



- [Solutions](#)
- [Products](#)
- [Training & Learning](#)
- [Support & Services](#)
- [Corporate](#)
- [Communities](#)

Feature Article: Delivering Live, Hands-On Training to the Desktop

[Publications and Newsletters](#)

Be Current

Be Current
A Bentley Magazine for AEC and Geospatial Professionals

Be Current

[Read more from the current issue](#)

Bentley's distance learning offers convenient, cost-effective professional development that lets users expand their skills without leaving their offices

There is no doubt that the right training at the right time for the right team members can yield big payoffs for infrastructure firms in terms of higher productivity, more creativity, and increased contributions from their staffs. But professional development often presents these organizations with a Catch-22.

When times are good and the projects are rolling in, team members have a hard time making the time to attend the training that will help them become more efficient, reduce design errors, and offer more value in the solutions they present to their clients. When the economy slows and design teams find themselves with more downtime, however, organizations re-evaluate their current levels of training.

Reductions to gain some immediate cost savings could prove costlier in the long run, however. In fact, workforce development experts advise that companies maintain or even increase their investments in their staffs when times are tough. Existing employees' skills become even more important when professionals have to find creative ways to do more with less, they say.



Strike a balance with distance learning

Whether infrastructure firms are experiencing good times or challenging ones, one convenient, cost-effective option for professional development is live, instructor-led distance learning over the web. [Distance learning](#) courses from Bentley are scheduled regularly, and students attend sessions from their home or office computers. While the students and instructor are separated physically, they interact and collaborate in real time in a virtual classroom with the aid of technology. It eliminates all costly, productivity-sapping travel.

Staff from Traffic Planning and Design (TPD), a consulting engineering firm specializing in transportation engineering and related environmental and construction services, regularly participate in Bentley distance learning courses. Todd Lanphear, the firm's CADD manager, said, "Besides the more obvious savings in travel time and costs, the ability to attend hands-on distance learning classes via the web allows TPD to balance project workloads more efficiently while minimizing lost productivity normally associated with training. Distance learning classes also align with TPD's green initiatives by reducing our carbon footprint on the earth as well as our goal to improve employee's work/life balance by not pulling them away from their families in order to attend training."

Another advantage of distance learning is that it can address an immediate learning need much more quickly than an in-person course can – just register for the next available session. The courseware is the same hands-on material being taught in the classroom so there is no need to see if or when a class may be scheduled in nearby location. Since co-workers can all attend the same course from multiple offices, it can also be used to get groups of employees – such as managers or new hires – up to speed quickly.

“We use the distance learning options as a way to provide training when specific courses are not available locally or are not available in the required time frame,” said Michael Dawson, CADD systems administrator at Halff Associates, which offers engineering, architecture, planning, interior design, landscape architecture, environmental, right of way, and surveying services.

Dynamic learning environment

Many forms of distance learning have been around for several years now, but live instruction with application sharing has really only taken off in the last few years thanks to the widespread adoption of new Internet technologies. Peter Huftalen, vice president of [Bentley Institute](#), explained, “We are powered by a dynamic combination of live audio and cutting-edge networking technology. Our virtual classroom experience intertwines the expected classroom elements with distance learning tools to provide a rich interactive learning environment for meaningful collaboration among the participants. It has really matured to the point where distance learning is a cost-effective alternative to classroom learning.”

The instructor can communicate with the class in a variety of ways, including live audio via voice over IP, instant messaging and chat, polling, and the ability to raise a virtual hand. There is a whiteboard and private breakout rooms as well.

Application sharing allows both the instructor and the students to share work, demonstrate problems, and provide feedback. When learning how to operate software applications, technology enables students to toggle between the lesson and the application, so they can immediately apply what’s been learned. If assistance is needed or there is a question, it feels as though the instructor is right there looking at the students’ work.

Dewberry CAD Application Specialist Tom Felcone, a Bentley software user who specializes in planning, design, and program management, noted, “We’ve conducted Bentley distance learning from our office, and it’s great. We were able to have several people together, and they could ask questions and participate. The only difference was you couldn’t see the instructor, but he could take control of our computers and look over people’s shoulders just like he was in the class. It’s a big benefit.”

According to the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA), research studies have consistently found that distance learning programs report similar effectiveness results to traditional classroom instruction methods. In addition, these studies often point out that student attitudes about distance learning are generally more positive. This is especially true for younger workers who are more familiar with doing things online and in a collaborative way.

USDLA also says that companies in many industries now use distance learning for all aspects of training, and many major corporations save millions of dollars each year using distance learning to train employees more effectively and efficiently than with conventional methods.

The bottom line is distance learning can save all infrastructure firms money. While the registration fee for a distance learning course may be comparable to that of a classroom course, it cuts out travel, hotels, and meals – typically 50 percent or more of the total cost of providing training.

Gain knowledge and experience

The infrastructure workforce can participate in high-quality distance learning direct from Bentley to expand their skills, increase productivity, and stay competitive with their peers all while spending less time away from work and home. The company offers more than 225 courses with live instruction from Bentley knowledge experts. More than 300 hours of product training are offered around the world on a weekly basis, and hundreds of course dates are scheduled annually. Throughout the courses, expert instructors demonstrate capabilities, problem solve in real time, lead hands-on exercises, provide inside tips, answer specific questions, and share best practices.

The knowledge and experience students gain helps them design more efficiently, reduce mistakes and change orders, and bring projects in on time and within budget. Organizations can market more services, decrease outsourcing, and position themselves as industry leaders using learning units and online transcripts.

Users can register individually for any scheduled distance learning course. A [Bentley LEARN](#) training subscription, which offers organization-wide training for a fixed annual fee based on the size of a business, offers unlimited access to the entire schedule of distance learning courses as well as Bentley’s comprehensive [OnDemand eLearning](#) library of self-paced content.

“The Bentley LEARN training subscription is ideal for organizations that want to provide maximum opportunities for comprehensive training to all team members,” commented Huftalen. Additional offerings enable organizations to deliver distance learning courses exclusively to their teams and/or tailor them to their workflow.

Make the most of every training dollar

According Bersin & Associates, a research firm specializing in corporate learning and development, the biggest driver of impact from learning investments is the development of an “organizational learning culture.” Companies with strong learning cultures often are more adaptable to business and competitive changes.

When subscribing to Bentley LEARN for unlimited access to distance learning, organizations also gain access to all of the courses recommended in any Bentley learning path. Learning paths present infrastructure professionals with online training roadmaps that are ready-made development plans for creating and sustaining a highly efficient workforce.

“Organizations that pair distance learning with learning paths and a Bentley LEARN training subscription are encouraging a culture of excellence for their users,” said Huftalen. “With continuous learning, firms employ effective, well-trained teams that deliver high-quality work and exceptional services. Their returns on their training investments are reflected in the bottom line with increased revenue and improved profitability.”

==

Is Your Organization Ready for Distance Learning?

If you can answer yes to two or more of the following questions, your organization is ready to adopt distance learning and reap the benefits of expanded development opportunities.

- Does your organization train employees in two or more geographically dispersed offices?
- Is it critical that training be distributed quickly and consistently?
- Has the cost of travel and lodging for off-site instruction become too expensive?
- Must you reduce your company's carbon footprint and overall impact on the environment?
- Is time away from projects difficult to schedule?
- Is direct access to Bentley knowledge experts and collaboration with peers critical to achieving your training objectives?

[Read more from the current issue](#)

[Blogs](#) | [Job Opportunities](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Contact Webmaster](#) | [Site Map](#)

© 2009 Bentley Systems, Incorporated | 1-800-BENTLEY or +1-610-458-5000