

THE IGEL PILOT

E-LEARNING IN THE INSPECTORS GENERAL COMMUNITY—THE IGEL PILOT

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“The illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.”

- Alvin Toffler, futurist and author

Toffler’s quote is more true today than at any time in history. As agents of positive change, Inspector General (IG) offices struggle to position themselves to help their departments and agencies continually improve. How can IG offices embrace and commit to the continuous learning required for helping their departments and agencies improve programs and operations, increase Government integrity, thwart crime, build relationships across levels of Government while providing innovative solutions to complex problems? One strategy is E-Learning. The IG community’s E-Learning (IGEL) pilot provides staff with access to a broad range of curricula, information, and performance enhancement tools in a “just in time” and “any place” learning and work environment.

BACKGROUND

E-Learning is not new—it has a surprisingly long history. With its beginnings during the 1970s, many computer programmers got their first lessons on green-screen machines.¹ During the next stage of development—1980 through 1990—satellite-based video training, commonly called distance learning, brought together large gatherings with multiple speakers from around the world. Global companies such as FedEx and Xerox participated in such events as a way of providing information and communicating key directions to their staff across the globe. During that same period, PC-based training began by way of the CD ROM.² Programs such as DOS and Windows were among the first products in that format. The first generation of Web-based training or the virtual classroom, what we now commonly understand as E-Learning, began in 1998.³ Current trends in E-Learning emphasize blended learning experiences incorporating the Web, video, audio, and simulations. IGEL builds from best practices, offering the IG community state-of-the-art E-Learning opportunities. E-Learning is also advocated through the President’s Management Agenda.

¹ *E-Learning: Evolution, Best Practices and Future Solutions*, Jack J. Phillip and Christine Pope, ASTD 2001.

² *How Did We Get Here?* Josh Bersin, Jossey-Bass, 2004.

³ *Ibid.*

THE IGEL APPROACH

Work on the IGEL pilot began in April 2005 when an E-Learning Steering Group that represented the community met to develop guidance and support for 35 participating IG offices. The Steering Group met for the first time in late April. IGEL was launched in July. With the assistance of subject matter experts, the Steering Group developed learning programs for each key occupation within the community.

The staff at participating IG offices were asked to test a learning program based on their specific occupations or their areas of operations. When the IGEL pilot ends in April 2006, the Steering Group will report to the PCIE/ECIE the effectiveness of E-Learning as a way of increasing the skill levels of the community, reduce overall training hour costs, increase actual training hours and training opportunities, while supporting developing core skills and training experiences consistent with the community's core competencies.

THE POWER OF E-LEARNING

We are already learning that E-Learning has many advantages over classroom training including:

- Broader reach. E-Learning has no boundaries. E-Learning does not have travel restrictions, scheduling concerns, or restrictions on classroom size.
- Consistency across the organization. With E-Learning, delivery is consistent. Customization of content can be designed into the course or blended learning can be conducted to bring a fresh touch or feel consistent with specific user requirements. However, the strength of E-Learning is in the consistent delivery of learning across an organization.
- More choice. We have more than 2,000 courses available to the community. Students can take courses when they feel the need or when they desire greater skill proficiency. Staff can and are encouraged to go where their interests take them. Tomorrow's work will need different sets

of skills than we have today. IGEL provides a rich curricula for IG staff to explore.

- Training on demand. Training is available when the user wants or needs it. IGEL is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You do not need to be on line to take IGEL courses. Courses can be downloaded to the student's laptop and the course taken on an airplane, at the beach, or wherever students find themselves. Upon reconnection with the Web site, course work is updated into the student's individual folder.
- Self-paced training. For too long, students were locked into the pace of the classroom instructor or the slowest student. No longer; E-Learning is self-paced. You can go as fast or as slow as necessary. In our pilot, students are encouraged to take the course test first. If they pass, they receive credit without having to take the course. Self-paced training can accelerate the learning process and ensure a level of proficiency that we expect within the IG community.
- Training that reflects employee needs and interests. While the Steering Group established expectations around specific occupations and core competencies, NO restrictions on the overall curricula exist. Staff can take as many courses as they want.
- Custom content. The IG community is the first in the Federal Government to have access to "Dialogue." Dialogue is a virtual classroom application that lets us provide custom content to our community. We are pleased to announce that the Number 2 course is a course our Investigative Academy developed—"Flying Armed." For participating agencies, investigators no longer need to schedule, travel, and pay for the course. The course is available through Dialogue. As a virtual classroom application, Dialogue is a powerful tool and provides IG investigators with a solution to their training challenges.
- Performance enhancement tools. IGEL provides access to Books 24x7 Referenceware. With more than 7,000 titles, the reference library promises to be of immense value. Books 24x7 comes with a powerful search engine that identifies books,

chapters, and pages that can be read, copied, and pasted into our work products. With Books 24x7, offices can reduce the need to purchase books. Instead, staff can peruse hundreds of books or a few on a specific issue or problem, or search for best practices to support findings and recommendations, or both. Such functionality has the potential to significantly increase staff research capabilities.

EARLY PILOT PERFORMANCE

The IGEL pilot is receiving strong support and activity in the community. At the end of August, IG staff had accessed more than 2,000 courses. The top three courses included Blood-Borne Pathogens, Flying Armed, and Building Relationships to Get Results. Staff also made extensive use of Books 24x7, having read more than 4,600 pages on line. The top three books assessed were “Project Management Tool Kit,” “100 Tip and Techniques for Getting the Job Done Right,” and “175 Ways to Get More Done in Less Time.”

The Human Resources Committee and I are encouraged with early performance statistics and the promise of the IGEL pilot. When users were asked to respond to whether the course content was useful, 85 percent responded strongly agree. On a similar track, when asked whether the subject matter could be applied to their work, 84 percent of the respondents strongly agreed.

CONCLUSION

How does the IG community posture itself to continually improve? How do IG leaders assist IG staff embrace and commit to the continuous learning required to work with their departments and agencies to improve programs and operations, to increase Government integrity, to thwart crime, to build relationships across Government lines, and to provide innovative solutions to complex problems? E-Learning may prove to be part of the strategy. While not a silver bullet, the strategy could prove to be a component of our comprehensive

workforce capability development program. The Human Resources Committee encourages pilot participants to log on to IGEL at <http://igel.skillport.com>

I want to express my thanks to the IGEL Steering Group whose names are listed below. Their dedication, insight, and sense of community are evident in this E-Learning pilot.

John Mullins

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U.S. Postal Service

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Treasury

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