CASE STUDY

Affinity Health System

SUMTOTAL® CUSTOMER SUCCESS

THE COMPANY

Affinity Health System upgraded to SumTotal System's LMS to meet the needs of time-pressed and geographically dispersed employees

Affinity Health System is a Catholic, mission-oriented healthcare network serving communities in Wisconsin's Fox River Valley and East Central Region. With more than 4,500 employees Affinity unites nearly 200 medical group physicians, 17 clinics, three hospitals, and an insurance plan. With job titles that range from accounting clerk to surgeon, Affinity's employee training needed to accommodate a wide and everchanging set of requirements as well as a geographically dispersed workforce. Based on long-term confidence in the Registrar® product, Affinity selected SumTotal to enable and fast-track a transition to e-learning.

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THE CHALLENGE

Healthcare organizations operate in conditions defined by continuous change. Many factors affect such organizations generally, including discoveries from the worlds of scientific and clinical research, changes in regulations and policies, and new and revised tracking requirements from licensing organizations. And at the core of any healthcare organization are those who actually deliver services: employees.

"A big part of being successful is having effective recruiting, training, and employee development practices," explains Carrie Hankes, Affinity Health System's director of training and development. "We strive to support, develop, and retain our employees to the best of our ability because they are our greatest assets."

Two years ago, with employee training and development clearly established as one of Affinity's competitive advantages, Hankes set out to determine how her division could develop even more effective learning mechanisms. "We needed a new and innovative way to deliver training," Hankes said. "We needed content that was on the cutting edge and challenging." At the same time, Hankes wanted to transform the training and development function into one that would have a positive impact on the organization's bottom line.

Hankes wanted a solution that was cost-effective. In Affinity's case, cost considerations touched on not only the initial investment in the solution, but also the costs of developing, delivering, and tracking training efforts.

With employees spread out geographically and by job function, the challenge to reduce costs loomed significantly. "With a classroom-based approach, employees had to take time away from their jobs to attend the training, and there were often travel costs involved," Hankes said. "Costs kept climbing." In addition to direct financial costs, Hankes began to consider whether the traditional, instructor-led model was one that reached employees when they were best suited to absorb information.

> *"When we chose SumTotal, we were doing more than buying a product and turning a light on," she said. "We've been building an infrastructure and helping our employees develop the skills they need to use technology to its fullest."*
>
> **- Carrie Hanks,**
> Director of Training and Development Affinity Health System

Most important, Hankes needed e-learning technology that was flexible enough to adapt to the individual needs of employees of Affinity. "Our goal was to support employees who wanted to refresh their skills and knowledge when they felt the need," Hankes said. "We needed a flexible and powerful enough solution to bring the classroom to the students."

THE SUMTOTAL SOLUTION

Hankes listed several factors that were crucial in her decision to choose SumTotal over other vendors. Based in part on her experience with SumTotal's earlier product, Registrar®, Hankes was confident in SumTotal's commitment to partnering with customers. “They are eager to hear what their customers are thinking,” she said. “They listen to our suggestions about improvements we'd like to see.

THE RESULTS

Reduced Time and Expense for Course Completion

Hankes has introduced Affinity to e-learning by making courses available to employees on their desktops, where they can access them at their convenience. One is a safety training course mandated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Joint Commission and Accreditation for Hospital Organizations (JCAHO).

Delivered through the traditional classroom approach, the course took 90 minutes to complete. Delivered via the LMS, the course took between 30 and 45 minutes. “All 4,500 employees need to take that training,” Hankes observed. “And we cut the completion time in half.” In addition to saving time, Hankes pointed out that employees no longer have to travel to a central location for the training, which reduces costs even further.

The Flexibility Employees Need to Do Their Best Learning

Hankes noted that one of the chief benefits of delivering training via the LMS is that employees can access learning in an environment, and on a schedule, that works best for them. “In a classroom setting, everyone has to be taught at the same pace and on the same level,” she said. Using the LMS, employees are afforded the flexibility they need to do their best learning. They can go somewhere quiet and focus on the material. This is especially important for employees who work at the bedside. “You never know when the call light is going to go on,” Hankes said. “Employees can stop and start as they need to.”

Improved Accuracy, Increased Efficiency

Hankes said that 70 percent of the training Affinity offers needs to be reported to either managers or regulatory bodies or, in some cases, both. The reporting and tracking tools in the LMS helps to reduce the time and paperwork it takes to monitor Affinity's training efforts. At the same time, it narrows the margin for error and increases accuracy.

Greater Compatibility with Third-Party Vendors

One of the challenges Hankes faced in delivering online learning was that she wanted to offer courses in “chunks” or “vignettes” that last between 10 and 20 minutes. “Employees don't always have eight hours to spend on something, so we needed flexibility in terms of the content we offer,” she said. She found the flexibility she needed in the open platform of the LMS, which allows Affinity to offer training from an assortment of third-party content providers.

Taking e-learning to the Next Level

According to Hankes, the future of e-learning at Affinity calls for a continuous building of online learning opportunities, including competency assessments that identify gaps in training and provide the basis for offering professional development options and supporting employees in their pursuit of another career path as appropriate. Hankes plans to continue developing technology skills throughout the organization in conjunction with further implementation of e-learning.

“When we chose SumTotal, we were doing more than buying a product and turning a light on,” she said. “We've been building an infrastructure and helping our employees develop the skills they need to use technology to its fullest.”

For more information, please contact us at +1 650 934 9500, or toll-free at +1 866 768 6825, or via email at sales@sumtotalsystems.com.

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