Information Skills Training for High Tech Workers

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Innovative ideas need information to help them turn into products or services

Adobe is a place of innovation—and **innovation needs information** to become a product or service, or to make a sale.

I’m part of the library and research group that handles secondary research support, manages a portal for primary as well as purchased secondary research, manages the corporate library, and provides enterprise access to several research and news tools.

In other words, that’s a lot of information flowing out there to people because of us.
Employees work fast—and need information even faster

Adobe is like a lot of other high tech companies, or other settings as well—things move quickly. Employees are smart but don’t necessarily have all the information skills they need.
They face too much information and tend to shut out getting even more

When you couple the fast pace and the quantity of information out there, our employees face too much information (including the torrent from us). They often don’t know where to look for what they need, so they tend to shut things out if it’s not of immediate importance.

This also makes it hard to get through to them with announcements of training, new products or services, etc. What do you do with people who say they’ve been at the company for several years but they’ve never heard of your portal, your library, your services, whatever? This, despite all your appearances on the intranet, in site newsletters, on bulletin boards, etc. How do you reach them?
Factors came into place to move us toward a more formal training program

Our training programs have evolved organically a piece at a time. Usually, people would ask for individual or team training, which we would provide as one-offs.

Then a few things slid into place.

One, I finally thought “Why not make a more formal program to maximize (my) efforts?”

Two, our portal was redesigned recently for an emphasis on self-service, so we needed to do more training to get people to the point that they felt comfortable and competent doing at least some of their own searching. And even before that, we wanted to do more publicity to get the word out.

And three, Adobe had acquired another company, Macromedia, in 2005, and that brought some new collaborative technologies in-house.
It TAKES all types...

Our services cover all of Adobe—engineering, marketing, sales, product management, executives, etc.

As the training program developed, we found out more about how Adobe people like to learn, and we ourselves learned more effective ways to reach people in offices besides our San Jose headquarters.

The personas on the following slides were not formally created following real rules of research. On top of that, I created them after the fact, after a survey on learning styles (which was somewhat skewed by the number of engineers who like to take surveys). We certainly have thought about these types before, and I included our subjective impressions in the persona characteristics. So take them with a grain of salt. But I think they’ll give you an idea of the types of workers and information needs that led us to develop our training program.
Meet our users

Kathleen
Product Manager

Likes:
• Personalization
• Lots of detail
• Latest updates
• Web conferencing-based learning from her desk
• eBooks and audio for remote listening

Ajay
Engineer

Likes:
• Working remotely
• Searching for or figuring out things himself
• Hands-on learning, in person or using collaborative technology
• Sharing his own expertise
• Deep research in narrow areas

Stephanie
Marketing Manager

Likes:
• Getting the bottom line ASAP
• All kinds of research on Adobe
• Being able to ask someone else
• Web conferencing so she can multitask at her desk
Meet our users

Rich
Sales Person

Likes:
• Quick responses
• Competitive info
• Communication by phone
• Web conferencing-based training just on his areas of current interest
• Not likely to go back to class recordings later

Ben
Intern

Likes:
• Picking the brains of more experienced co-workers
• Exploring the portal on his own
• Learning via in-person classes
• Working collaboratively

Laura
Director

Likes:
• The big picture
• Email-based alerts and newsletters
• Time not spent in meetings (or class)
• Learning new things as needed
So we decided to try some new approaches to training
Point-of-need training helps with the just-in-time learners. Not everyone wants to or has time to learn upfront about something they may not need to know at the moment.
For self-service people, we have a Help section on the portal, plus a new FAQ on the wiki.
We still do individual training at people’s desks, but we also now have a tool called Adobe Acrobat Connect for virtual training, with real-time desktop sharing, video, and chat. This is one of the products we got through the Macromedia acquisition. Their corporate culture involved a lot of virtual meetings like this, but it has taken the Adobe side a while to catch on.

It’s more often used in group trainings, one-to-many, but it’s handy for those cases where you can’t be at the other person’s desk but it’s hard to explain verbally what they need to do, or if they get a weird error message, you can watch what they do to get it.
Homemade tutorials

We also have a tool called Adobe Captivate for doing screen captures and online tutorials.

I hope to have quite a few more done in the coming months.
Since I have limited time to create these tutorials, I wanted to start where there was most need.

We did a survey of portal users recently to find out what areas people find most useful.

These are the top tools…
Deciding where to start with tutorials—
The Survey Says…

[Bar chart showing the distribution of responses for different features]

…and features that people said were “very” or “somewhat” useful.
Deciding where to start with tutorials—The Survey Also Says…

![Bar graph showing tool awareness.

But the survey also pointed out areas that aren’t getting enough attention.]

These are the top tools…
Deciding where to start with tutorials—The Survey Also Says…

…and features with lower awareness.

Some things rank both high in usefulness and low in awareness. These useful and low-awareness areas are where I want to concentrate first.
In this and several other lessons, we'll browse using the Research tab at the top of the page.

This is one screenshot from a tutorial on using the browsing function, with a note added in the red box for this slide. Captivate publishes the final results in Flash with audio, and users can go at their own pace with the controls at the bottom.
Hands-on and virtual classes
After wondering to myself about a more efficient way to train users, I decided to start a series of classes in 2006 to cover the kinds of topics we get asked about a lot.

We started out just teaching a few classes on the same things we had been covering informally, mostly about the portal and its specific tools, content, and services.

Then we branched out into areas we knew held some interest and were maybe less direct, like RSS. On the portal, we have a number of RSS feeds available, which we wanted to evangelize, but many people hadn’t even gotten set up with a reader yet, so we did an RSS intro class, and tossed in bits about our own services along with more general information.
Web conferencing and in-person group training

Info U is made up of live training which is available in person in San Jose, via videoconferencing in some sites, and via Acrobat Connect everywhere.
Connect also lets us take polls before, during, or after class. This is a good way to judge experience level before starting, and it helps me keep track of where the remote participants are.
Web conference recordings for later viewing

The web-based training sessions are also recorded so that people can access them later if they couldn’t attend in person or watch live, or for people who want to watch at their own pace or rewatch something they didn’t catch.

Posting the recordings lets us make the same training available to people in our European and Asian offices that’s available to those in the headquarters in San Jose and the other large North American offices.
In addition to individual and class training, we still do departmental or group training by request. These sessions can be targeted to particular groups’ needs or can just allow for more hands-on learning.
Social networking tools—this is an area where we’re just getting going but would like to do a lot more.
We’ve had blogs for a couple of years.

First, we started a blog to share primary and secondary market research tidbits and to share library news, then we started one specifically for the Info U classes. They’re great for publicity as well as information sharing.

The Info U blog has become the one place to go to for information about what the class will entail and where it will be held, links to handouts and tags, and a link to the recording after a session.

There are some dedicated bloggers in our larger research group, but they all tend to be from our librarian-based subgroup. It has been an uphill effort to get the primary and user researchers to do much on the blog.
We just started using wikis fairly recently. Wiki technology is well-used in other parts of Adobe, mainly the technical groups, but less so in marketing and research.

I mentioned the FAQ earlier, and we have a general page for the group as well.

I also started one for Info U so that we’d have a place for more community involvement before and after class. That has yet to happen, but I keep trying…
I’ve also been using a wiki to help me manage the myriad details of putting on a class.

And my hope is to get people to use the wiki as a way to collaborate, before or after class, but this hasn’t taken off yet.
Adobe has an internal tagging application, so it can be used to tag information behind the firewall as well as outside. Info U is one of my tags. I make specific tags for each class so that people will have one place to go to find the URLs I reference during class.

I also use Furl for general source-tracking outside the firewall.
Where to now?

- Follow new features and redesigns with new classes and tutorials
- Plan earlier training for interns
- Extend reach to remote offices
- Investigate tools like podcasts, videos, mobile access

We’re learning from a new training survey, our experiences this year, and time learning new technologies ourselves.

One of the most important things we’ve learned is the value of formalized training to tie in with major new feature, service, or design rollouts. It’s great for marketing as well as training.

We also want to address specific users more. For example, we have technical and MBA interns every summer, and they need to get up to speed quickly in order to use our resources to best advantage for the few weeks they’re with us. We also want to customize training, even if it has to be asynchronous for remote offices.

We’d like to add new technologies like podcasts, video, etc., but we still have to develop more involvement from users to make sure the use of these technologies would justify the time and effort spent.
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Find this presentation on PBwiki:
http://kdraper.pbwiki.com/

And the Internet Librarian website after the conference

Ask me about my Moo cards and Moo stickers:
Stock photos from stock.xchng: http://www.sxc.hu/

I have Moo cards and Moo stickers of the personas available with the PBwiki URL. If you didn’t get them at the conference and would like them, just let me know.