

The Ford Motor Company

Established in 1903, the Ford Motor Company (www.ford.com) is the second largest automotive manufacturer and the largest truck manufacturer in the world, with more than 15,800 dealers in 200 markets and more than 100 plants in 38 countries, and a financial services division. Most of the company's 2000 sales were in its home market of the United States: in 2000, this region's sales were \$118.37 billion, which is equivalent to 69.6% of total sales. Ford currently has 345,991 employees and with sales of \$170.06 billion, this equates to sales of US \$491,527 per employee. (CorporateInformation.com)

Ford Motor Co. has launched a variety of enhanced learning experiences for its employees. Most recently it provides specific job training through the Ford Learning Network, it has expanded its eternally professional development tool (My Roadmap), has begun to deploy a virtual assistant (Ernie) for its repair technicians, launched the Ford Design Institute for its engineers and technical employees, and a Pathlore system to train its customer service call center employees. Many of these programs have been so successful that their original use has been expanded through the company's departments and others (the Ford Learning Network) are being monitored as potential revenue makers once packaged and sold to other industries.

My Roadmap

Due to recent financial instability, Ford Motor Co. decided that it wanted to increase its emphasis on helping its employees hone their skills to maintain their competitiveness. So the automaker expanded an internally developed tool called My Roadmap beyond Ford's sales and marketing teams and into its human resources, materials planning and logistics, and purchasing departments with plans to eventually provide all 350,000 employees with access to the software to acquire needed skills and plan their careers at the company. (Khirallah) "With plans to cut its workforce by several thousand, My Roadmap will be useful in reassigning tasks to remaining employees." (Khirallah) The Roadmap system helps employees analyze their current competency levels, guides them through appropriate learning experiences that will increase their competency and allows managers to view and analyze the training data. (Strategic, 2001)

Ernie-an automotive technician's virtual support system

Ford was also interested in how mobile learning and technician support could improve its customer service efficiency and effectiveness.

Powered by software from San Francisco-based NativeMinds Inc., Ford developed "Ernie" software that answers questions over the Web about Ford's car problem analyzer, the Worldwide Diagnostic System (WDS), from repair technicians at 5,600 Ford Dealerships nationwide.

(Johnson) Ernie has a natural language interface so it understands not only natural conversation but also the car manufacturing terminology. Ernie also tracks the topic of a back-and-forth interaction with a technician; so if Ernie gets a follow-up question like "How do I hook it up?" it knows to what "it" refers. When Ernie is truly stumped, the application automatically routes the customer's question and contact information to customer service for a callback, saving a Ford technician the effort of starting over with the customer's question. (Johnson, 2001)

Ford Design Institute

To achieve workplace excellence for 20,000 engineers and technical employees worldwide Ford developed the Ford Design Institute (FDI). FDI trains each engineer on a range of 10 methodologies, like experimental design, process controls and reliability. Each methodology takes about 3 months to complete and has a 6-step patented training process. The steps include online and CD-ROM training, an online post-test, workshop training and online practical assessment (APEL). (Futuremedia.com) Using the FDI, Ford was able to put nearly 20,000 of those employees through 160 hours worth of training in four years (EasyCando).

Ford Global Technical Education for Suppliers

Quickly Ford Motor Company came to the realization that their suppliers were playing an increasingly integral role in bringing new products to market and therefore supporting their professional development and providing training to ensure that the skills of their supplier's engineers matched those of the competition was essential to maintaining Ford's competitive edge. In September of 2000, and Accenture team designed and build Ford Motor Company's Global Technical Educational for Suppliers (GTEPS)

<https://fsn.ford.com/default.html> which allowed the suppliers to register for and purchase course and web-enabled or in-person workshops, complete course and take competency tests in a subject area that allowed for tracking of student qualifications through the company-wide training progress reporting system. (Accenture, 2001)

Ford Customer Service Call Center Elearning System

Ford has also given their customer service call center access to elearning technologies in an effort to maintain and improve customer

support. Their Pathlore CRM system has enabled Percepta (Ford's customer service outsourcing company) to deliver and manage just-in-time learning for their customer service representatives around the world. "Fifteen hundred Percepta agents are learning 25% faster than they would through instructor-led training alone, and they are retaining more content" (Pathlore, 2000) Customer relationship management training used to run two to four weeks in the classroom depending on the type of product the customer support team was learning about, but the new elearning system has shortened that training by a week or more.

Ford Learning Network

Ford has found that their Ford Learning Network that was launched in June of 2001, has been effective. Ed Sketch, director of educational training and development for Ford in North America and Europe estimates that by putting classic Ford courses, such as "Lean Manufacturing" online the company's training division is saving at least \$25 million a year. (Schneider, 2001) Ford is also focus on maintaining a enterprise knowledge base for both its employees and suppliers. Its Lean Resource Center online bookstore features one of the most extensive collections available of titles focusing on lean manufacturing. All Ford employees and suppliers have access to the site's collection of technical and professional books and information resources covering more than 35 subject areas. (Ebiz Chronicle, 2000)

As testimony to Ford's successful implementation and use of their various elearning ventures, it plans on selling their Ford Learning Network system to other companies within the next year. Realizing the competitive advantage that is developed by providing elearning for employees, Ford's competitors are quickly entering the mobile learning realm as well - with Toyota Motor Sales launching an e-learning component of their existing corporate university, The University of Toyota; and GM's plans announced in April of this year to move its four-year old corporate university online as well.

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