



Fireman's Fund Teams With Lasselle-Ramsay to Build E-Learning

Fireman's Fund Insurance Company determined that electronic learning was essential for the company's survival, but it had no standardized process for implementing it. Its instructional designers had no experience with e-learning, and the first deadline in its development schedule was about to pass without any modules completed.

"We were paying out more in claims than we were receiving from premiums sold," explains Rowell Matt, Director of Instructional Design & Development in the Fireman's Fund Organizational Capability Department. Thus improving underwriters' skills was critical to the company's turnaround strategy. To get them up to speed quickly and reduce costs, the company wanted to create an underwriting curriculum that could be delivered through e-learning.

A factor affecting the development of an e-learning curriculum was a reorganization in January 2002. Four divisional training organizations – underwriting, claims, IT, and management development – had been combined into one corporate services department. "We suddenly had skill sets ranging from people who had never developed a course to people with extensive knowledge of curriculum development," recalls Matt, "and none of them had any experience in e-learning."

The challenge was increased because Fireman's Fund executives had been promised that e-learning materials for underwriters would be available in six months. It was the beginning of June, the deadline was 30 days away, and the department had nothing to show for its efforts. That's when Matt began looking for a vendor to help out.

"We needed to build an e-learning curriculum that would provide consistent and accurate information to underwriters around the country," says Matt. "We needed a standardized process for building e-learning materials. And we needed someone to coach our subject matter experts on how to develop e-learning courses."

A Hands-On Approach

Lasselle-Ramsay was asked to assess the situation. Their first recommendation was to separate the writing and programming of e-learning modules. "We assigned the programming to other resources," recalls Matt. "That way our team only had to focus on learning instructional design from an e-learning perspective."

The next step was developing e-learning standards and tools. To get a module ready by the end of June, Lasselle-Ramsay helped Fireman's Fund instructional designers create a minimal set of basic standards – each module would have a title page, the next page would be an introduction, and so on. It wasn't much more than a style guide, but it was a good first step toward meeting the rapidly approaching deadline. Tools developed included templates for module outlines and storyboards, and interaction models to engage users, such as pop-up windows and quizzes.

What They Said:

"Lasselle-Ramsay is a major strategic partner for our organization," said Rowell Matt.



After the first module was finished, Lasselle-Ramsay consultants and Fireman's Fund personnel collaborated on developing a more comprehensive set of standards. "Now we've got a 100-page document that describes every aspect of the methodology," says Matt. "From outline to storyboard to review and finalization. And not just for modules in underwriting. We made the standards broad enough to apply to any subject areas worked on in the future. We can reuse all our process maps and interaction models so we don't have to go through that pain over and over again. In fact, the standards are now being applied to develop e-learning modules for other groups in organizational capability."

"The Lasselle-Ramsay consultants essentially coached our instructional designers in e-Learning 101," says Matt. "How to develop a storyboard. How to include a sufficient level of interactivity. How to teach concepts visually as opposed to text." And, they delivered much more than information. "They did a great job of building confidence in our instructional designers," explains Matt. "They showed them how to do it and that they could do it!" Then, Lasselle-Ramsay also helped Fireman's Fund develop a curriculum plan for its underwriting area and managed development of the e-learning courses.

Mission Accomplished

So how did Lasselle-Ramsay do in terms of meeting the Fireman's Fund goals? "Absolutely fantastic," says Matt. "We got the first course out the door and have gone on to develop seven others, as well as 11 curriculum maps for underwriting." The feedback from users is positive as well. "Our clients like the e-learning we built better than the ones commercially available," states Matt.

"Lasselle-Ramsay has been instrumental in mapping our work processes," notes Matt. In fact, the e-learning initiative with underwriting was so successful that Fireman's Fund is now working on the claims area. "Same drill," says Matt. "Lasselle-Ramsay is coaching a whole new group of instructional designers."

"Now we don't have to start from scratch," observes Matt. "We expect course development in claims to go much faster." He estimates four times faster. And that pace is likely to improve as development continues. The team is currently developing over 10 hours of e-learning with plans to continue development through 2003.



A Collaborative Relationship

If you walk into the instructional design area of Fireman's Fund today, you wouldn't know who is from Fireman's Fund and who is from Lasselle-Ramsay. "The team is completely blended," observes Matt. "All the work is done collaboratively."

And that's not all that impresses him about their working relationship. "They constantly discuss how the e-learning operation will run after they leave," says Matt. "Anyone who has worked with consultants knows this is astonishing – consultants who plan their exit rather than trying to scrounge up more work!" But it really doesn't surprise him. "The whole Lasselle-Ramsay philosophy is to leave clients with the skills and knowledge to sustain themselves."

Matt also appreciates that they accept his decisions. "They give me options and support my decision even if they disagree with it," explains Matt. "They're always onboard, sleeves rolled up, ready to help." And unlike his experience with other consultants over the years, Matt doesn't receive any billing surprises from Lasselle-Ramsay. "We talk about cost at least once a month," he explains. "So I always know exactly where I stand."

It sounds like Lasselle-Ramsay is really part of the team. "That's how I view them," says Matt. "They're a major strategic partner for our organization." And that's how it should be.