

Blackboard Learn™ Powers Watson's Continuous Learning Environment

PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS

California-based Watson Pharmaceuticals Inc. takes innovative steps to prepare its sales force.

In 2008, with a new CEO, Paul Bisaro, and three product launches in the same specialty on the way — an undertaking virtually unheard of in the pharmaceutical industry — all eyes were on Watson, the nation's third-largest prescription drug provider. Even Wall Street was paying close attention.

"Prior to launch time, we needed to come up with a blended learning strategy to better prepare our sales representatives for success," said Jason Zeman, associate director of sales training and leadership development. "And we needed to do things differently than we had in the past."

To deliver on that vision, Watson worked with Blackboard Inc., a global leader in enterprise learning technology, to provide its sales force with access to an interactive online training program.

In years past, Watson would fly the sales representatives in at launch time and train them within one week. The sales force would review pre-training

learning module binders, then while at the meeting, would be required to learn a sales script and take an assessment. After the launch meeting, they would hit the streets to sell the product and the sales training and marketing team would collectively hold its breath.

With the incorporation of Blackboard's software, this all changed — dramatically.

An online learning environment packed with sales courses, sample sales presentations and tutorials became an around-the-clock virtual classroom. Participants were able to view model presentations, upload their own video presentations for coaching, and learn extensively about the new prescription drug products — RAPAFLO, an alpha blocker for the treatment of benign prostatic hyperplasia; Gelnique, a topical gel for the treatment of an overactive bladder and a six-month formulation of Trelstar, an LHRH agonist used for the management of advanced prostate cancer.

To the surprise of upper-level management, some representatives practiced 70 times before posting their best videos. "Prior to implementing the Blackboard solution, the chances of someone standing in front of their mirror and doing this even five times were slim to none," Zeman noted.

The Blackboard solution provides a continuous learning environment beyond product launches, which encourages learning before and after the actual learning event, i.e. Initial



Sales Training School. For instance, participants receive prework material prior to class. This way, everyone comes in to training much more prepared.

After training, they use Blackboard as a platform for their managers, certified trainers, mentors, and colleagues to provide immediate feedback. "It's that coaching environment that will enable our sales representatives to learn to sell with passion and enthusiasm more quickly," Bill Reggio, director of sales training & leadership development said.

Beyond the new level of motivation, another unexpected outcome occurred. Senior management delved into the training programs, too. The technology is so innovative and exciting, Zeman said, that everyone wanted to be a part of it: "Area sales directors, the VP of area sales directors, and directors of marketing, even Lynne Amato, vice president of sales, logged on to see where the representatives were on the learning curve before they even got to the launch. That spoke volumes for the Blackboard technology."

Where to Start

For companies looking to save money while raising the bar with training efforts, the first step is to have buy-in from upper management, according to Reggio. "You really have to listen to what the CEO, president, and VPs, and directors of marketing and sales are looking for," he said. "In our case, the Blackboard platform fits in well with our CEO's strategy

and transformational way of thinking and aligns with our company's values of accountability, innovation, collaboration, commitment and leadership."

Plus, the new technology promotes better communication between departments. "The fact that we had support from the top helped us to rally and secure engagement from all of the vertical groups within our company," Mel Solomon, manager of sales training & leadership development said.

"The beauty of the Blackboard solution is that it enables everyone to progress at the same pace. The sales representatives were completing their courses and taking their assessments at the same time. It also helps us with FDA compliance. In the event that we are audited, we minimize our risk by knowing exactly what course each representative has taken and when they took it. We know that every representative is certified to sell," Reggio said.

Results

It all comes down to this question: What is the impact on business?

Start by looking at the fact that the representatives were truly engaged, thereby empowering them to sell with confidence. This, of course, led to a high-level of credibility for the sales representative and confidence when mitigating any customer concerns and closing for the business.

The proof points: The first week of launch, Gelnique boasted close to double the amount of prescriptions as a large competing company. And RAPAFLO had a similar success story.

"With our new training system, representatives were arriving to the launch good and leaving great," Lou Candura, manager of sales training & leadership development, explained. "Sales representatives have told us they've never been trained so well and felt so prepared. They truly were ecstatic about this technology."

Overall, the training department gained visibility throughout the organization and people now come to them looking to partner. Plus, there was a huge shift in employee behavior, not to mention a substantial cost and time savings and a boost in sales. What's more, the sales force gained self awareness and belief in product. And that's priceless.

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Bill Reggio
Director of Sales Training
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