



DEDICATED TO ASSOCIATION EDUCATION: THE ASAE UNIVERSITY MISSION AND ICOHERE

Case Study: ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership

This case study covers:

- ✓ Member Associations
- ✓ Online Professional Learning

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Introduction



Tammy Blosil, VP, Online Learning, ASAE

ASAE: The Center For Association Leadership is a professional membership association consisting of more than 22,000 association executives and industry partners that together represent over 11,000 trade associations, individual membership societies, and voluntary organizations across the United States and worldwide. For over 90 years, ASAE has been “the mother of associations,” cultivating a rich, collaborative community where association and nonprofit professionals learn their trade, contribute best practices, publish industry references, and continue professional learning throughout their career. In key operational areas, ASAE sets the standard for how associations worldwide strive to operate.

In 2005, as part of their educational program now known as “ASAE University,” ASAE began developing 6-week self-paced courses on association core competencies. With a limited budget and staff, ASAE decided to cut costs and maximize outreach by offering courses online through the iCoHere platform. Upon completing a course, participants receive a certification of completion from ASAE University and eighteen Certification Association Executive (CAE) credits.

“The goal of our online education is not just to provide products and programs, but to actually provide a curriculum whereby an association member can glean what it is they need in order to do their jobs better.” — Tammy Blosil, VP, Online Learning, ASAE

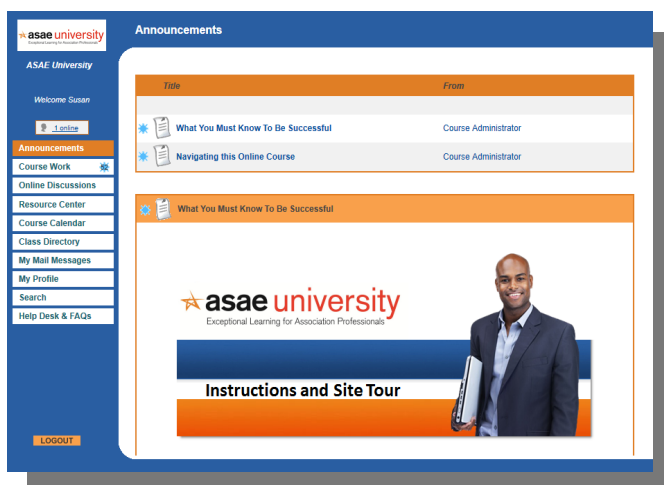
Key Challenges

Though online education can have many benefits, it also drastically changes the learning landscape for participants accustomed to traditional in-person classroom settings. In an online course, the participants assume a higher degree of responsibility for their education; without an in-person instructor to guide them through every step, it becomes their responsibility to master the material in a timely and efficient manner. Less independent learners can sometimes find themselves struggling to keep pace in an asynchronous online environment where self-starting and self-discipline are essential to maximizing one’s learning experience.

In a traditional classroom setting, camaraderie built through daily contact with the faculty and fellow participants can bolster interest in and dedication to the course. However, an online course lacks this face-to-face interaction, thus making it more difficult to foster the same supportive environment. The absence of live contact with an instructor or peers can leave some participants feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and less motivated to learn.

Finally, in an online course, where learning takes places exclusively in a virtual sphere, technical issues can significantly impede a participant's education. For example, a slow Internet connection can cause problems logging into the site, retrieving and submitting assignments, or posting to threaded discussions. Additionally, participants who are less computer-savvy might find themselves frustrated by complicated web site designs where information is hard to find.

Solution and Results



Since 2005, ASAE has expanded its online education programs considerably, going from a small offering of 6-week volunteer-run courses to an extensive and diverse curriculum of eleven 6-week courses and three 2-week courses taught by paid experts in the field. Despite the challenges of online education, ASAE's virtual courses have flourished, enrolling thousands of participants every year and reporting an average satisfaction rating of 4.3 out of 5.

Furthermore, the majority of people who enroll in ASAE's online courses successfully see them through, with more than 75% of ASAE's participants finishing their courses on time.

The Phenomenal Success of ASAE's 2-week courses

ASAE's 2-week courses were designed following the success of their 6-week courses. These shorter courses, covering such soft-skill topics as customer service and supervisory management, served a need for those with tight schedules who were still looking for ways to attain professional development. Today, they are ASAE's most popular online course. According to Tammy Blossil, "members are actually knocking on our door asking to get into these courses. They have been phenomenally successful."

Part of ASAE's success lies in the structure they've established for their courses. Each online course is divided into six modules (or less in a 2-week course) that focus on specific topics. In these modules, participants join in related discussions and complete relevant reading and learning assignments. This modulated framework simplifies the process of setting a self-study schedule. Rather than having to budget time for the entirety of a course's content, participants can organize their weeks by the various modules, studying one module per week for a 6-week course and one module every 2-3 days for a 2-week course. However, this is only a recommended pace, and students can always catch up or work ahead. Recognizing that its members often have busy careers and personal lives, ASAE keeps its modules accessible 24/7, so even if members have missed a few weeks, it is not difficult to make up the work.

Another aspect of ASAE's success is the ample guidance and assistance provided to participants. By reaching out to participants before the course even begins and making them feel comfortable in an online environment, they administer the support needed to overcome the isolating qualities of the Internet. For example, prior to the start of a 6-week course, ASAE provides participants with a 6-day orientation period where they are able to log into the iCohere site, view a site tour explaining the different features, familiarize themselves with the site settings, and create an online profile.

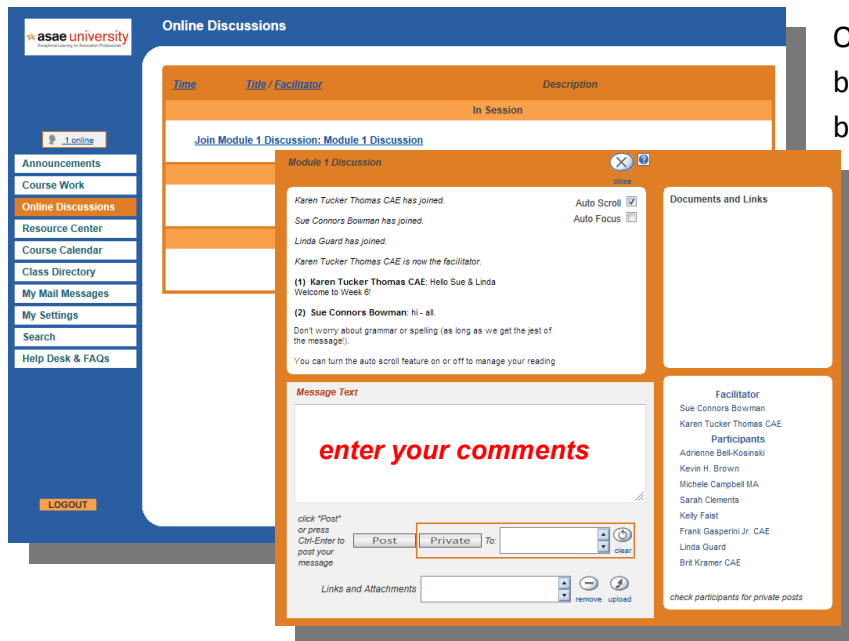
According to Tammy Blosil, the idea is to make participants feel like "they are in a safe net haven. We know that social media and social networking are important to individuals these days. You have a tendency to bond more so with individuals when you share something about yourself, so we provide those means within our profiles."

The screenshot displays the 'My Profile' page for a user named Susan. The page is divided into several sections:

- Time Settings:** Shows the current date and time for the user's computer and the system. The system time is 'Fri Aug 26, 2011 3:07 PM'. There is an option to 'Edit Time Zone Settings'.
- Date Format:** Offers two options: 'mm/dd/yy' (selected) and 'dd/mm/yy'.
- Identification:** Contains a form with the following fields:
 - First Name:** Susan
 - Familiar Name:** (empty)
 - Last Name:** Wilson
- Photo:** A small profile picture of Susan is shown, with 'replace' and 'remove' buttons below it.

At the bottom of the page, there is a 'LOGOUT' button. The left sidebar contains navigation links such as 'Announcements', 'Course Work', 'Online Discussions', 'Resource Center', 'Course Calendar', 'Class Directory', 'My Mail Messages', 'My Profile', 'Search', and 'Help Desk & FAQs'.

The course and software are designed to be accessible and easy-to-use, so that participants do not feel overwhelmed. The site runs well even for those with low network bandwidth, and participants can log in from any location with Internet access using a PC, Mac, smart phone, or tablet computer. A help desk is available 8 A.M. to 8 P.M. EST to assist participants with any issues they encounter while using the site.



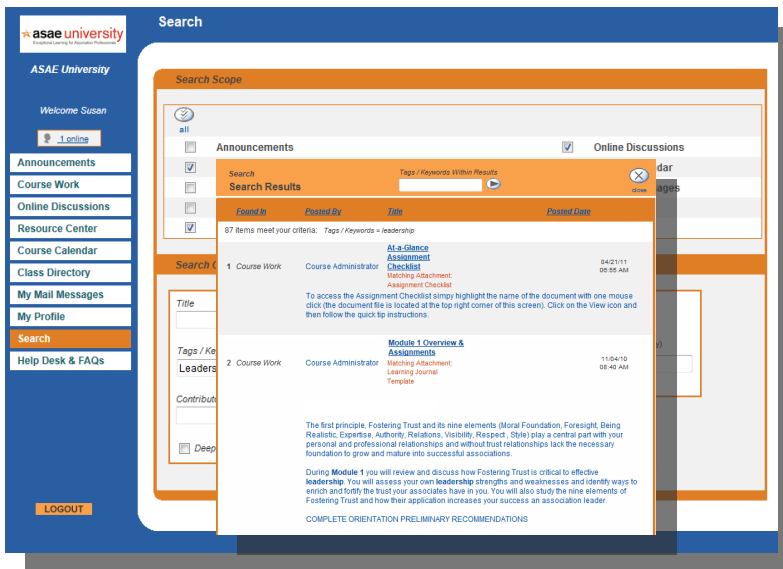
Once the course officially begins, participants are guided by experienced faculty and a course administrator. The faculty helps facilitate the participants' learning experience by providing such services as sending out personalized progress reports and initiating live online discussions for additional interaction. Participants are also connected to their peers through discussion

boards where they can share ideas and best practices, as well as debate important association issues. For every course module, participants are required to submit two quality discussion postings, thus promoting interaction and encouraging an active role in their learning outside of just absorbing the material.

ASAE's courses are customized to an audience, not only by topic of interest, but by level. Courses offered range from basic subjects such as "Principles of Association Management" (Level I) to more complex topics such as "CEO Dialogue: Leading Associations in the 21st Century" (Level III). This way, anyone from an entry-level young professional to a seasoned executive can find a course that interests them and learn with similarly experienced and like-minded peers, furthering a sense of community in the course.

"Individuals recognize the value we bring to them by the number of experts that they have at their beck and call and the number of peers that are accessible online with them in building that community."

– Tammy Blosil



In addition, ASAE’s courses are often tailored to each set of participants that comes in. Even though a course such as Principles of Association Management has a single syllabus, it may evolve differently depending on the level and role of the learner and the various concerns they have coming into the course. For example, one group of participants in a course might be

interested in volunteer management, while a different group of participants in the same course might want to focus on marketing and branding. Due to the flexibility of the courses, discussions with facilitators and peers could turn out very differently for these two groups, thereby creating a more personalized and engaging experience for attendees.

Summary

With the growth of the Internet and collaborative technologies, online educational programs are becoming more and more commonplace. ASAE is an example of an organization that has taken great advantage of online learning programs, creating highly successful, personalized curricula that have expanded learning opportunities for its members. Starting off with a shoestring budget and volunteer-run model, ASAE has expanded its online educational programs into a thriving, paid-faculty operation with multiple 6-week and 2-week courses. Accommodating the needs of hard-working professionals and association members who need or want to continue their education, ASAE’s facilitated online courses offer valuable content and tools accessible 24/7 for excellence in association learning.

ASAE Key Takeaways:

- ◆ Start small with volunteer staff while you prove your online learning model.
- ◆ Provide 24/7 access to support materials through online tools.
- ◆ Test your education platform on all the computer platforms your members use.



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iCoHERE is an online collaboration platform that has been enabling online communities, conferences, courses, and webcasts since 2001. We can help you launch a dynamic member portal. We can extend your in-person meetings and conferences to remote Internet-connected participants nationally or internationally in a highly interactive manner. And we can produce entirely online (also called “virtual” or “digital”) workshops focused on specific topics of interest.

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