



PERC Goes on Digital Mission To Train Propane Marketers

Propane Education & Research Council (PERC)
Best Unique or Innovative Learning
and Development Program
October 2017



Company Background



Company At-a-Glance	
Headquarters	Washington, DC
Year Founded	1996
Revenue	\$26,846,812
Global Scale	United States
Customers/Output, etc.	Marketing, research, education, training for the propane industry
Industry	Propane
Website	[http://www.propanecouncil.org/]

Budget and Timeframe

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Overall budget	\$240,000
Number of employees involved with the implementation?	24
Number of Operations or Subject Matter Expert employees involved with the implementation?	10
Number of contractors involved with implementation	3

Timeframe to implement	April 2016 through today
Start date of the program	March 2017

Business Conditions & Business Needs

In recent years, more participants in classroom-based Marketer Technology and Sales Training (MTST) have requested digital learning to supplement their experience and expand training beyond the classroom. PERC surveyed propane industry representatives to define the top MTST-related training needs of the propane industry and collaborated with a digital training expert to define digital course requirements and brainstorm ways of promoting digital sales training to the industry.

Overview

PERC selected GP Strategies to help with content development, learning design, and performance support strategy. Working closely, the two teams designed and implemented learner-driven content that brings together existing PERC marketer resources, custom-designed eLearning courses, webinars, videos, and other materials to create structured, interactive learner journeys.

The training, built on the Intrepid LMS platform, uses gamification elements such as points, badges, and interactive tiles, and social media features such as message boards and bookmarking.

Design of the Program

GP Strategies' team worked closely with PERC on the site structure to incorporate customized content and learning paths by curating PERC resources, existing web content, videos, white papers, job aids, eBooks, and webinars. The customized learning activities include capstone virtual-learning projects.

Initially, GP Strategies developed four sleek, highly-interactive eLearning modules on advanced training topics such as the Propane Energy Pod and Propane Autogas School Bus Market. Another 12 webinars are planned to cover advanced sales, marketing, and technology topics.

This project is particularly innovative because structure is only provisional. Instead, users have a learner-guided platform where they select topics they want. Learning elements



are bite-sized, allowing busy professionals to “hop on and hop off.” In addition, the customized learning experience allows users to access resources from a variety of areas.

The ongoing curation of content ensures that the learning experience will continue to stay fresh and exciting for PERC’s audience.

Delivery of the Program

The diversity of the target audience was a major challenge. PERC serves the entire propane marketing industry, and members come from all company sizes, possess formal educational backgrounds or little formal education, and have varying levels of business experience and technical savvy.

The custom courses and overall digital experiences were tested and validated with representatives of the propane industry. The goal was to ensure that the training was sufficiently sophisticated and engaging while still simple and user-friendly enough for novices.

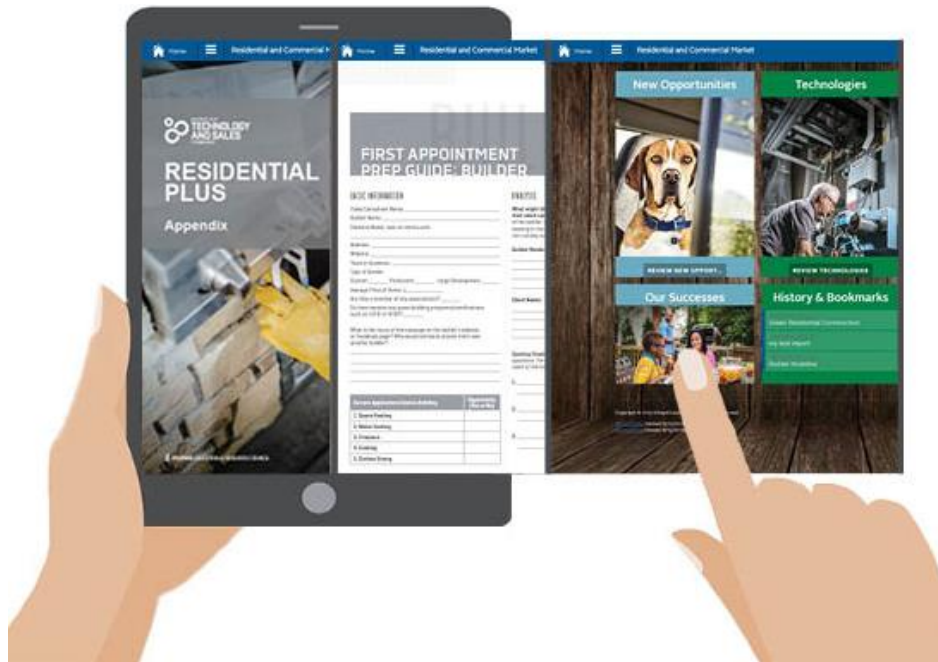
PERC’s sales and marketing newsletter, *Marketer Momentum*, was used to invite learners to the training with this message:

“The MTST classroom experience is expanding into a digital space. You can now get classroom sales theory, market insight, and sales practice from your house, office — anywhere digital can go.

“PERC’s new Learning Hub is a digital space where you can explore, learn, and refine your propane know-how. The Hub connects you to other propane professionals through its social features and shared activities. Earn points for completing the activities to reach the top of the leader board.

“Wherever you are, you can stay connected with the propane community and continue refining your expertise.”

Figure 1: Learning Hub



Source: PERC 2017

Additionally, PERC rolled out the Digital Marketer Technology and Sales Training just prior to the NPGA Southeastern Convention & International Propane Expo, where promotional activities highlighted the new features and opportunities available to learners in the platform. The conference allowed PERC to reach its target audience in a different way.

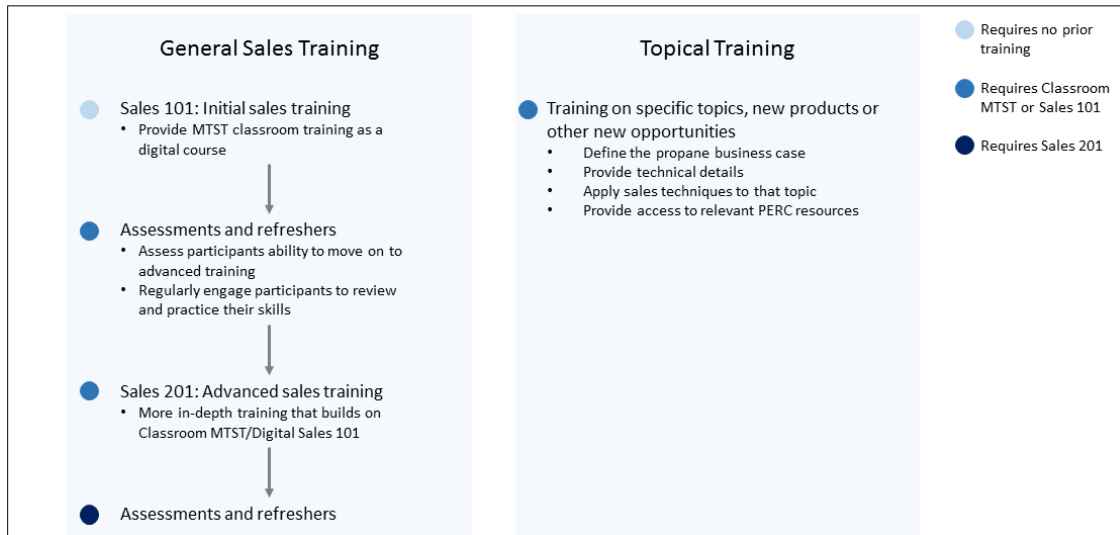
The MTST classroom experience has been redesigned to directly expose participants to the digital environment.

Targeted Audience

The training's key audience is any member of the propane industry who interacts with current or potential propane customers, including past participants of the MTST classroom training. Following up with past participants is helping the eLearning gain initial traction in the market, while engaging non-participants expands PERC's current training audience.

To meet the needs of both past participants and non-participants, the digital training includes general sales training and topical training.

Figure 2: General Sales and Topical Training



Source: PERC 2017

General sales training is applicable across topics and market sectors and includes:

- **Sales 101 for non-participants.** Digitally mirrors the classroom MTST.
- **Sales 201 for past MTST participants.** Builds on previous training for those people who have taken either classroom MTST or digital Sales 101 and passed the associated assessments.
- **Assessments and follow-up material.** To ensure both courses meet their training objectives and to continuously engage participants in the skills and information learned in the courses.

Topical courses apply sales techniques to specific markets or sales opportunities and can be accessed by propane industry members with basic sales training either in the classroom or online with Sales 101. Topical training provides a more in-depth look at a specific sales opportunity, shares relevant technical background, and trains participants to make a sale within that specific context.

For example, PERC could offer a topical course on new water heater standards, the opportunity they create for propane water heaters, and technology-specific sales training for those water heaters.

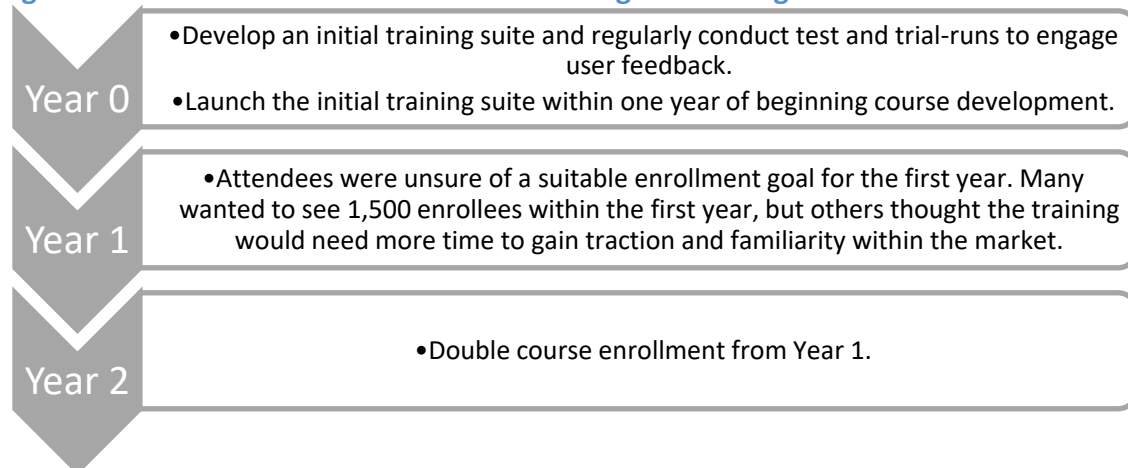
Measurable Benefits

PERC’s customers are propane marketers around the country; hence, PERC itself does not directly benefit from training. Instead, as an industry research and training non-profit, PERC exists to serve the marketers.

Deployment of the Digital MTST platform provides a direct, concrete benefit to members by providing a new learning channel that is available to any time, requires no travel, supplies training in short bursts, continually evolves, provides access to advanced learning topics not available in the classroom training, and delivers opportunities for social networking and engagement

Within the first two weeks of launch, more than 200 participants self-enrolled. PERC identified other metrics and key milestones to track the success of the program as it rolls out and evolves over the next several years. The first milestone has been achieved.

Figure 3: Milestones and Methods to Assess Digital Training



Source: PERC 2017

Overall

The Digital MTST platform already shows success with enrollments exceeding 200 within two weeks, user feedback strongly positive, and interest across the industry.

Feedback

The pilot tests from industry representatives included these comments:

“Very professionally done! Excellent!!”

“Everything seemed to flow nicely.”



“Some very good information for beginners into the water heater propane sales area.”

“A lot of information, best when have time to watch several times to help comprehend the information supplied to become more knowledgeable on the water heaters.”

“I thought the program covered all bases to get into the school bus autogas market.”

The PERC team and propane company representatives should check with each other regularly to ensure that the training continues to meet companies’ goals and expectations. PERC also should also track website metrics on:

- Number of people who engage in topical training after taking a general sales course.
- Number of uses who engage with other resources on the PERC website after taking a course.

New content is continuing to be developed along with new learner journeys to ensure that the digital experience remains fresh for learners, offers opportunities to draw new learners, and provides rewards for existing users to revisit the site. A curriculum development plan already maps learner journeys through the remainder of 2017.

Longer-term plans include the conversion of seven classroom modules to virtual formats, the creation of additional eLearning modules, and the continued development of new learner journeys into 2018 and beyond.

PERC and GP Strategies’ partnership will be considered successful based on answers:

- Are people using the digital component after classroom training?
- Are there repeat visits?
- Do participants believe the training impacts their sales efforts?



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