



**THE GMarie GROUP**  
Performance Improvement Specialists

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# Product Launch Training

Recognizing and Planning for Unique Challenges

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## Introduction

Effective training and the quick transfer of skills and knowledge to the job is especially important when launching a new product. In order for a product launch to succeed, a plan that integrates training into the overall launch strategy is essential, so that all of the elements of the product rollout are coordinated and consistent. Through this level of coordination, training can then serve a vital role in ensuring quick adoption and accelerating the change process.

In our work with product launches, we have found that there are particular instructional design and development considerations that need to be kept in mind when working with new product introductions. Recognizing and addressing these considerations will increase the effectiveness of the training and, by extension, the product rollout.

## How is New Product Training Different?

New product training is different from other types of training for several reasons.

**First, new product training requires behavior change and higher levels of learning.** In the framework of Bloom's Taxonomy, new product training requires application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. For example: marketing and sales audiences will be called on to select the best solutions from an array of products. They must evaluate how the new product fits into an established product line through comparison and contrast. Finally, they have to explain this to customers and justify to customers why the new product is better than existing products.

To address this challenge, learning and development professionals must choose learning solutions that are appropriate for these higher levels of learning, through the use of case studies, demonstration and contextual practice.

**Second, training happens within a framework of “speed to market,” when timing can mean the difference between success and failure of a new product.** For example, a new technology product may be complex to use and relatively untried with end users. The customer service teams that will field calls on this new product cannot remember vast amounts of technical data and need to be at-the-ready, not in the classroom.

To address this challenge, training designers and developers can look to innovative ways to provide needed information, just in time. Rather than teaching large amounts of content, training can instead teach customer service personnel how to access the tools and information available to them.

**Third, the largest audience for new product introductions is usually the sales force, with teams of busy, high-energy reps spread across the globe.** Training delivery methods must be flexible and portable to address the issues of location diversity and content must be presented in engaging and succinct ways. E-learning, virtual instructor-led learning, podcasts and learning portals are all methods to consider for this audience.

**Finally, new product introductions are occurring within a framework of change.** Learning professionals should strive to become part of the change management or implementation team, so that their work can be integrated into the entire process. In addition, learning materials should address the issues of change and innovation and allow participants to acknowledge their own resistance to change, as well as recognize the positive reasons for innovation.

## Challenges

Developing learning for new product introductions also entails some specific challenges. For instance:

**Resistance to change:** The product is untried, with no established track record of reliability and no sales history. Employees are basically taking “on faith” that the new product is better than the old one. Those developing the training need to work harder to address the “what’s in it for me” and approach the training as part of the “sell” of the new product to the internal audience.

**Learning curve:** The new product may be more complex than the previous product; learners may lack confidence in how to use it, how to sell it, how to speak to it, how to service it, etc. Training professionals can address this through hands-on use of the product, Q & A forums, on-going resources for questions and issues. It can also be effective to find early adopters of the product who can speak to its advantages. Another way to address this challenge is to focus on the similarities of the new product to an existing product, to allay lack of confidence.

**Simultaneous development:** New products and training about them are often developed at the same time. Any changes in the product development may impact the training content; the content of the training is unstable and may change during training design and development. Learning developers need to stay in constant contact with the product development team to ensure that the product deliverables and the training deliverables are aligned.

**Content fuzziness:** When the product and training are developed concurrently, the subject matter experts have likely not used the product. As a result, their knowledge level may be somewhat theoretical and based on “best guesses” rather than proven data. Subject matter experts may not know what kind of trouble most users will run into, or may not yet know how to address them. As learning professionals, it is important to recognize this and plan for it, through successive iterations of training, as these details become known.

## Summary

New product introductions make the effectiveness of training and the quick transfer of skills and knowledge highly important. Training all affected audiences about the new product is key, and training plans must be part of the overall launch strategy.

Recognizing the particular challenges of new product training, and addressing the ways in which this learning challenge is especially unique, can help learning professionals to succeed. The training they develop can serve a vital role in ensuring quick adoption of the new product, both internally and with customers. It can also contribute to excellent change management and accelerate the change process.

## The GMarie Group

For over 20 years, The GMarie Group has provided nationwide clients with custom learning and performance improvement solutions. To do so, we apply the ADDIE Model, a systematic process for:

### **Analyzing Performance and Training Needs**

The GMarie Group recommends initiating a project through rigorous analysis, which is the key to obtaining valid results and ensuring that a significant cross-section of the organization has a stake in the process. We can conduct training needs and performance analysis to determine learning solutions to address identified performance gaps.

### **Designing and Developing Effective Solutions**

We design and develop online (Web-based) training, virtual Webcasts, podcasts, instructor-led training, performance support tools, learning portals and much more! Our team can author your custom product using any industry-standard authoring tool (e.g. Flash, Lectora, Flypaper and Captivate).

### **Implementing Products and Programs**

We also provide training program planning and coordination, train-the-trainer, training delivery and facilitation for all types of subject matter. We can also help integrate Web-based solutions into your LMS or LCMS.

### **Evaluating Reactions, Learning, Skills Transfer and Returns**

Using Kirkpatrick's "Four Levels of Evaluation," we develop tools and scoring mechanisms to measure participant reactions to learning, mastery of objectives, transfer of skills to the job and return-on-objectives.

## How Can We Help YOU?

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