



OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF

TRAINING DESKLESS WORKERS

WHITE PAPER BY FRANK RUSSELL



INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced, digitally driven world, the workforce is increasingly divided between those who sit behind desks and those who do not. The deskless workforce—comprising retail associates, healthcare employees, field service technicians, hospitality and food service workers, and others—makes up most of the global workforce. According to a study by Emergence Capital, deskless workers represent approximately 80% of the worldwide workforce, or about 2.7 billion people (Bersin & Zao-Sanders, 2019).

Deskless workers are the backbone of many industries. They interact directly with customers, maintain supply chains, and provide essential services. However, despite their critical roles, they are frequently underserved in terms of training and development. Traditional training methods, which often rely on lengthy sessions, desktop computers, and email communications, must be more suited to the realities of a workforce that operates on the go. As organizations seek to improve productivity, reduce turnover, and maintain a competitive edge, addressing the unique challenges of training deskless workers has become imperative.

CHALLENGES

1. Lack of Access to Traditional Training Platforms

One of the most significant challenges in training deskless workers is their limited access to traditional training platforms. Unlike their desk-bound colleagues, these employees often do not have regular access to computers, email, or even corporate intranets. Research from McKinsey & Company highlights that only 1% of corporate learning management systems (LMS) are designed with mobile accessibility as a primary focus, leaving many deskless workers without access to critical training resources (McKinsey, 2023).

2. High Turnover and Varied Skill Levels

Deskless workers tend to have higher turnover rates than other employees, meaning that training needs to be rapid and effective. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average turnover rate in industries with a high concentration of deskless workers, such as retail and hospitality, can exceed 60% annually (BLS, 2022). Additionally, the varied skill levels among deskless workers necessitate personalized training approaches that can cater to both novices and experienced workers alike.

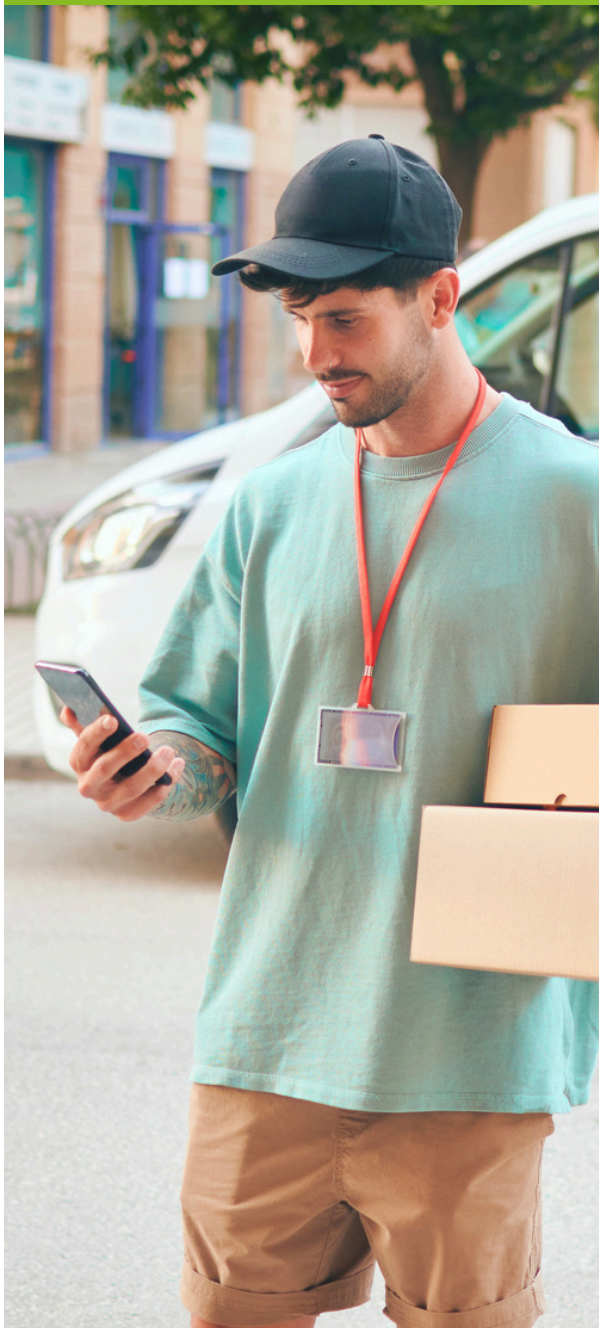


3. Disruption in Workflow

The nature of deskless work often involves tight schedules and a constant flow of tasks. Traditional training methods, which require significant time away from daily responsibilities, can disrupt workflow and productivity. Studies have shown that over 70% of deskless workers report that time constraints are the primary barrier to participating in traditional training programs (LinkedIn Learning, 2023). Therefore, there is a need for training that can be integrated seamlessly into the daily routines of deskless workers.

EMERGING LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

Organizations must leverage emerging learning technologies designed specifically for deskless workers to address these challenges. These technologies offer new ways to deliver accessible, engaging, and effective training without the need for traditional platforms or extensive time commitments.



1. Nanolearning

Nanolearning represents a significant shift in how training is delivered. Characterized by short, highly-focused learning modules, nanolearning is designed to deliver just-in-time training that fits into the daily workflow of deskless workers. These modules, typically lasting between 45 seconds to 3 minutes, are perfect for workers who need quick, actionable insights that they can apply immediately.

The advantages of nanolearning are clear: it reduces the cognitive load on learners, improves retention, and allows for continuous learning in bite-sized chunks. Research by the Journal of Applied Psychology indicates that learners exposed to nanolearning modules demonstrate a 20% higher retention rate than those who engage with traditional long-form content (Smith et al., 2023). For example, a retail associate could receive a daily nano lesson on customer service best practices during their slow or downtime, ensuring they are constantly updated with the latest company standards.

2. Mobile Learning

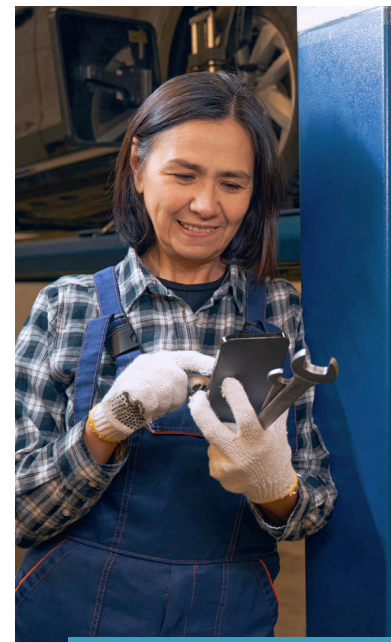
Many deskless workers rely heavily on their mobile devices, so mobile learning (or mLearning) is a natural solution. Mobile learning allows workers to access training content anytime, anywhere, without needing a desktop computer. Whether a quick refresher on safety protocols or a tutorial on new equipment, mobile learning ensures that deskless workers have the training they need at their fingertips.

To be effective, mobile learning content must be optimized for small screens, ensuring it is easy to navigate and engaging. A study by eLearning Industry found that mobile-optimized learning experiences increase completion rates by 25% compared to desktop-based courses (eLearning Industry, 2023). It should also be designed for offline access, allowing workers to complete training even in areas with limited connectivity.

3. Microvideos

Microvideos—short, engaging videos that convey essential information in under three minutes—are another powerful tool for training deskless workers. These videos can cover various topics, from technical to soft skills, and are ideal for workers needing quick, on-the-go training.

Microvideos are particularly effective because they align with the way many deskless workers already consume content. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have popularized the short video format, making it a familiar and preferred medium for learning. Research by the Video Marketing Institute reveals that 87% of users prefer to watch microvideos on their mobile devices, and 64% of users are more likely to remember information presented in video format than text (VMI, 2023). For instance, a healthcare worker could watch a quick video on the proper use of PPE (personal protective equipment) during their shift, ensuring they follow the latest guidelines.



4. SMS, Chatbots, and Team Collaboration Platforms

For deskless workers who may not have regular access to email or traditional corporate communication channels, SMS, chatbots, and team collaboration platforms like Slack, MS Teams, and Google Chat provide essential tools for delivering training content and facilitating ongoing learning.

SMS is a powerful tool for reaching deskless workers who may need more consistent communication and development. Training reminders, quick tips, nanovideos, and even short learning modules can be delivered directly to workers' mobile phones, ensuring they receive critical information in real-time. According to a study by Mobile Marketing Watch, SMS messages have a 98% open rate, making it one of the most effective ways to ensure that training content is seen and engaged with (Mobile Marketing Watch, 2022).

Chatbots offer another innovative solution, providing workers with on-demand access to training materials, FAQs, and instant feedback. Chatbots can be integrated into mobile apps or accessed via SMS, enabling workers to interact with training content whenever needed. Research from Gartner

shows that by 2025, 50% of knowledge workers will regularly interact with chatbots to access training and other work-related information (Gartner, 2023).

Team collaboration platforms like Slack, MS Teams, and Google Chat have become increasingly important for communication and collaboration among deskless workers. These platforms can also be used to deliver microlearning content, host discussion forums, and provide a space for peer-to-peer learning. The flexibility of these platforms allows for the integration of learning into the daily workflow, making it easier for workers to access training without disrupting their routines. A report by IDC found that organizations that integrate learning into team collaboration platforms see a 20% increase in employee engagement and a 15% improvement in productivity (IDC, 2023).

By leveraging these emerging technologies, organizations can create a comprehensive, flexible, and accessible training ecosystem that meets the needs of deskless workers in various industries.

SHORTCOMINGS OF TRADITIONAL LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (LMS)

Despite the availability of new learning technologies, many organizations still need to rely on traditional Learning Management Systems (LMS) to deliver training. However, most LMS platforms were designed with desk-bound employees in mind. They needed to address the unique needs of deskless workers adequately.

1. Accessibility Issues

Traditional LMS platforms often require computer and internet access, which are not always available to deskless workers. A survey conducted by the Brandon Hall Group found that only 3% of LMS platforms are fully optimized for mobile devices, making it difficult for deskless workers to access training on the go (Brandon Hall Group, 2023). Moreover, many LMS platforms must be designed to deliver content in short, digestible formats, which is crucial for effective learning in deskless environments.



ATD research found that 58% of learners prefer microlearning and nanolearning...

2. Lack of Flexibility

Most LMS platforms are built around structured courses that require significant time commitments, which is not feasible for deskless workers who need training that can be completed in short bursts throughout their day. The inflexibility of traditional LMS platforms means that deskless workers often see training as a burden rather than a benefit. A study by Fosway Group highlighted that 68% of deskless workers feel that traditional LMS platforms do not meet their learning needs due to a lack of flexibility and mobile accessibility (Fosway Group, 2023).

3. Ineffective Content Format

Traditional LMS platforms tend to focus on long-form content, which can be overwhelming and difficult to retain, especially for deskless workers with limited time to dedicate to learning. The need for more engaging, bite-sized content in many LMS platforms limits their effectiveness for this workforce segment. Research by the Association for Talent Development (ATD) found that 58% of learners prefer microlearning and nanolearning over traditional eLearning due to its more manageable and engaging format (ATD, 2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING DESKLESS TRAINING SOLUTIONS

To overcome the challenges of training deskless workers, organizations must adopt a new approach to learning and development. Here are some recommendations for effectively implementing technology-driven learning solutions:

1. Start Small and Scale

Organizations should begin by piloting nano and mobile learning technologies and solutions with a subset of their deskless workforce. This allows for testing and refinement before full-scale implementation. It's a great idea to reach out to potential nanolearning content and mobile solution providers to help test and pilot their offerings before making a major commitment. By starting small, organizations can gather valuable feedback and make necessary adjustments to ensure the program's success.



2. Focus on the User Experience

The success of any training program depends on how well it meets the needs of its users. For deskless workers, this means ensuring that the learning experience is intuitive, engaging, and relevant to their daily tasks. Content should be designed with the end user in mind, focusing on clarity, simplicity, and relevance. According to a study by the International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction, user-centered design in training programs can increase engagement and satisfaction by up to 40% (IJHCI, 2022).



3. Continuous Feedback and Improvement

Training programs should not be static. Organizations must establish feedback loops to gather insights from workers and continuously improve the content. This iterative approach ensures that training remains relevant, effective, and aligned with the workforce's needs. A survey by LinkedIn Learning reported that 76% of employees believe continuous feedback is critical for improving training programs and aligning them with real-world needs (LinkedIn Learning, 2023).

4. Integration with Existing Systems

While traditional LMS platforms may not be ideal for deskless workers, they can still play a role in a comprehensive learning strategy. Some providers can integrate SMS technologies or add nanolearning content to their mobile apps to make them more deskless-friendly. Organizations should look for ways to integrate new learning technologies with existing systems, ensuring a seamless learning experience for all employees. This integration allows for better data tracking and reporting, which can be used to further tailor and refine your training efforts.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF DESKLESS WORKER TRAINING

As the deskless workforce grows, innovative, flexible training solutions become increasingly critical. By leveraging technologies like nanolearning, mobile learning, microvideos, and SMS/chatbot platforms, organizations can deliver effective training that meets the unique needs of deskless workers. These solutions improve learning outcomes and contribute to higher employee satisfaction and retention.

In the future, the organizations that succeed will prioritize the training and development of their entire workforce, including those often overlooked—the deskless workers. By embracing new learning technologies and moving away from traditional LMS platforms that fail to address the needs of this segment, companies can ensure that all employees are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frank Russell has over 35 years of experience as a speaker, trainer, and talent development professional. He is also a talent development pioneer and serial entrepreneur, having founded four successful H.R. technology and training content companies. His companies have won numerous awards, including ranking on the prestigious Inc. 500/5000 lists of fastest-growing companies in the U.S. for seven consecutive years, six years on the Software 500 list, and 14 Stevie Awards for business innovation and excellence.

Frank's current organization, Propositions, Inc., is a rapidly growing talent development company. DashTrain™, its flagship software application, is revolutionizing how organizations use microlearning to engage, train, and develop employees. Frank is also a founder and CEO of EZPZVideos, LLC, one of the largest producers and publishers of nanolearning videos and content in the market.

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