

## Retailers Making A Difference Through E-Learning

**:: By Paulo Goelzer, Ph.D.**

I would guess that you and most of your associates have received some kind of training. Perhaps the format was an initial dialogue, a classroom session or mentoring. My second guess is that you have also seen people thrown into a new position in a “sink-or-swim” mode.

Though the latter situation still happens rather frequently in an industry with high turnovers, savvy business leaders know better. They understand that acquiring skill and knowledge in an organized fashion ends up costing less. That’s why the average number of hours of formal learning per employee increased from 35 to 41 hours in the last year. Today, training investments for large organizations are averaging \$1,424 per employee, or 2.2 percent of payroll.

Research shows that adding an e-learning component to a store’s job training, mentoring or instructor-led class can significantly improve the store’s experiential training and employee performance. IGA retailers are able to use blended training because the

technology element, which is both costly and difficult to develop, is available to our stores through the IGA Coca-Cola Institute’s online training program.

IGA supermarkets that take advantage of the e-learning program are investing in training in sync with the identified best practices of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). According to ASTD, many organizations with high-performing individuals are able to demonstrate that e-learning technology has produced clear cost savings and efficiency gains. Data from research shows steady growth of e-learning over the past eight years. This trend is mirrored by e-learning through the IGA Coca-Cola Institute, which has had phenomenal growth over the past four years, including a 32 percent usage increase in 2006.

With that, I would like to offer my congratulations to the top 10 IGA Institute achievement award winners for their efforts to support and promote people development through the use of Web-based learning. As these winners

have proven, investing in people pays off in far more than just productivity; it increases job satisfaction and retention while building a more positive work culture. These stores have leaders who understand how to use training to drive business results. Quite simply, they recognize that a highly trained work force improves performance.

### Meet the Top Users

#### NAKUL PATEL, Owner

Nakul Patel, owner for the past eight years of Mt. Plymouth IGA Express in Mount Plymouth, Fla., moved



to the United States from England. His present store is 5,500 square feet, and he plans to add a 2,800-square-foot pharmacy across the street to

complement his supermarket. Patel explains, “We don’t employ people

### Top 10 Users of IGA Coca-Cola Institute's Online Certification Program

Rank	Store Name	City, State, Zip Code	Owner/Manager	Courses per Employee
1	Mt. Plymouth IGA Express	Mount Plymouth, FL 32776	Nakul Patel	3.2
2	Foothills IGA Market	Marble Hill, GA 30148	Jeff Downing	1.5
3	Payless IGA #3	Copperopolis, CA 95228	Tammy Andrada	1.2
4	Weber's IGA Food & Drug	Sedona, AZ 86351	Lisa Grondin	0.98
5	Stein's IGA #1	Kellogg, ID 83837	Dwight Hwoeck	0.92
6	Stein's IGA Troy #5	Troy, MT 59935	Jim Baillie	0.81
7	Little Apple Market #9124	Allentown, PA 18102	Jan Davie	0.7
8	Stein's IGA #2	Osburn, ID 83849	Joe Margason	0.68
9	Quality Foods IGA	Scofield, WI 54476	Bill Thauer	0.64
10	Stein's IGA Plus #3	Rathrdum, ID 83858	Jim Stein	0.53

who don't take the courses. Every employee must do the welcome course and one course related to the job they are applying for, and pass a drug and background check before we make an offer for employment. This attracts a better-quality employee. After a week or so on the job, we surprise them with a \$25 certificate."

He feels that the courses motivate employees, assist them with basic skills and improve their self-worth. "Our employee turnover has stopped," says Patel.

Employees can take the courses at home, at a friend's house or at the library. He emphasizes to other retailers, "This system provides consistent training, which helps independents become more successful in a very competitive retail market."

Mt. Plymouth IGA Express is located about 20 miles northwest of Orlando, Fla., and is served by Ira Higdon Grocery.

### SEAN CLEVERSEY, Manager

Cleversey is a 27-year-old night manager at Mt. Plymouth IGA. He has been at this store for 2 1/2 years and



represents a new generation of managers. He completed 14 courses through the IGA Coca-Cola e-learning program to receive most of his formal training in

the grocery industry. Cleversey notes that courses specific to a department such as the deli, produce and bakery were helpful to better understand the operations of the whole store. Besides setting the example, he encourages others to take these classes in addition to on-the-job training. "They think they know what is going on, but there is more to it than they realize," he says. "The IGA Coca-Cola online program gives us a framework to train our people."

### JEFF DOWNING, Owner


Jeff Downing, owner of Foothills IGA Market, has more than 40 years of experience in the grocery industry as a



past southern regional vice president for A&P and Grand Union. Downing says the online courses are mandatory for new hires, and associates take classes during

their paid time. Foothills IGA has a training center with three computers, one of which is exclusively dedicated to online training. Sylvia Smith is in charge of the training and dedicates one day a week to

prepare students for learning activities. As an experienced manager, Downing researched online courses before he knew of the IGA Coca-Cola Institute's program. "I'm delighted to have the e-learning program; I can't say enough good things about it," he says. "Besides making people more professional, it is also a morale booster, as our employees more clearly understand their responsibilities to our customers, our company and their fellow associates."

Foothills IGA, a 21,000-square-foot supermarket, employs 45 associates and is located in Marble Hill, Ga., about 70 miles from Atlanta. MDI is the store's supplier. 

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## E-Learning Best Practices

The online course should be blended with on-the-job training, mentoring, shadowing or classroom training. The blending of methods is much more effective than a single method.

### Tips to make training more effective:

- Have a computer dedicated to online training.
- Make the training part of new-employee orientation.
- Make certification mandatory (or a condition for employment) for new employees, as well as for new positions.
- Designate someone to be responsible for training and setting up new students.
- Have managers take the online manager's classes.
- Recognize the manager or supervisor who has trained the most people in a department.
- Have a list of course suggestions, such as customer service and professionalism classes for entry-level employees as well as a course linked to the employee's position.
- Inform your team that online courses are a part of the new 5-Star Assessment Program.
- Cross-train to promote personal advancement.

### Ways to encourage training at your store:

- Give a raise after completion of training, such as an additional 25 cents an hour for entry-level new hires.
- Make course certification diplomas part of annual reviews.
- Display a list of employees who have completed the training for the month, quarter or year. (The IGA Coca-Cola Institute system allows managers to print a list of all students along with the courses they have completed.)
- Recognize students or top students with any of the following:
  - A picture or diploma on a bulletin board
  - A letter of recognition
  - Gift certificates for movies, dinners or fuel discounts; also store gift certificates or coupons
  - Lottery tickets
  - Recognition at team meetings
  - Plaques, pens or polo shirts
  - On-the-spot praise
  - A leadership position or additional responsibility
  - An outside seminar, such as the IGA Coca-Cola Institute's Supermarket Management Class
  - An article highlighting the employee's achievement in a newsletter or local newspaper