

# How e-learning, developed using Seminar Author, improved performance and cut costs at the London Fire Brigade



The vital role the London Fire Brigade (LFB) plays was brought into sharp focus recently when the Brigade's 999 control officers answered 2,168 calls in a 24-hour period at the beginning of August 2011 and attended over 100 fires during the four-day period of unrest in the capital.

Each of these incidents will be fully reported and learning points and observations recorded to help prevention or to improve the quality of response in future. Training needs will be assessed and incorporated into procedures. Phil Evans, Head of e-learning at London Fire Brigade, explains:

"Maintaining a motivated and highly professional fire fighting force requires a continuous training programme. However, this must be balanced with the need to maximise availability of firefighters ready and able to respond to incidents."

To address this need for balance, the LFB training support and performance team has introduced a blended training programme including e-learning and classroom training. It has not only managed to improve the consistency and quality of its training, but has also increased the availability of frontline staff, and saves the force £700,000 each year.

Prior to the introduction of the computer-based training, a quarterly printed news bulletin, entitled *Operational News*, was

distributed to all the stations with a set of overhead projector foils for use by watch managers. However, the LFB has over 100 stations based across the capital with four watches at each station, thus creating the potential for over 450 different versions of training for the same subject.

A move to e-learning has enabled the training to be embedded within the organisation. It is now possible for the training team to evaluate the training needs and rapidly develop a new module to address this or update existing materials in order to communicate the recommendations across the LFB.

Courses are hosted online and made accessible to all staff, so that the management board can be assured that the latest information is always available. As each learner studies the new module, their individual training record is dynamically updated. In this way the LFB can disseminate safety and mission-critical information to 5,000 staff within 12 weeks.

E-learning was introduced two years ago, with the Seminar authoring tool from Information Transfer selected as an all-round solution, allowing the LFB to include line drawings, animations and videos to make the resources highly visual.

Since the introduction of Seminar, the LFB has produced 75 modules in just two years.

E-learning has become the core of a blended strategy incorporating both individual computer-based training and group classroom training.

A major cost saving has been achieved by adopting a blended approach to the supervisory management course, which is completed by all watch managers and crew managers selected for promotion.

Traditionally, this has been delivered through three weeks of classroom training and one week at the Fire Services College. But removing firefighters from the station for four weeks has a major impact on operational efficiency. Relief staff may be required to cover their jobs and there is a risk that a fire engine might not be able to respond because of a shortage of crew.

Candidates now complete an e-learning training programme at their own speed before the classroom training. This accelerated learning means that candidates have already covered much of the course material and the trainer can focus on more advanced training. The learner gets greater value from the classroom session, which has improved the quality of the training.

Additionally, reducing the classroom time for each course has improved availability of frontline staff as employees can now study in half-hour slots instead of taking five days out of the station.

Introducing e-learning has helped the LFB to improve training delivered across the brigade while lowering the cost.