A Case Study of General Electric’s Multimedia Training Systems

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General Electric Aerospace, one of 15 corporate divisions, implemented a series of multimedia training systems in response to the need for employee awareness and understanding of mission-critical compliance requirements for dealing with the US Government. Although employees were satisfied with the traditional seminar approach to training, it was recognized that there was a need to deliver information better in order to increase retention, promote better use of information, and foster the development of more capable employees. In the interest of keeping training refreshed, new ways to deliver information were sought. This case discusses the initiation of the multimedia systems, the processes and considerations for developing and maintaining such systems, and GE’s secrets for success in the on-going application of multimedia technology to training.

In 1985, a more formalized, structured approach to internal training on how to transact business with the US Government was initiated. This approach entailed the use of a series of standard seminars, one for each of 19 modules of the compliance training curriculum, with topics ranging from “Truth in Negotiations” to “New Employee Orientation” and “Kickbacks & ‘Gratuities.” The seminars were administered with a corporate trainer communicating compliance issues, supported by a slide presentation and reinforced through written materials distributed to participants in notebook form.

The content and materials for the seminars were developed with the input of a subject-area expert, an employee whose area of responsibility encompassed the particular compliance module. Five of the 19 seminars were first developed and internal corporate trainers were themselves trained to deliver the first five. The schedule
for seminars was formulated with the determination of who should attend which seminars dependent on the employee’s area of responsibility.

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Investigating Multimedia Technology

In December 1989, the Vice President of Finance & Information Technology, Robert W. Tieken, requested the Manager of Operations and Training, John Townsend, to look into applying multimedia technology to compliance training. John Townsend, with the MIS Department serving as consultants, investigated the state of multimedia technology in the marketplace. Multimedia technology incorporates a combination of computer hardware, software, and other devices, such as a video monitor, optical disc system, or stereo system, to produce a multi-sensory presentation. This combination of technology provides a powerful interactive interface enabling an area of knowledge to be more fully communicated. In addition to the traditional text and graphics-based interface, the user is able to selectively see, with pictures, full-motion video, or animation; and hear, with stereo sound, voice recordings, or music, information and explanations which are difficult to conceptualize from mere text alone (Sipior and Garrity, 1991).
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