



# WHY AND HOW TO BUILD YOUR BLENDED LEARNING PLAYBOOK

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# Why and How to Build Your Blended Learning Playbook

by Celisa Steele and Jeff Cobb

This resource makes the argument for blended learning and helps you understand why and how to add blended learning offerings to your organization's portfolio or enhance what you're already doing with blended learning.

## What Blended Learning Is

Like many terms in the learning space, "blended learning" doesn't have a single, universally accepted definition, so we want to be clear how we use the term in this resource.

Drawing on the work of the [Christensen Institute](#) and its [Blended Learning Universe](#), we define blended learning as a formal education program which meets the following criteria:

- A student learns in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace.
- A student learns in part in a brick-and-mortar location, where instruction is facilitated.
- The online and offline modalities are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.

We know from our informal and formal research that some practitioners use "blended learning" to refer to experiences that combine different modes of online learning and don't involve any in-person component. "Face to face" is sometimes used interchangeably with "in person," but, using online meeting technology such as Zoom, it's possible to convene learners online at a set time so they can see others' faces.

While we understand the logic that leads to applying "blended learning" to offerings that happen purely online, here we hew closely to the Christensen Institute's definition and focus on learning experiences that combine online and placed-based learning.

## WHAT BLENDED LEARNING ISN'T: HYBRID LEARNING

"Hybrid learning" is as ambiguous a term as "blended learning," but we want to mention hybrid by way of pointing out what blended learning isn't—at least for the purposes of this resource.

For us, hybrid refers to an educational approach in which some individuals participate in person and some participate online. Instructors and facilitators teach remote and in-person learners at the same time using technology like video conferencing.

Contrast this with blended learning, where instructors and facilitators combine in-person instruction with online learning activities. All learners complete some components online and participate in other components in person.

Both types of learning involve a mix of in-person and online learning, but how the mix is used differs in the two scenarios. With hybrid learning, the in-person learners and the remote learners are different individuals—learners choose to participate online or to participate in person. With blended learning, the same individuals learn both in person and online.

Whether you choose to call these approaches to learning by other names, a fundamental distinction remains. In one case (what we call hybrid), the different modes of learning are *options* that individuals can choose from. In the other (what we call blended), the different modes of learning are *prescribed*, and all learners are expected to participate using the different modes.

All this points to the need for you and your team to have shared definitions and a shared understanding of what you're doing or considering doing. If someone suggests blended learning, take the time to unpack what that means.

### What is a **learning business**?

First, **a learning business exists to generate revenue** through selling learning and education experiences to a target audience.

Second, the **individuals working in the learning business recognize that revenue generation is a fundamental reason for the organization's existence**. That is, they are conscious of and focused on that goal as part of the organization's identity and part of their own identity. This second aspect is important because it distinguishes learning businesses not just by their activities but also by their mindset.

## The Benefits of Blended Learning

Learning is a process, not an event. One-off experiences rarely result in the changed behavior most learning businesses want for their learners. By mixing components, blended learning involves at least two events—and it often involves many more spread across weeks, months, or a year.

This means a primary benefit of blended learning is efficacy. Because it takes place over a longer period and because it involves multiple touch points, it's more effective than a single self-paced e-learning module or a single half-day in-person workshop.

Blended learning also allows designers to match delivery mode to the desired learning outcome or content. Didactic, information-conveying content may lend itself well to self-paced online delivery, where individual learners have the option to view videos at twice the normal speed or view them repeatedly

based on their prior knowledge of and experience with the topic, for example. A pre-assessment might even allow learners to skip entire portions of the content they're already familiar with and focus their time instead on new information and ideas.

Higher-order thinking, like synthesis and evaluation, may benefit from in-person discussions or student presentations of work projects—projects made possible by what they learned through online elements before showing up in a room together.

For learning businesses, potential benefits of implementing blended learning include these five:

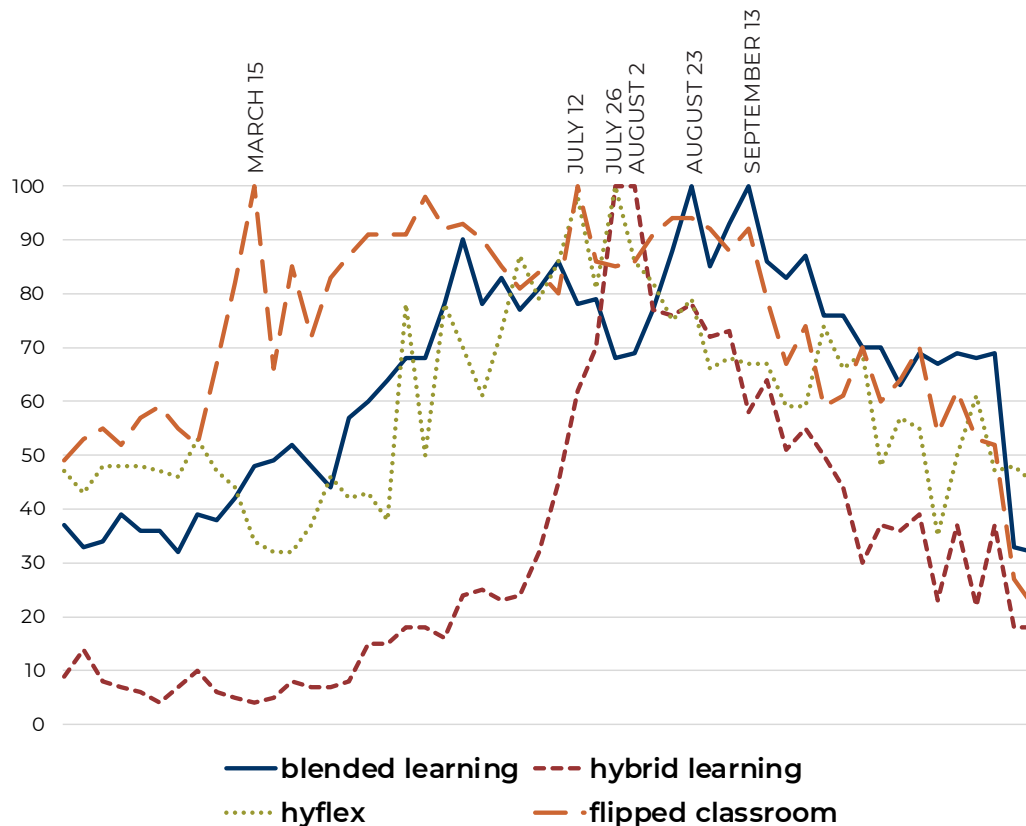
- **Higher learning value and impact**  
As already mentioned, blended learning tends to be more effective than other approaches, offering learning businesses the potential to deliver more value and, ultimately, greater impact through the learning experiences they offer.
- **Increased pricing flexibility**  
Because learners typically perceive and appreciate the greater value and impact that blending learning offers, it's often possible to charge significantly more for blended learning programs. Additionally, adding blended components to existing offerings—face-to-face sessions at your annual conference to complement online offerings or on-demand content as pre- and /or post-event bonuses, for example—enables you to elevate the value of these offerings and raise prices accordingly.
- **Better ability to serve business buyers**  
Employers are also likely to appreciate the greater value and impact that blending offers. As a result, a blended approach can be a compelling offering for your business-to-business (B2B) selling. Cohort-based blended offerings aimed at onboarding new employees or developing potential leaders, for example, may be very attractive to business buyers—and those buyers may be willing to pre-pay to help underwrite the development costs of such offerings.
- **Enhanced relationships with subject matter experts**  
Getting full value from your subject matter experts (SMEs) is challenging with typical Webinar formats and even with well-designed self-paced courses. In our experience, the best subject matter experts are interested in achieving real impact with their teaching, and a blended approach offers a way for you to work more deeply with your best SMEs to make that happen.
- **Stronger differentiation from competitors**  
Blended offerings stand you out from competitors that offer only face-to-face options or only online options. If you have access to a well-respected group of subject matter experts—as many trade associations, professional societies, and academic continuing education units do—the ability to offer real-time, in-person access to these experts can be a strong differentiator.



## The Growth of Blended Learning

Blended learning is not new, but interest in it rose dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic as organizations and instructors across all sectors of education sought solutions for shifting the balance away from traditional brick-and-mortar learning. As captured in the graph below, Google Trends data shows a significant increase in searches on “blended learning” and related terms like “hybrid learning,” “flipped classroom,” and “hyflex” (a version of blending popular in higher education) between March and September 2020.

**GOOGLE TRENDS FOR KEY SEARCH TERMS BY WEEK FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2022**



Our own informal surveying suggests the pandemic pushed many learning businesses from interest in blended learning to action. In 2018, approximately 47 percent of respondents to our annual trends survey indicated that they were already pursuing “creation of learning experiences that combine online elements with face-to-face elements.” Another 34 percent were planning to in 2019.

By the fall of 2021, 65 percent of respondents indicated they were already pursuing blended learning while another 35 percent were planning to in 2022. Notably, none of the respondents in 2021 indicated they would not pursue blended learning in 2022.

Plans for blended learning appear to be strong in other sectors of education as well. A [July 2021 survey by the EdWeek Research Center](#), for example, indicated

that about two-thirds of K-12 educators expected their use of blended learning to increase during the 2021-22 school year.

While we don't have concrete growth numbers for higher education, our informal review of popular publications in the sector readily reveals much interest in, discussion of, and research on blended learning and related areas. What happens in K-12 and higher education is often a bellwether for change in the adult lifelong learning market.

Time will tell whether plans for blended learning come to fruition in the months and years ahead, but the blended approach is arguably more relevant than ever in a world emerging from the pivot to fully online instruction necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The coronavirus showed learning businesses that felt their learners could never learn online the error of that assumption—and many were able to expand their reach by drawing learners from a wider geographic range. The pandemic also robbed individuals of the chance to gather, talk, and learn in person.

Post-pandemic, there is a golden opportunity for blended learning. Combining the appeal of in-person learning's inherent social interaction with the convenience of online learning, blended learning offers both learners and learning businesses the opportunity to benefit from matching delivery mode to learning outcome.

Blended learning experiences, particularly ones that make thoughtful use of the cohort of learners engaging together, have the chance to be especially resonant in the age of remote work ushered in by the pandemic.

## The Challenges of Blended Learning

Blended learning is not without its challenges, and we'd be remiss to only discuss benefits without also touching on the challenges. The difficulties that can accompany designing and delivering blended learning tend to fall into four main categories:

- Complexity
- Cost
- Scalability
- Accessibility

### COMPLEXITY

Because it involves multiple components and delivery modes, designing a blended learning experience is more complex than designing free-standing, single-mode offerings. That has implications for the timeline for developing an offering and for the skill sets needed.

Reflecting on her experience, Tiffany Crosby, chief learning officer at the Ohio Society of CPAs, points to the need to justify undertaking the complexity: "There needs to be a solid business case as to why blended learning versus other approaches, given the amount of time that's involved."

Those designing and delivering the blended experience—instructional designers, subject matter experts, instructors, and facilitators—need to be familiar with the

multiple modes themselves or need to work in a team that collectively brings the range of needed knowledge.

Face-to-face components increase the logistical complexity. Scheduling times for in-person classes and finding appropriate meetings space are unnecessary if you're delivering self-paced e-learning.

Blended learning also often prescribes an order of completion—for example, learners might be expected to complete a foundational e-learning module before coming together for a lab on a related topic. To make the experience as valuable and effective as possible for all involved, monitoring and enforcing completion may be necessary. That increases the complexity.

Also, the experience itself may be more complex for learners because they have to interact with multiple interfaces. An experience that blends live video meetings, self-paced e-learning, and an in-person meeting the day before the annual conference means the learner has to learn two online interfaces and know how to navigate traveling to and from the face-to-face conference venue.

### SCALABILITY

While there are approaches to scaling blended learning, blended learning won't be able to serve as many learners as entirely online offerings. Some of the benefits of blended learning—more interaction with an instructor and peers, for example—make it better suited to a smaller group of learners. For a presentation-driven Webinar with an expert in your field, the number of attendees is practically limitless.

On the flip side, blended learning may be more scalable than in-person-only offerings. For example, a learning business, like the National Wood Flooring Association, that brings learners to its space for in-person may be able to increase the number of learners served by limiting the time any one class or cohort spends in the space, allowing more instances of the course to be offered in a given time frame.

The point of comparison is important when discussing the relative merits and drawbacks of blended learning.

### COST

Including one or more face-to-face components naturally increases costs compared to online-only offerings. The increased costs often apply for both the learners who may have to pay for travel and hotel and for the learning business that may have to rent meeting space and provide food and beverage.

When comparing blended solutions to in-person-only offerings, cost-savings may be realized eventually, but the upfront development costs for self-paced e-learning, for example, may mean blended takes longer to reach profitability.

Engaging subject matter experts over a longer time period will, at a minimum, involve increased staff time and costs. It will likely also involve greater compensation for the SMEs—or, if your learning business relies on volunteers, it may introduce a situation where SMEs have to be compensated.

Generally, the increased cost has to be passed on to the learners, which creates an additional need to focus on accessibility.

## ACCESSIBILITY

Depending on your point of comparison, blended learning can be more or less accessible and inclusive than other forms of learning. Compared to an entirely online offering, the need to travel and the associated costs in dollars and time can make blended learning less accessible and more exclusionary. This is what ACUI found.

ACUI is a nonprofit educational organization that serves college union and student activities professionals. In 2018, ACUI introduced multiple blended learning programs. Participants who successfully completed a program were issued a digital badge. Much of the content was delivered online, but there was a required in-person component at ACUI's annual conference. "Not everybody can afford to go to the in-person event, and so it became a financial equity issue," says Scarlett Winters, an instructional designer at ACUI. "Our folks from community colleges or historically Black institutions or tribal institutions don't have as much funding as large, four-year, research, primarily white institutions. Is it fair to deny them the opportunity to get the badge because they couldn't attend the in-person stuff?"

While Winters saw many positives in the blended programs in terms of learning goals and participant feedback, the format's inherent inequity led ACUI to abandon it. "The people who could participate loved it," shares Winters. "The downside was that you were excluding people that have historically been excluded already. And, for us as an association, that goes against our core values."

Compared to an entirely in-person offering, a blended approach may make it easier for learners to participate—and it may make it possible for the learning business to serve more learners. The National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) has converted three of its four certifications to a blended approach (the fourth is entirely online). Formerly, all the education for the certifications was done in person at NWFA facilities.

Stephanie Owen, vice president of education, cites two goals as NWFA's drivers to convert to online and blended approaches: "Cut back on classroom time, and reach more people." Learners in this hands-on industry appreciate being able to complete many requirements online, which results in less time in a classroom, and, with less demand on its physical training space, NWFA can serve more learners—and serve them better. Reflecting on the results of switching to a blended approach, Owen says, "The actual in-person, hands-on training is actually more beneficial for everybody because the people that are coming in are pre-qualified. They're at the same level essentially from a knowledge standpoint, so the instructor can really take it deeper, and they come out more prepared."

In addition to considering accessibility from the learner's viewpoint, think also of the staff and volunteers that support the offerings. Even if hard costs associated with travel are covered, face-to-face components that require more than usual time away from home and office can make it harder for them.

BreAna Moss helps organize and facilitate the leadership programs offered by LeadingAge, which represents more than 5,000 nonprofit aging services providers. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership programs were offered entirely in person. LeadingAge has settled on a blended approach for the



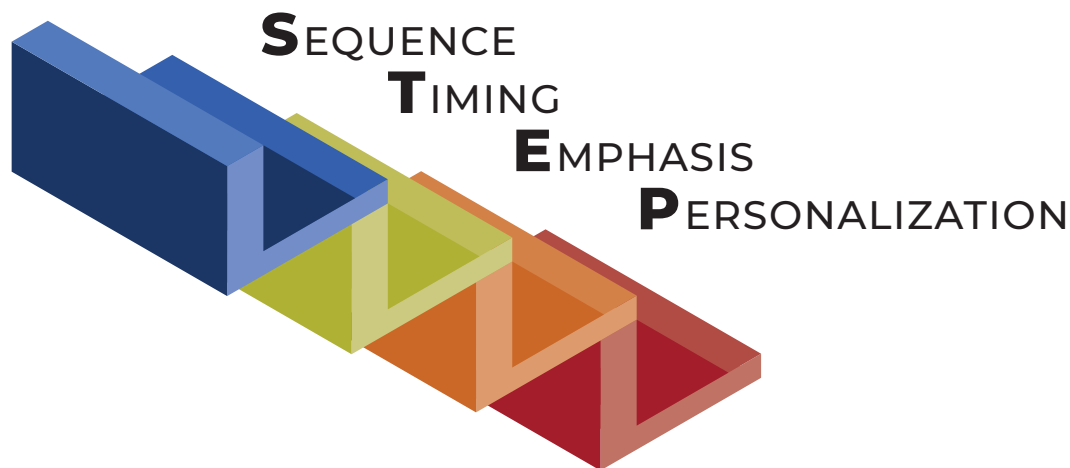
present. While participants enjoy meeting in person, it can be hard for them to get away from work, and Moss has heard that they appreciate meeting virtually during the summer, as that allows them to spend more time with family during a typical vacation period. Moss has also come to appreciate some benefits of the blended approach herself. “I’ve gotten used to not traveling as much too,” she says. “I like not having to travel as much during the year.”

## Considerations When Designing Blended Learning

Even within our somewhat narrow definition of blended learning (i.e., it must include online and in-person components), there are still many approaches, so, when designing a blended learning experience, it can be helpful to consider these four dimensions:

- Sequence
- Timing
- Emphasis
- Personalization

We remember these dimensions using a STEP acronym. Let’s look at each of the four parts of STEP.



### SEQUENCE

When developing blended learning, you must consider the sequence of components.

A simple blended approach that we call a front flip involves learners completing an online component before showing up for further in-person learning. This is a popular model, especially with hands-on, hard-skills training like that done by the National Wood Flooring Association. If a lab or hands-on component happens in person, completing foundational content, such as a lab safety module, online can help make the time together more efficient and effective—and, in some cases, safer.

A front flip could also involve providing a series of video modules leading up to a pre-conference workshop.

Another simple approach to sequencing is a back flip—learners gather in person to kick off a blended experience and then follow that in-person gathering with online content. This approach could work well with softer skills or more personal content. Coming together in person at the beginning of a leadership-focused

offering might allow learners to get to know one another. Feeling more familiar with other learners might make them more comfortable sharing their experiences and asking questions in subsequent online components.

A learning business can combine front flips and back flips to create more complex blended learning experiences. One might start online or offline and involve more than one face-to-face component and one online component. The sequencing possibilities are essentially endless.

### **TIMING**

Another important consideration when designing blended learning is timing. Timing refers to the overall length of the experience. Is this a year-long class or a few weeks in duration?

Timing also refers to the elapsed time between components. Is there an activity or event for learners every day, week, or year?

Learning science has proven the positive benefits of spacing, which suggests the importance of having some time pass between components. The benefits of spacing will need to be balanced with the realities of learners' availability and what a learner business might be able to charge for an offering.

Balancing these timing considerations ideally yields an optimal cadence.

### **EMPHASIS**

According to our definition, blended learning involves both face-to-face components and online components. But different experiences will place a different emphasis on those modes.

For some, the online component might be the backbone of the experience. The majority of the content, skills, or knowledge are taught online. The face-to-face component is icing on the cake—a chance to discuss or explore application without covering new content, skills, or knowledge.

For other experiences, the face-to-face component might be the backbone, with the online component supporting or reinforcing key concepts over time.

Some experiences will have a more equal emphasis on online and face-to-face instruction, with learners receiving essential content and practice opportunities through both modes.

### **PERSONALIZATION**

Personalization is as buzzy a term as blended learning itself. Its core idea is that different learners bring different prior knowledge and experience to any learning experience, and so learners typically benefit from some level of customization that acknowledges their differences.

When designing blended learning, you'll have choices to make about whether all or only some components are required and whether to build some components in ways that can help you personalize the experience.

Because blended learning involves multiple components, it offers the potential for learners to skip ones that aren't relevant to their work or life or ones where they're already fluent with the content and skills taught.

You might also leverage technology to help learners identify which components are most relevant to them. For example, you could develop a pre-assessment that test learners' knowledge of the content. Based on their specific performance, learners will be recommended specific components. Perhaps a remedial module is needed. Perhaps a learner can test into a more advanced discussion of the topic.

In some cases, though—for example, some certifications or employer-funded training—stakeholders (such as the accrediting bodies or employers) might not support the flexibility for providing individual learners with differentiated paths.

Another aspect of personalization speaks to the intimacy of the experience. When designing, you have choices to make about the number of learners allowed to participate and the number of facilitators (teachers, coaches, mentors, etc.) involved.

Those numbers impact how much interaction there can be among learners and facilitators. Some learners will be drawn to blended learning's promise to give them access to other learners. If the group is huge, it may prove difficult for a learner to connect with others and feel like a meaningful part of a cohort.

If the group is smaller, it may be easier to get to know one another and create an environment in which learners are willing to be open and authentic—though too small a group may prevent learners from finding others with whom they can identify and connect. In sharing lessons learned, Moss says simply, “The size of the group matters.” Given the leadership focus of LeadingAge's blended program, Moss will split a large group into smaller breakouts during online sessions to better allow them to see and interact with one another.

The size of the cohort also impacts how much attention each individual learner can expect from a facilitator. Involving multiple facilitators can allow more one-on-one attention to learners, but it can fracture the group. In single-facilitator situations, that facilitator can unify the experience by her recurring presence and knowledge of each learner. And, if that facilitator is well-respected or well-known, having access to her may drive learners to participate in a blended experience where they know they'll be able to interact with her over time.

## Successful Blended Learning

To build a successful blended learning playbook, you need to be aware of the benefits and the challenges we've discussed.

To help you maximize the benefits and minimize the challenges, we'll offer some suggestions on how to balance competing demands and the implications for the capacity of your learning business.

### OBJECTIVES AND AUDIENCE

When making decisions about sequence, timing, emphasis, and personalization, a learning business has two touchstones: objectives and audience.

Objectives speak to the goals of the blended experience. Why are you offering this experience? Is it to certify wood flooring installers or to develop the next generation of vascular surgeon leaders? That high-level focus will lead to many

more specific objectives, e.g., the basics of sanding wood floors or enumerating the keys to successful leadership.

Then consider how each specific objective can best be achieved. Would it benefit from an online video that can be re-watched? Would it benefit from a hands-on component where an instructor can observe and give individualized feedback on the activity?

Audience is the second touchstone. Always keep in mind who you're designing for and their goals and challenges. Know what the target learners for your blended offering consider valuable. This involves having good market awareness and data—don't assume you know.

"One of the hardest things to do—and I include us in this category—is knowing what your audience wants by asking them. And asking them frequently," shares Elena Takaki, director of professional development and conservation education at the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. While knowing your audience is always important, the current moment makes that even more difficult. "One of the challenges is that I think we're at an inflection point somewhere along this curve of online learning, blended learning, and in-person learning, and we don't know what we want just yet," observes Takaki. "We're just starting to go back to in-person things, and it's feeling good, but it does take more time, and the schedule isn't as flexible. So the jury is still out. For me and the nonprofits that I manage right now, the importance is flexibility for our audience and giving them options."

If travel (because of cost or time away from work and home) will be a barrier to participation, then you may design a blended experience that emphasizes online over face-to-face components. If you know your audience is technology-adverse or lacks reliable access to the Internet, you might emphasize the face-to-face piece.

EDUCAUSE, a nonprofit association with a mission to advance higher education through the use of information technology, launched a blended program in the fall of 2022. As with ACUI, equity was among EDUCAUSE's concerns, but in this case they knew the target audience for their Executive Leaders Academy attends the EDUCAUSE annual conference at a much higher rate than other professional levels. "The annual meeting is essentially a three-day event," says Veronica Diaz, senior director of professional learning and development. "So we tacked on essentially two full days in front of that (a half day, a full day, and then a half day), and we bundled in the conference registration fee. So, for one flat fee, they get the seven-month program, as well as the annual conference."

Given the plethora of options for sequence, timing, emphasis, and personalization when designing blended learning, it's important to keep objectives and audience in mind so your decisions are grounded in what is likely to be both practical and effective.

### **CAPACITY CONSIDERATIONS**

Should your learning business decide to try blended learning or delve deeper, there are implications for your technology and human resources.



Having a single online destination where learners can go to see where they are in the process and access materials can be essential. Look for technology that can support both online and offline modes of learning. Some learning platforms are geared to the delivery of self-paced e-learning. For blended learning, those platforms may not be adequate. Look for technology platforms that can manage both online and offline offerings—and offerings that combine both modalities.

EDUCAUSE created a home for its Executive Leaders Academy in its learning management system. The program begins with three weeks of online activities that help learners get acquainted with the program and the faculty; engage in self-analysis, reflection, and pre-work; and prepare for the in-person components, which happen before and during the EDUCAUSE annual conference. “The entire experience is inside a custom-developed shell for them,” says Diaz. “All of the resources, the schedule, everything that they need is in one place.”

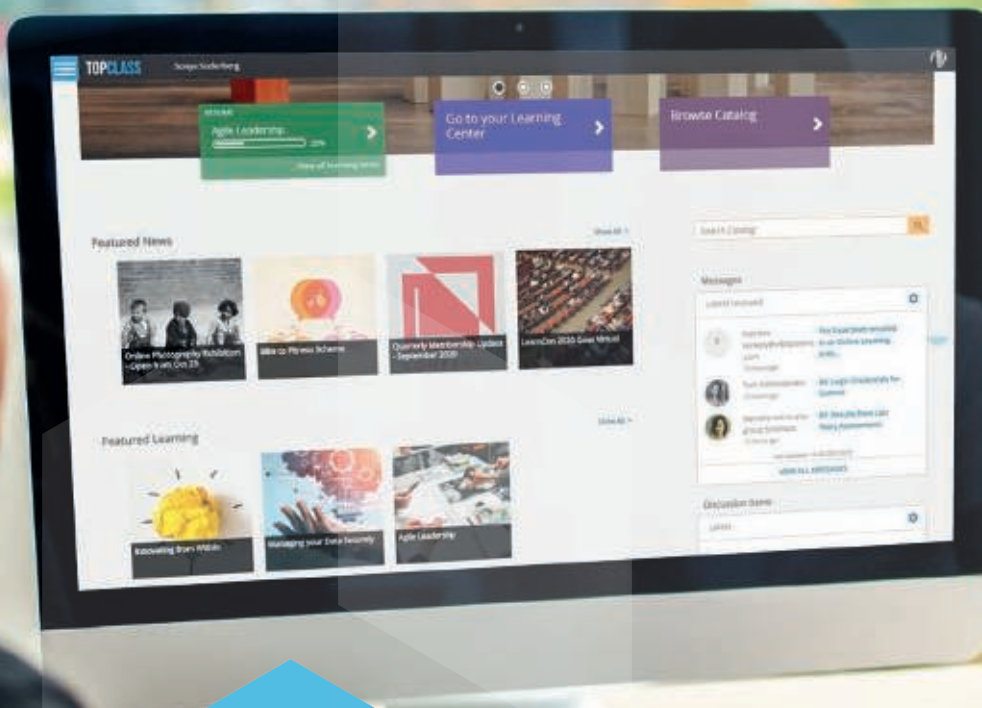
Developing blended learning requires having a team that understands both the online and offline modalities of learning. That may mean hiring, outsourcing, and/or providing learning and development options to expand your team’s wheelhouse.

### MOVING FORWARD

When exploring what you might do with blended learning, especially if you’re trying it for the first time, remember that you can keep the complexity low. A simple front or back flip where you provide some online content before or after an in-person learning event, like an annual conference, can be a great place to start.

Also keep in mind that you can iterate and evolve. The move to blended learning might even happen organically rather than being planned from the outset. “It’s okay if blended learning happens more organically,” asserts Lisa Cohen. Cohen, director of education and professional development at the Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS), has introduced blended learning programs at multiple organizations and is currently involved in a blended program at SVS that aims to accelerate the growth of vascular surgeon leaders. “In some cases you may think that you’re going to provide a live Webinar, and that’s that. But you can add in blended learning to all kinds of formats of education. You’re going to have a workshop, and then you’re going to provide some pre-content or some post-content that is enduring. It can be small steps. It doesn’t have to be comprehensive and planned out.”

Given the potential benefits to both learners and learning businesses, we believe there’s value in every learning business considering the role of blended learning in its portfolio of offerings. ►◀



# Transform Learning Increase Revenue Drive Growth

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TopClass LMS by WBT Systems provides the tools for you to become the preferred education provider in your market, delivering value to learners at every stage of their working life. We believe in truly understanding your challenges and partnering with you to ensure success. Our award-winning learning system delivers impactful professional development experiences for association education and certification programs; to transform the learning experience, increase non-dues revenue, and drive growth in membership engagement.

## Blended Learning Can Help with Efficacy, Relevance, and Diversity

by Michelle Brien, VP of Marketing and Product Strategy, WBT Systems

Learning in a post-COVID world provides a perhaps once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experiment with new ideas—ideas that could turn into programs that position you, your learning business, and your learners for future success.

Blended learning isn't a new concept, but, as outlined in this briefing, it has new relevance and creates new opportunities for learning businesses to transform the learning experience for learners and drive the growth of their education and certification programs.



Several [reports examining the impact of the pandemic](#) on associations showed that many experienced a decline in membership and reduction in budgets and revenue. However, associations that had an innovation mindset and had invested in learning technologies (such as learning management systems, virtual conference platforms, or Webinar platforms) prior to the pandemic or were early adopters during the first months were less affected and better positioned for the accelerated move to online learning and remote working.

Many of these forward-thinking organizations experienced [huge growth in attendance](#) at their virtual learning events and conferences, reaching a higher number of younger professionals and more women, working parents, people of color, and national or, in some cases, international audiences. These new voices highlighted the fact that the audience for continuing education isn't a homogenized group. They have a diverse mix of preferences, abilities, interests, and needs, so you should offer a diverse mix of learning experiences that appeal to all segments of your target audience.

Blended learning could provide the best of both worlds and appeal to the unmet needs of your different target audiences. Learners could go through coursework at their own pace online before meeting in person for a seminar or workshop at your annual conference. After the event, they could do follow-up coursework or practice recall with a quiz or assessment. In-person events offer opportunities to facilitate a deeper understanding through collaboration and social learning such as study groups, group discussions, and group activities and projects. Time isn't wasted on transferring knowledge—that can be done on the learner's own time, allowing in-person session time to be devoted to strengthening skills, discussing challenges, solving problems, and putting knowledge into context. A blended approach can also facilitate [spaced learning](#) and [retrieval practice](#) to help learners retain knowledge and deepen their understanding. Finding the right balance or *blend* between online and in-person elements will help learning businesses

to retain those learners who previously were not registering for in-person-only programs and provide a more inclusive learning experience for all involved.

One of our clients, NIGP: The Institute for Public Procurement, undertook a project to [restructure their education programs](#) to better meet the needs of professionals in their industry. NIGP surveyed their members, who told them they wanted choices and flexibility for lifelong learning to help them progress in their careers and earn recognition for the training they completed.

NIGP created competency-based learning and credentialing pathways. They did extensive market research and built a framework of standards—with each competency as its own self-contained learning module. Content is delivered in three ways to make it more accessible to learners. Formerly face-to-face sessions involved upwards of 40 learners in a one-day session. Now class sizes are restricted to 15, whether the learner attends the one-day session in person, signs up for 2.5-hour sessions with a virtual instructor over a two-week period, or chooses the self-paced online learning format. To standardize the experience regardless of the delivery method, all classes use the same content resources, and all learners have access to discussion forums and printable resources.

**Learning in a post-COVID world provides a perhaps once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experiment with new ideas.**

Since all formats include an online element, the option that includes an in-person one-day seminar is an ideal example of blended learning. Learners attend the seminar and then are enrolled in an online discussion forum to allow them to continue conversations with their class peers and in an online learning activity, which allows them to access printable resources, practice retrieval by reviewing the materials, and be assessed on the knowledge gained from the in-person seminar.

The blended learning program allows those who can and wish to attend in-person to do so, and these learners benefit from the deeper interactions with the instructor and their peers the reduced class sizes make possible while the extended online offerings also enable NIGP to reach and serve a more diverse audience of professionals in their industry. Across all channels, NIGP is able to provide learners a standardized, more supportive, and more rewarding learning experience.

By strategically planning their in-person training in a blended format with supporting resources and assessments online via their learning management system, NIGP was better able to adapt to the pandemic as their courses could be offered virtually or self-paced online, and the reduced class sizes and standardized content also made it easier to return to in-person training. The tracking of attendance (at in-person, virtual, and online courses), completion, and continuing education credits is automated by their LMS, and this data is shared with their association management system automatically, further reducing administration time and effort for NIGP's staff. NIGP has increased their non-dues revenues by reducing the logistical costs and staff time required to manage a lower number of in-person events while also increasing their overall capacity to offer training and certification programs.



One of the silver linings of the pandemic is the growing number of leaders and professionals who are more willing to experiment with new ideas and approaches to learning. Learning businesses have discovered new ways to bring high-quality education, conversations, and connections to learners, members, attendees, and customers wherever they are in the world. Incorporating blended learning offerings into education and certification programs will enable your organization to continue to provide relevant, effective education and value to a larger and more diverse audience of lifelong learners in your industry. ▶▶

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## LMS by WBT Systems

### About WBT Systems *sponsor of this executive briefing*

TopClass LMS by WBT Systems provides the tools for you to become the preferred continuing education provider in your market, delivering value to learners at every stage of their working life. Our award-winning learning system enables delivery of impactful experiences for continuing education, professional development, and certification programs. Our focus is to support learning businesses in using integrated learning technology to gain greater understanding of learners' needs and behaviors and in applying insights from training and purchase history to enhance engagement, to aid recruitment and retention, and to create and grow non-dues revenue streams.

At WBT Systems, we regularly incorporate customer feedback into our development roadmap as we continuously improve the features of TopClass LMS. As your technology partner, we're ready to listen, share our experience, and help you provide the best learning experience possible. Clients praise our team's responsiveness and knowledge. We will work with you to truly understand your preferences, needs, and challenges to ensure that your experience with TopClass LMS is as easy and problem-free as possible—from the first demo, through implementation, to the continuing development and growth of your education offerings and certification programs.

In 2021, WBT Systems was acquired by Advanced Solutions International (ASI), a leading global provider of subscription (SaaS) products and related programs and services. The acquisition reinforced the position of both companies as strategic partners for associations, continuing education providers, and other learning businesses.

Learn more about WBT Systems at [www.wbt systems.com](http://www.wbt systems.com). ▶▶

## About Leading Learning *publisher of this executive briefing*

Leading Learning ([www.leadinglearning.com](http://www.leadinglearning.com)) provides a range of resources to help learning business professionals excel in the global market for lifelong learning, continuing education, and professional development.

Leading Learning resources include a podcast, Webinars, an e-newsletter, publications such as this executive briefing, and more. The goals for Leading Learning are to do the following:



- Raise awareness of the third sector of education and the critical role that learning businesses play in it.
- Help learning businesses increase the reach, revenue, and impact of their offerings.
- Support individual learning professionals in achieving high levels of performance in their work.

An initiative of Tagoras ([www.tagoras.com](http://www.tagoras.com)), Leading Learning was co-founded by Jeff Cobb and Celisa Steele, who have each been



working in the business of lifelong learning since the 1990s. They have worked for multiple learning technology companies and have built and sold a learning technology and online course production company of their own. For more than a decade (through Tagoras), they have consulted with a wide range of learning businesses to help them improve their performance. Last, but certainly not least, they are in the learning business themselves. ▶▶

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