranked as the top three topics for using VILT.

### #2: Is virtual the way to go?

Again, the answer was yes. A number of team members in marketing, finance, and sales were responsible for pricing. In addition to working from different locations, they worked on different continents.

### #3: Does the training have practical, day-to-day applications?

Management was reluctant to take these busy teams "away from their jobs for too long" to receive the pricing training. Therefore, any training had to ensure pragmatic content—content that not just stimulated new thinking, but also generated real impact.



#### **#4: Who can make this training work?**

This L&D manager had several options. He could go to a prestigious university and have faculty deliver a custom executive workshop. He could seek out a consultancy that specialized in pricing strategies and tactics and have that firm teach the best pricing practices.

Ultimately, the L&D manager decided upon a firm to partner with that both specialized in the pricing concepts and who could deliver the training in a way that engaged attendees and drove pricing results across the company.

#### **The Question for You Going Forward**

This scenario is common in companies both large and small. With a growing number of potential L&D solutions, learning professionals must address all of this in a way that meets the organization's educational and business needs.



## Getting Business Value from Your VILT Learning Approach

When you initially consider deploying VILT, use the following guiding principles to determine if VILT is the right L&D application for the project.

### Principle #1: Identify a real business problem before focusing on learning objectives or delivery methods.

- Start with a meaningful and well-defined problem. For example: "Utilizing pricing to improve the margins on mature products" is crisper and more useful than "deliver pricing training and education to our marketing managers."
- Define the impact/return metrics. These will shape the design and delivery decisions. For example, "Improving the margin by sustaining a price increase," is more beneficial than, "Testing the knowledge of participants by conducting a post-learning session quiz."
- Focus on relevant subject matter and application of learning to work to enhance participant engagement. Without this pragmatic foundation, no tool—chats, polls, quizzes, live conversation—can strengthen the learning experience.

### Principle #2: Be a lot for a few people instead of a little for a lot people.

- Just because you can reach more people economically in a VILT delivery doesn't mean you should. Remember that, at the end of the day, someone will ask about the ROI. Don't compromise return potential by trying to reach too many people.
- Most meaningful business challenges involve professionals with different skill sets and levels of experience. Break learners into cross-functional teams based on their ownership/influence on the business problem. Encourage divergent perspectives and thinking as you create the teams.

### Principle #3: Go beyond paving the cow paths.

- Avoid taking a learning experience that was designed for a face-to-face, instructor-led delivery and using it—as is—in the virtual world. Interstate highways were not placed on



top of the old cow paths and horse trails!

Paving cow paths looks something like having a full-day virtual session (death march) with virtual breakouts and a schedule that could easily be appropriate for a face-to-face delivery. The only redeeming aspect of this approach is the virtual lunch—which is calorie free and easy to prepare!

- Most business challenges cannot be readily addressed or resolved in a 45-minute breakout session—whether face-to-face or via a VILT session. It takes more than a few breakout sessions, team report-backs, group discussions, and instructor lectures to address meaningful business challenges and gain tangible results. Therefore don't spend time figuring out how to replicate breakout sessions that you offered in a face-to-face delivery.

Real business challenges and adult learning require time for testing ideas, gathering data, participant reflection, and application.

- The expense of in-person training often means you have to cram everything into a set timeframe. With VILT, you can design and deliver a series of more and shorter application-oriented sessions. You do not need volume to justify costs.

**Fast Fact:**

Quizzes (31%), live conversation (24%), blogs (23%), and forum (19%) ranked as the top four post-session engagement tools for VILT.

**Principle #4: Provide more than an instructor.**

- Adult learners engaged in real work don't need an instructor or facilitator—they need a subject matter expert. They need someone who can coach, challenge, and cajole them through the learning and application process.

Choose someone who can establish credibility by demonstrating their relevant experience and who can help resolve business challenges as they teach.

- Select a coach for each team who understands the relevant learning concepts and has experience as a practitioner. The coach must ask provocative questions that stimulate thinking, learning, and application.

No amount of polling, classroom management, facilitation skills, or tech savvy will make-





up for a facilitator who lacks subject matter expertise or relevant experience.

## **Why Just 20% Is Perfect**

That only 20% of VILT users rated their experience as "very effective" should not alarm L&D professionals. In fact, they should expect such numbers.

Any new technology or approach takes time for the market to develop and for new users to adopt it. VILT is no exception. It has existed for a short time, and is a "New Category" of L&D offering, and has yet to "cross the adoption chasm" where it can be broadly adopted for use. People within the L&D field can therefore frame the low effectiveness numbers as "category lifecycle stage appropriate."

### **Moving Beyond 20%**

The majority of L&D professionals will not adopt VILT until the low participant engagement concerns are addressed. It will not be considered a viable L&D approach until that happens. (Even the group that rated the VILT experience as "very effective" said learner engagement was the biggest challenge.)

The key question therefore is how can VILT successfully overcome the participant engagement issue? How can it lift the 20% "very effective" numbers seen today to above 80%?

Identifying and incorporating key success factors that improve learner engagement will enable the successful incorporation of VILT as part of the L&D portfolio of solutions.



## VILT: A Category, Life-Cycle Stage Perspective

The following factors create the conditions for the success and growth of VILT programs.

### 1. **Enabling Technologies:** "Democratizing Access"

**Description:** Companies do not have to develop their own web-based technology. They have a variety to choose from, including Citrix's Go-to-Webinar, Cisco's Telepresence, and Adobe's Professional Connect.

In addition to having relatively affordable price points, these technologies also reduce a company's travel and logistical costs. All this makes VILT a compelling "value proposition" in the eyes of executives.

**Challenges:** As a result of the tempting value proposition, decision makers can easily overlook the key aspects of creating a successful experience. For instance, they can put as many trainees as they like into a session with few logistical concerns. While this saves on travel expense and reduces the cost per participant, it can serve to decrease participant engagement.

Beware. The "R" in ROI does not stand for *reach*—so don't compromise the return just because you can affordably reach a lot of people. You risk losing any operational savings gained by trading off efficacy and impact.

**Remedies:** Be selective and deliberate about the L&D opportunities where you deploy VILT. Do not trade off the operational savings of having larger numbers of participants if engagement is diluted.

**Example:** A smaller group of participants/learners can enable more interaction, application focus, and coaching, which all serve to enhance learner engagement.

### 2. **Blending L&D Solutions:** "Not only, but also."

**Description:** You don't have to employ VILT by itself. You can blend it with other learning methods. The survey results indicated that 53% of the time VILT is designed and delivered as part of a blended approach.

**Challenges:** Executives need to pair VILT with other L&D methods in a "seamless and



effective" manner that enhances participant engagement.

**Remedies:** As you design the VILT session, challenge yourself by asking, "What other delivery methods could help teach this content?"

One consideration is to look at where the instructor's time is needed. Other learning approaches may teach material just as effectively as a "live instructor. Also, consider what learning delivery modes will enhance the VILT sessions. In-person, group activities may lay the ground work for a VILT session.

**Example:** Utilize self-paced e-learning as pre-work in order to "level set" participants' knowledge of core concepts before they attend a VILT session. This is especially important if attendees come from different backgrounds or functions, or have different levels of experience with a topic.

### 3. **Problem Selection:** "Just Say No"

**Description:** VILT can provide rich learning experiences but it is not appropriate for every L&D challenge. In the early stages of VILT, it is important to select business challenges that will clearly benefit from the unique capabilities of a well-designed and delivered VILT program.

**Challenges:** The temptation will be to deploy VILT to any L&D opportunity. Economic reasons, the desire to test this evolving L&D delivery method, or the fear of being left behind peers may drive the decision to utilize VILT.

**Remedies:** Establish a set of explicit criteria (4-7 factors) for using VILT. This will help you avoid being doomed to failure. Test the criteria and revise them with each experience. Some criteria will matter more. Give those more weight.

**Example:** Criteria may include:

1. Do I have a clear reason for training?
2. Do I have subject matter expert who can deliver the content while coaching and pushing the thinking?



3. Does the selected business challenge need attention now? Is there a sense of urgency?
4. Can I create a learning experience that gives participants ample time to reflect upon, question, and test the new concepts as they apply them to their work?
5. Will the training make participants accountable for providing a clear deliverable (such as a tactical plan)?
6. If the training benefits from diverse perspectives, could I create cross-functional teams and have them participate?

At this early stage of VILT's market development focus on identifying specific L&D applications that meet your defined and refined criteria. Setting yourself up for early VILT successes will help ensure the successful adoption of VILT in your organization.

**Fast Fact:**

Live conversation (82%), chat (64%), polls (54%), quizzes (54%), and animation (48%) ranked as the top five in-session engagement tools for VILT.



## Conclusion

As with most exciting and growing products or solutions, VILT can offer significant operational and strategic learning improvements, if it is deployed in a thoughtful and appropriate manner. The guiding principles in this white paper coupled with the notion that you must establish specific criteria for assessing the fit and utility of VILT for inclusion in your learning engagements should set the stage for your organization to generate its own success stories with VILT.



## Appendix – Testimonials

I encourage you to create your own testimonials and case studies by maximizing the power and promise of VILT to generate business results.

"The VILT workshop opened my eyes and validated the importance of value when utilizing pricing strategies. We need to get everyone in the organization on the same page and we need to be realistic in capturing % premiums vs. what the competition is doing.

"By going with a value option, we are able to preserve a street price of about \$30 higher than if we added no value to the product. This contributes about \$10-12 incremental gross profit per unit. We're planning to sell approximately 400K units at this higher price. There is some incremental non-recurring cost to the program (estimated \$500K) which nets out to about \$3.5M incremental profit.

"The examples and tools offered in the course were great. This was probably one of the best L&D classes that I have ever attended."

"The VILT workshop provided tools and methodology which have made the process easier to comprehend. The Value Creation and Value Analysis concepts are very key to applying to real life business situations.

"There was one instance where a product manager wanted to price a new product below market price—we were able to convince the product manager to take on a different strategy which assisted in the positive reposition of the product and enhanced pricing."



"We began to reorient our marketing and sales organizations towards a more strategic view of pricing.... Clearly, those areas of the business that picked up the training and took it through to the execution stage benefited greatly when their product entered the market.

"The ability to combine the learning with application was invaluable as it leveraged the time of our marketing people who are very busy. The demand for these sessions grew as the 'word' got out about how practical and application-oriented the learning experience was as compared to prior executive education workshops.

"We were able to involve team members from across the globe because of the virtual delivery format so everyone could be engaged in both the learning and the implementation plans that emerged."



## About Imprint Learning Solutions, Inc.

We believe **how** you learn determines **what** you learn.

We utilize a hybrid approach to deliver practical—not theoretical— knowledge that generates business results. Why? Because executive education gives you the theory and relies on you to apply it to your organization. Although consulting solutions provide the answer to the problem, they fall short of addressing the ability of your organization to resolve marketing issues after the engagement ends.

We focus on capability transfer—learning to identify the specific marketing competencies required to implement strategic marketing initiatives, retaining what you learn, and transferring that knowledge to your team or organization.

Our focus on your companies' marketing and go-to-market readiness led to the development of market-driving learning strategies and tools that leverage the latest accelerated team-based adult learning methods. Our seasoned staff members are professionals in their individual fields—they've been where you are, and are uniquely qualified to guide and coach your people to turn training investments into actionable and measurable business results.

Our team is composed of educators, authors, inventors, entrepreneur's and global executives with experience ranging from startups to Fortune 20 companies with 'C-level' responsibilities.

We have delivered:

- Instructor Led workshops to more than 6,000 corporate executives in 40+ countries
- Marketing eLearning courses to more than 1,200 marketing professionals
- Web based diagnostic assessments to more than 5,000 marketing professionals

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