

CASE STUDY

Susan Gosselin, The CMOOR Group

How One Security Industry Giant Uses Online Resources to Help Drive Sales: ESSEX and E-learning

The security industry is no stranger to the promise of technology. In fact, it's driving the business. But what is relatively new to the category is the idea of training salespeople and distributors online. ESSEX Industries, the New Haven, CT-based Sales and Marketing Group of Securitron, HES and Sargent electronic products along with McKinney, Curries and Graham products, were among the first to make an investment in e-learning two years ago. Now, with a major upgrade of its Online Training Center planned, ESSEX hopes to make e-learning an even more important part of its business strategy.

We recently sat down with George Bertram, electronic security specialist for ESSEX, and Connie Moorhead, president of The CMOOR Group of Louisville, KY, the e-learning firm that designed and implemented the ESSEX project. Here's what they had to say about the impact e-learning is having on ESSEX.

Q. Why did you decide to make the jump from traditional training methods to e-learning?

A. Bertram: We have over 110 salespeople who are working to sell our products to large commercial clients and distributors. Up to this point, the only tools they had were very large product catalogs and an occasional training class, which we would conduct here. We polled our sales force and they were asking us, very clearly, to have information available to them on their laptops. So we contracted with CMOOR to develop our Online Training Center (OTC), an online site that allowed them to take more than 200 training classes online. The subjects include everything from preparing presentations to time management to technical information.

We also internally produced a separate site called RepNet that is designed specifically for our sales reps that includes PowerPoint sales presentations and other technical information they may need. The rest of our sales staff, as well as a few choice distributors, can view it, too.

Q. That's a lot of courses. Where did they come from?

A. Moorhead: We are an e-learning company, but we

specialize in putting together online programs for the security, architecture and construction industries. Nearly all the courses were already available in our archives, which we've assembled with information from various professional organizations. It gives the user the ability to better understand the things that affect their business, like project management or negotiation skills, for instance. In this case, it was a very turnkey kind of thing. For a monthly fee, we provide these classes for ESSEX's OTC, monitor who's taking them, and provide the company with reports on how well their employees were doing.

Q. Was it difficult getting management to embrace this technology, and employees to use it?

A. Bertram: Fortunately, no. We have divisional sales managers who were all on board initially and they personally encouraged their sales staff to use these new sales tools. While these high-level skills were useful, our students told us they felt custom courses specifically about our products would be most valuable. So last year we designed our first custom course with CMOOR, Writing Architectural Specifications. That went over so well that we decided to do more.

Q. You have a new upgrade coming to OTC this fall. What will that include?

A. Moorhead: In the surveys we conducted of ESSEX online students, they kept asking for specific ESSEX product information...most of which was only available in a rather large and hard-to-use catalog. So we have designed 10 custom courses on ESSEX's most important electronic products. It takes the average student about 30 minutes to complete each course. Each of the courses follow the same format and always discuss the features and benefits of the product from the sales perspective. The courses are designed to help salespeople feel more comfortable doing product demonstrations. They learn the best applications for the products, so it makes it easier for them to target the right customers, too. There's a thorough discussion of how to overcome customer objections, which, as you can imagine, is pretty critical to the sales staff.

Q. What did it take to pull all this together?

A. Moorhead: Since we've got a format we all agreed on, ESSEX provided us with the basic content that was needed for each of the segments in the courses. Then we storyboarded that information and designed and programmed the graphics. Once they're up and ready to run, we simply put them on our server and make them available through the password-encoded OTC site. If anything goes wrong with the site or there are bugs, then we have easy access to the courses to make fixes, and it doesn't bog down ESSEX's system at corporate.

Q. Do you have a way of knowing who has taken what courses?


A. Bertram: Yes, CMOOR provides us with monthly reports of who has completed what courses, and we share that with their supervisors. We also know what their scores have been on each of the courses, so we're able to tell who is having problems with what areas.

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The Salesman's screen shots New Tutor



Module 6: 1006 Electric Strike



The 1006 Series is an advancement in electric strike design technology. The advanced design features include:

- Dual locking technology
- Tamper resistant
- Tested up to 6,000 lbs of holding force
- High cycle testing
- 26 face plate options

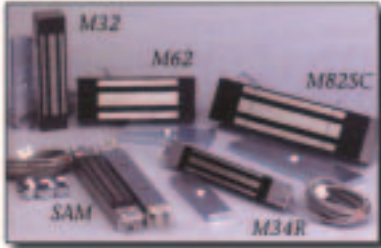
This module will explore these selling points in more detail.

Learning Byte

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Module 2: MagnaLock Line

What is an electromagnetic lock?



An electromagnetic lock is a lock designed to secure any type of door or gate that closes against a fixed stop. The electromagnet mounts on the fixed frame, and the strike plate mounts on the moving door or gate. When the door or gate is closed and the maglock is powered, a magnetic bond is created that can only be broken by disrupting power to the lock.

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Costs for putting together a program like this vary, but in general, you can expect to pay about \$5,000 to \$10,000 per completed coursework hour, depending on how complex and graphics-heavy the courses are. With this kind of investment at stake, I think it's pretty important not to just get this done at your corner advertising agency.

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Q. Do technical issues ever hinder the training process?

A. Moorhead: Fortunately, the courses were designed with that in mind. Salespeople with laptops, as a rule, don't always have access to high-speed internet connections. It's just something you have to deal with. So the courses were designed without the bells and whistles that make downloading slow.

Q. Do you think the role of online training will expand at ESSEX?

A. Bertram: Yes, I expect it will continue to grow as we build more courses around the salespeople's needs. But it will probably never replace our catalogs and face-to-face training. Some things just have to be done in person. But I do expect, as we get more and more of these courses up, our traditional methods will become less and less desirable. Online training is just so convenient.

Q. Do you think online training will help you compete in the sector?

A. Bertram: We hope so. It's a little too early to tell yet, but a well-trained sales force will always give you an edge, particularly when we are continuing to roll out more and more elaborate products. One of our most recent ventures, for instance, is a partnership with Diebold for an Integrated Securities Program, which will allow us to provide the software and systems, while Diebold provides the hardware like cameras, cards and door locks for large institutional customers. As far as we know, no other company in our sector has made a commitment to e-learning. We think it will be the key to keeping our people ahead of the technology.

Q. What advice do you give to other companies who might be considering starting an e-learning program?

A. Moorhead: Putting together an e-learning program is a very worthwhile thing, but it takes a significant upfront investment of time and resources. The client has to put a lot of effort in planning and providing their designer with good information for the courses. The good news is, though, that once the program is up and running it should be problem free to maintain. I recommend getting a provider that can manage your training sites for you, as it eliminates a lot of hassles. Costs for putting together a program like this vary, but in general, you can expect to pay about \$5,000 to \$10,000 per completed coursework hour, depending on how complex and graphics-heavy the courses are. With this kind of investment at stake, I think it's pretty important not to just get this done at your corner advertising agency. Anyone can design the graphics for a program like this, but you really need to have an e-learning specialist who can make your sites SCORM and AICC compliant. These are technology-based, professional training organizations that have set common programming and language standards. If your training program isn't designed around these standards, it can make it hard for your programs to interact with other programs, and make real problems for you as you try to expand your course offerings.

A. Bertram: I think it's pretty important to have management buy-in up front or you won't be able to get people to take the time to try the courses in the first place. But once you've started actively encouraging your e-learning, you have to listen to your users. You need to get a tracking mechanism in place, take frequent surveys, and be willing to make changes based on their input. I believe e-learning has endless potential as we continue to expand it. I think other companies will soon come to see its potential, too. **D**