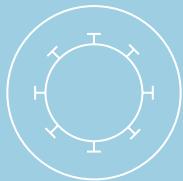


SUDDENLY
VIRTUAL



Using Text-based Courses to Provide Remote Workforce Services

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As businesses start to reopen and individuals try to operate in the “new normal” amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many are looking for ways to adopt new technologies as a means to maintain social distancing practices and limit in-person interactions. The public workforce system and its partners have historically relied heavily on in-person service delivery. As workforce development professionals now consider what a return to their physical offices will entail, incorporating remote service options remains a priority to ensure both staff and customer safety alike. With many local workforce areas anticipating a return to some form of in-person operations by the end of the summer of 2020, workforce staff may want to consider all the ways to address the pressing need and demand for virtual customer-facing services. One way that workforce staff and partner training providers can deliver services virtually is through text-based courses, which are designed to teach course materials in a simple and accessible manner.

What is a Text-based Learning Course?

A text-based learning course is one that is completely conducted via text message by employing text, images, audio, and/or video for course delivery. The purpose of text-based learning courses is to simplify course delivery and widen

access to learning materials. While laptops and other devices may be difficult for some to acquire, text-based learning courses play on the widespread access to cell phones in order to provide educational materials to a broader demographic.

Why Consider Text-based Learning Courses?

Reach customers where they are: While workforce staff have voiced concern over customer access to technology, a majority of customers have access to a cell phone. Text-based course technology does not require an individual to have a smartphone, but simply a device that is able to receive text messages.

Remove barriers for customer participation: In conversations with frontline staff, some reported that using virtual services has increased participation in previously in-person workshops and events. Staff have surmised that this upswing in attendance rates is because customers experience fewer barriers to participation, such as transportation and child care, when events are held virtually. The same rationale behind reducing barriers to participation can be applied to text-based courses.

Expand capacity through new means of communication: At present, only a handful of the One-Stop Career Centers that the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development has spoken

to have embraced text messaging customer communication. By using text-based courses, staff may be able to expand their reach and more effectively impart course materials to customers, with potentially less staff time investment.

Local workforce areas with existing text service capabilities can also consider the ways in which they can pull and use course design information from text-based, course-specific technology and adapt it to be effective with their existing technology. One text-based course technology company, Arist, offers general course structure information, templates, and cheat sheets, which can be found with the start-up guides [here](#).

Below are two examples of text-based learning course technologies workforce professionals can consider. **Readers should note that the Heldrich Center is not endorsing any of these proprietary products.**



[Arist](#) is a text-based platform that allows users to create remote-friendly courses via text message or short message service (SMS). The platform cites research from Stanford University and the University of Pennsylvania that text message courses are more effective than video, web, or app-based courses, as text message courses are more accessible and easy-to-build. While most text message courses take 5 to 30 days to complete, Arist's short and engaging format allows users to complete a course in as little as 5 minutes. In addition, Arist boasts a 94% completion rate, underscoring how text-based courses are simple and proven teaching tools.

Administrators can design and create course content in minutes while being able to add images or GIF graphics and exercises to elicit a response from learners. Workforce staff can use Arist to send daily lessons and guidance to customers via text message. As well, staff can add new content, allow customers to reflect, and assess customer progress via text. This platform offers an alternative to teach customers about job search techniques and materials more engagingly and interactively.

Platform Features

Course Editor: Easy-to-use tool to develop course content in a simple and adaptable manner, as well as edit existing content.

Assessment Tools: Administrators can access detailed analytics and gather responses to track both individual and overall progress.

White Labeling and Single Sign-On (SSO): Easily integrate text message learning with existing tools, SSO, or a learning management system.

Enrollment and Privacy: Learners can quickly and securely connect their own phone number, WhatsApp, or Facebook Messenger credentials to enroll in a course.

Benefits

- ▶ Arist's compatibility with text messaging, in addition to WhatsApp and Facebook, makes it accessible to anyone with a cell phone, regardless of whether or not they have a smartphone. The technology's seamless integration with common social media platforms also expands the potential customer reach even further.
- ▶ Based upon the plan purchased, certain educators can access the platform's [course library](#), which provides examples of how to structure course content and improve service delivery.
- ▶ Designed with remote learning in mind, Arist's simple and user-friendly interface makes it easy for educators and learners to use the platform and engage in the course material.

Pricing for Teachers and Schools (as of July 2020)

- ▶ "For Teachers" Plan: \$29 per month, billed annually (try it for free through September 2020)
 - ▶ Up to 100 learners
 - ▶ Unlimited authors and courses
 - ▶ Instant set-up
 - ▶ Compliant with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and Student Online Personal Information Protection Act
 - ▶ Free workshops and custom onboarding
- ▶ "For Mid-sized Schools" Plan: \$249 per month, billed annually for 2020-21 school year (try it for free through September 2020)
 - ▶ Up to 1,000 learners
 - ▶ Unlimited authors and courses
 - ▶ Instant set-up
 - ▶ Compliant with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and Student Online Personal Information Protection Act
 - ▶ Free workshops and custom onboarding
 - ▶ Course library included
- ▶ "For Larger Schools" Plan: Contact [Arist](#) directly for pricing information.



ConveYour is a text-based platform that prioritizes microlearning, which uses smaller learning units and short-term achievements. Although creators designed the platform to assist field and sales personnel, the public workforce system could incorporate the platform's services. Administrators can personalize training using ConveYour's simplified design features. The platform requires no technical experience to implement. Also, it is easy to modify training modules and gamify exercises to better engage customers.

Platform Features

- ▶ **Gamification**: through leaderboards, achievement currency, and dynamic engagement formats.
- ▶ **Social Learning**: View other participants' answers to questions and be able to see individuals' progress on the leaderboard.
- ▶ **Mobile Driven**: Notifications via SMS or email that send a unique learner link to each participant.
- ▶ **Simplified Production**: Ten engagement formats bring life to even the most basic videos (allows for "homemade content" creation such as recorded videos).

Benefits

- ▶ ConveYour can be beneficial to frontline workforce staff who are working to engage youth customers, since youth may respond to the platform's advanced gamification features.
- ▶ Leaderboards and achievement currency foster community engagement, interaction, and group accountability, which can be both encouraging and an effective means of learning for customers.
- ▶ ConveYour sends training materials via a unique learner link, which eliminates the need to log in to the platform or provide online credentials such as usernames and passwords.

Pricing Levels (as of July 2020)

- ▶ **Pilot**: \$297 per month for up to 50 monthly active learners
- ▶ **Launch**: \$497 per month for up to 100 monthly active learners
- ▶ **Division**: \$897 per month for up to 250 monthly active learners
- ▶ **Small Business**: \$1,497 per month for up to 500 monthly active learners

Conclusion

When looking to the future of service delivery, workforce professionals may want to consider text-based courses as a tool to provide job search and job skills training to a wider number of customers than can be achieved through in-person training and education. As seen in platforms like Arist and ConveYour, text-based courses seamlessly distribute course materials to learners in an accessible format via text message. While some customers may not have access to a computer or Wi-Fi, most do have access to a cell phone.

In turn, this format may be able to ensure that customers have equitable access to quality remote work and learning services. As well, the ability to incorporate multimedia content such as images, videos, and audio files can create a more engaging and comprehensive learning experience for customers. Overall, text-based learning technology may be an excellent path forward for workforce professionals as many begin to consider how to continue to engage virtual service delivery in the coming weeks and months.

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About the Heldrich Center

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University is a university-based organization devoted to transforming the workforce development system at the local, state, and federal levels. The center, located within the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, provides an independent source of analysis for reform and innovation in policymaking and employs cutting-edge research and evaluation methods to identify best practices in workforce development, education, and employment policy. It is also engaged in significant partnerships with the private sector, workforce organizations, and educational institutions to design effective education and training programs. It is deeply committed to assisting job seekers and workers attain the information, education, and skills training they need to move up the economic ladder.

As captured in its slogan, "Solutions at Work," the Heldrich Center is guided by a commitment to translate the strongest research and analysis into practices and programs that companies, community-based organizations, philanthropy, and government officials can use to strengthen their workforce and workforce readiness programs, create jobs, and remain competitive. The center's work strives to build an efficient labor market that matches workers' skills and knowledge with the evolving demands of employers. The center's projects are grounded in a core set of research priorities:

- ▶ Career and Technical Education
- ▶ Data Collection and Analysis
- ▶ Disability Employment
- ▶ Job Seekers in Transition
- ▶ Program Evaluation
- ▶ Trend Analysis

Learn more: www.heldrich.rutgers.edu