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# Bringing the Future to Life: i-Pads Change Life Outcomes for Over 16 000 Learners [Extended Abstract]

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## Abstract

Around the world, educationalists are struggling to come to terms with the reality that institutional learning needs a radical overhaul. South Africa has been facing an education crisis for decades. Too few and ill-equipped human resources, too few classrooms and parents who are illiterate are some of the many problems that learners experience. The South African government attempted to address this crisis by, inter alia, in 1995, promulgating the South African Qualifications Authority Act (No. 58 of 1995). The emphasis was on outcomes based education and adult learning which included the Recognition of Prior Learning. The purpose was to facilitate ongoing adult learning in the workplace and the SETAs were set up to monitor and assist this process. However South Africa has unique challenges in the learning arena. The legacy of a dysfunctional education system has left many adults illiterate and unable to participate in formal learning. Many companies have branches in all areas of South Africa and this means travel costs and additional training facilitators in order to implement company-wide training. *FUEL* has successfully utilized online technology to overcome the challenges of geographical spread and adult illiteracy.

**Keywords:** education, crisis, SAQA, adult learning, online training

## Introduction

Many companies in South Africa have embraced the ideals of adult education through ongoing training of their staff. However, these companies also experience challenges. The wide geographical spread of staff throughout South Africa means that consistent training is extremely costly, time-consuming and heavy on human resources. Our history has produced a large number of adults who are illiterate and cannot benefit from traditional training methods. In 2013, *FUEL*- an online training company in South Africa- was approached by *Engen*-a large petroleum retailer with nationwide outlets- and asked to develop training that addressed these challenges.

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In partnership with *Digicape* who is a local Apple re-seller, *FUEL* developed an online training solution which addressed the challenges described above. Online training is a phenomenon which is improving access to education across the globe.

## The Solution

Long time partners, *FUEL* and *Digicape* proposed using Apple technology as the delivery platform for a training solution designed by *Engen*. “The tablet format was proposed because it allows for intuitive access to education through a touch screen interface, and is not intimidating for those who are not computer-literate,” says MD of *Digicape*.

Apple iPads were chosen because they offer the best all-round answer to the requirement and the real-life problem of securing expensive training terminals at outlets nationwide – some in remote areas. iPads were tested against the full range of competitor tablets and chosen for their stability, zero defect, lowest failure rates, screen quality, video playback, device security, robustness and manageability. In addition, Apple provides extended warranty contracts for extra insurance.

*FUEL* develops creative, inspiring and interactive learning material targeted at employees with the aim of igniting the joy of learning in employees. *FUEL* builds, hosts & manages online corporate training academies on behalf of major brands ensuring an effective, integrated and managed learning programme.

Because of the unique challenges in the South African training landscape, *FUEL* developed training content which is intuitive and easily accessible to employees. It uses a combination of video and other interactive technology – such as touch-screen devices – to relay content, as well as make use of conventional study material when required. *FUEL*'s training is closely aligned to strategic business goals.

Traditional methods of training can be disruptive, costly and ineffectual in businesses. Impartial technology is utilised by *FUEL* enabling a broader reach to a more diverse audience

## Learning Philosophy

The following training principles were met for all users in the deployment of training solutions:

The training developed was:

- Individualised – every learner is unique and therefore every solution requires appropriate information and content delivery that suits their competency level and knowledge.
- Dynamic – content is designed to be effective and engaging and the interactive learning format facilitates maximum retention.
- Balanced – an ideal ratio between live and online solutions dovetail to create easy-to-understand training.
- Continuous – Learning is continuous, methodical and systematic and allows learners to progress steadily, at their own level and at their own pace.

With these training principles, *FUEL* has developed a unique system, the Continuous Learning Management System (CLMS), which ensures that all learners are engaged on an ongoing basis with dynamic, cost-effective training.

## Continuous Professional Development (CDP)

*Company A* recognises Continuous Professional Development in the workplace as the core of the online provision to clients. The approach is designed to support learning opportunities in the Professional Development cycle of all members within an organisation.

Learning solutions are designed around the following six core themes:

- New Hire Induction and Orientation Training
- Leadership and Business Management Training
- Sales Training
- Product Knowledge Training
- Compliance and Regulatory Training
- ICT Software and Systems Training

## **Methodology**

### **Consult**

*FUEL* consulted extensively with the *Engen* to obtain all the necessary information. Following this was a process of analysis and collation pertaining to their existing systems. Included in this process was an assessment of their current knowledge and the skills gap. Part of this process is obtaining the *Engen's* long term and short term learning goals. The information obtained was then passed on to the production team.

### **Create**

The instructional designers and production team considered all the information that was collated. They designed, mapped and created a unique solution that met the objectives of *Engen* in terms of initiating the training programme which was to upskill their frontline staff, the petrol attendants. They developed a multi-faceted learning programme that and took into account that many of the target learners were illiterate or semi-literate and that there was a range of competence and knowledge.

### **Implement**

*FUEL* deployed the training platform and content at 630 outlets across South Africa. The new learning system was launched with minimal demands on the resources of *Engen*. The rollout took 5 months and within this period 60% of the learners had begun their training. Once up and running learners could start acquiring new skills and all training could be monitored by head office staff at *Engen*.

The **Managed Service** reduced training administration overheads as services at each retailer are fully managed and facilitated for the duration of the agreement between the parties. The cost of expensive infrastructure and in-house development was therefore reduced.

The platform ensures that clients are able to provide a large amount of content, quickly and effectively, to a wide spread audience in a cost-efficient manner.

### **Support**

Learning progress is monitored with monthly service calls, ensuring that the *Engen's* training is running smoothly and on schedule. Learners progress is mapped which facilitates onward learning. A helpdesk is available to designated users and/or managers 6 days a week.

### **Managed Service**

- Fast and effective communications via information and bulletin services;
- Call centre available to all users six days per week;
- Extensive reporting capabilities with customised reporting;

- Comprehensive communications platform for notifications, messaging and alerts;
- Reporting – Administrators and Managers have the ability to access real-time reporting across all users and training departments;
- Reports can be scheduled and delivered to Managers on either a weekly or monthly basis;
- Weekly communication is sent to all users on the system as either a training reinforcement or reminder;
- Bi-Monthly training consultation –every outlet is called to discuss all aspects of the training;
- Content Management;
- Continuous improvement;
- Client Customisation

Utilising this methodology and training approach, **FUEL** distributed 630 iPads at **Engen's** outlets across the country and training began. The training has produced unprecedented results. **Engen** has more than 16 400 active learners. The learners have completed in excess of 414 623 modules and on average, the system trains 456 learners per day. A programme survey reveals that 99.13% of users find the modules easy to understand. Almost all (99.92%) say the programme helped them do a better job. Random customer satisfaction surveys show that **Engen's** outlets having undergone this training score on average 7% higher than those who have not. This is noteworthy as since the inception of **Engen's** customer satisfaction survey, no other initiative has ever yielded a greater increase in customer satisfaction.

The training is SAQA accredited and therefore contributes to the learner's qualifications. It is estimated by **Engen** that it would have taken them 25 years to train these numbers using traditional methods. Using the iPad is intuitive and thus makes learning accessible to illiterate learners. Customer service has improved as a result of this intervention, but, what is of interest to those concerned with education in South Africa, learners have testified to the fact that their lives have improved a result of the training.

## Findings

This project has significance both for the companies initiating training programmes and for the individuals being trained. For the trainees, skills and confidence are gained and it promotes the opportunity for people to progress, who might previously have been excluded from advancing their careers.

For businesses, it is important that the training solution is aligned with the government's Skills Development Strategy, which aims to combat South Africa's skills shortage by training people already in employment using the various SETA's.

"This is the first adult education initiative of its kind, and, we believe, the first corporate solution deployed amidst literacy challenges. Its success has surpassed all objectives and expectations. It has set the tone for what's possible for other employers," says **FUEL's** CEO.

"We could never have imagined that we could complete 145 000 training modules. Using our old training methodology, it would've taken us 25 years to get to the same results that we have achieved within the past 12 months," concludes the Customer Experience Manager at **Engen**.

On the back of this successful first-stage rollout, **Engen** is expanding the programme to more of its service stations across Sub Saharan Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands.

## Conclusion

The successful result in *Engen's* has made a positive change to staff performance, to customer satisfaction and ultimately to the business and has confirmed the effectiveness of *FUEL* learning philosophy and training methodology.

## Biographies



**Amanda Reekie** is an experienced brand strategist who graduated from WITS with a BA degree and has a Diploma in Marketing Management from the Institute of Marketing Management.

She is a marketer who has over 23 years of marketing experience and is now a marketing consultant to FUEL.



**Craig Reid**, Managing Director. FUEL's founder, Craig Reid, started the company with the vision of applying technology to develop employees skills to improve his clients' profitability and enhance corporate efficiencies. He draws on a decade of extensive experience in retail, broadcast technology, video production, professional coaching and training industries.

Driven by a keen insight into triggering human performance through customized technology, Craig pioneered online training in South Africa and more than 10 years down the line has established himself as a specialist in building corporate blended learning academies for a long list of blue chip companies.