

Communicate Value With a Learning Annual Report

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Measuring the value of an organization's investment in learning continues to be one of the five most pressing challenges facing chief learning officers, according to a recent Online CLO Forum conducted by Accenture Learning. CLOs voiced the need to be better at explaining the business results associated with their learning investment. All agreed that failure to do so would result in cost pressures.

While CLOs continue to emphasize developing the right set of measures, they must also create communication tools to highlight accomplishments and showcase how these are aligned to business needs. Recently, Avaya University developed an innovative device to address this need: the Avaya University Annual Report. Modeled after the Avaya Inc. Annual Report, this report focuses on three key business areas: improving efficiencies, strengthening new products and driving toward higher levels of revenue growth.

One of the first objectives in creating the corporate university annual report is to agree on the vision. What are you trying to communicate, and how does this link to what the company communicates in its annual report? Who is the audience? The annual report must summarize the business strategies of the organization and then focus on how the learning department contributed to achieving these strategies. For example, one of the sections in Avaya University's Annual Report focused on its commitment to improve the Avaya channel partner program so it can sell and bundle learning with Avaya products. This linked to Avaya's goal of improving revenue growth.

Choosing the writing team is critical. The team must have the endorsement and sponsorship of the chief learning officer and global head of human resources, who set the direction and review the report in all its stages. A seasoned team member who understands the learning inputs and outputs should lead the group, and the team must work with a communications specialist to craft a message that is consistent with the company's annual report.

The content should reflect the year's efforts, as well as metrics. The Avaya University Annual Report highlights how Avaya University has transformed learning at Avaya and includes specific metrics, such as:

- Reducing time to proficiency by 60 percent for technical training associated with a major new product launch.
- Meeting the objectives to increase the use of e-learning. There has been a migration from 77 percent instructor-led and 23 percent e-learning to present levels of 81 percent e-learning and 19 percent instructor-led.
- Focusing on building revenue-generation skills by developing a "Sales Excellence" program for both sales personnel and business partners, as well as a focus on improved performance of all employees via the "Avaya

Employee Excellence" program, which achieved 100 percent participation.

Finally, since employees, business partners and customers will receive the annual report, an approval process will ensure the content and emphasis is in sync with the public messages of the organization. That means involving the company's public relations department.

If you are considering creating a learning annual report, start collecting information, including:

- Learning budget (actual versus budget segmented by business unit, type of curricula and delivery methods).
- Cycle time of learning solution from inception to actual delivery.
- Access to learning—focusing on migration from instructor-led delivery to e-learning.
- Type of business outcomes directly related to learning, such as increased revenue generation or decreased time to competency.

Ultimately, a learning annual report shifts the focus of communication from discussing learning inputs, such as the amount of learning investment or the percentage of learning delivered via technology types, to learning outputs, such as improvements in revenue or improvements in efficiencies. By formalizing this process, CLOs can recap the performance of the learning function over the past year and show how it supports the strategic objectives of the company.

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