

Tuca Informática

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1. Facts about the institution

Name of institution	Tuca Informática
URL of institution	Under construction
Country	Spain
Number of Employees	3
Revenue in 2005	-
Experience with e-learning since	2005
Business sector	Sale of and advice on computer products
Target group/participants in e-learning	Intermediate command
Content	Business English
Form	e-learning
People interviewed	M ^a Mercedes Morales

2. How the institution used e-learning

2.1. The courses

Tuca Informática is a small retail company selling computer products (both hardware and software) and providing computer advisory services.

Mrs. Morales became aware of e-learning English courses for retail sector workers subsidised by *Fundación Tripartita para la Formación en el Empleo* (Foundation for the Vocational Training) (www.fundaciontripartita.org) and *Fondo Social Europeo* (European Social Fund), these organisations promote the Spanish policies on Lifelong learning. This training is made up in a Project financed to *Confederación Española de Comercio* and developed by *Confederación de Comercio de Cataluña* and, given that she has little time available for training and that English is an indispensable tool for her work, she took advantage of this opportunity to broaden and bolster her knowledge of the language.

Given that she works in the ICT sector, she had no worries about this form of learning. Nevertheless, she is of the opinion that e-learning is not the most appropriate method for learning completely unfamiliar subjects, although it is very useful for broadening and updating already-acquired knowledge.

The targets of the course are aimed at the knowledge of grammar, phonetics and vocabulary necessities to acquire an advanced knowledge enabling fluent conversations about several subjects regarding professional and familiar branches.

She has now completed two e-learning English courses and does not rule out doing more.

2.2. Number of employees involved

One manager

2.3. E-learning platform and technology issues

Editrain (www.editrain.com) supplies the training platform and takes charge of managing the course. Editrain is a company specialising in consulting and training, with more than 10 years' experience in the field. Made up of highly-specialised professionals, it carries

on its activities in Spain, Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. It participates in European Commission meetings on “life-long learning” and has developed training consultancies in countries such as Russia, Hungary, Latvia, the Ukraine and Brazil. It has participated in numerous European technology and training-related courses. It is a EFQM quality-certified company.

To do the course, users require a PC with audio output and a microphone for oral responses and pronunciation exercises. No special software is required, only the Internet Explorer browser.



Figure 1. Screenshot of the first page of the Editrain *Aula Virtual*

2.4. Course development

The entire course was online, with no face-to-face sessions. To carry out the course, users connect to the Editrain web site and access the Virtual Classroom with the user name and password with which they are provided.

Editrain provided her with a “user’s manual” which described the methods, a quick-start guide and how to access the course for the first time. There was also an immediate-response telephone hotline.

Before starting the course she took an on line “preliminary exam” to determine the level of her training course. The level she was assigned was in accordance with her knowledge.

Each course consists of didactic units. Every didactic unit contents the following activities to be carried out: Introduction, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing and Review.

Every didactic unit has to be worked out by using multimedia tools: video, audio, oral role-playing exercises and exercises carried out on the web site which are corrected automatically by the system.

Other complementary exercises are also included that can be downloaded onto the computer. These have a theoretical part, with the remainder applying said theory and the concepts seen on the web site.

Lastly, there are exercises in xls format, making them easily manageable by users, and which comprise the continuous assessment of the student by the teachers. These exercises allow for voice recording and contain pop-up fields for choosing options. Once

carried out, she sent them to the teacher, who returned them within 2 or 3 days with a small commentary.

The lessons were fun and the text understandable, but she feels that this type of training is more useful for reinforcing knowledge, increasing vocabulary and understating of verbs and grammatical structures rather than learning a new subject from scratch.

The course had a total duration of 72 hours and had to be completed in one month and a half. The time indicated for each lesson was 1 hour. If she did them without interruption, she required 45 – 50 minutes. On occasion, she had to interrupt her training to deal with other matters, and then she could take 90 minutes to complete the lesson. The time limit contemplated by the platform was not based on hours, but rather from the start to finish dates.

At the end of each lesson there was a knowledge assessment test and there was a final test at the end of the course (as noted above, in xls format).

She felt that the one month and a half time limit for the course was short. If more time had been made available, she would have revised more and could have done more complementary exercises.

The platform had a forum to connect with other students, but she never used it.

2.5. Course administration

The registration process was very straightforward. They sent her the registration application with information on the documentation required for carrying out the course. With the user name and password they supplied her, she accessed the course without any problem.

3. Effects and outcomes of e-learning activities

3.1. Completion rates

She completed the 2 courses she followed.

3.2. Satisfaction

The course met her expectations. In light of the effort made and the level of knowledge obtained, the course was satisfactory. She does not rule out following other courses.

4. Challenges and barriers

The period established for the fulfilment of the course could turn into a barrier doing difficult the carrying out of the complementary and reinforcement exercises as well as the other training tools of the web.

Using new technologies as an usual tool makes the carrying out of online courses easier. Nevertheless, there are still lots of small trading companies without -or with not many- technological competences.

The participant establishes one's own apprenticeship pace and the teacher / form master does a more individual control of the student.

5. Success factors

This learning method is satisfactory because it can be carried out conveniently, without having to travel and taking advantage of odd moments during the day. Another success

factor was that she had prior knowledge of English and wished to reinforce and broaden this.

Motivation is a key element in course satisfaction: English is a basic tool of the computer retail sector, in that, if there is any technical or commercial issue, they communicate with the manufacturers in English through the manufacturer's web site, e-mail, by phone, etc.

Another positive factor was that the course was completely subsidised.

6. E-learning investments, developmental costs and operational costs

The course was completely subsidised and hence free of charge to the student.