GUIDE

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ONLINE TRAINING

PowerDMS

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Introduction

As a law-enforcement professional, you are tasked with a multitude of responsibilities that you're depended on to carry out in a timely, efficient, and thorough manner. And through all this, you still have to remain up-to-date on the latest best practices within your agency – review and sign off on current compliance standards, take tests to assess your knowledge and earn certifications, and hope the higher-ups can find the time and resources to listen to your needs and opinions and make dynamic changes.

Many agencies turn to face-to-face classrooms to help combat lack of time vs. regulatory compliance, aiming to train and certify many officers at once. But what about the other types of costs to these agencies? Not only do face-to-face courses require money spent on proctors and learning materials; they can also easily create issues like scheduling conflicts that may outweigh the purpose the course had in the first place. In law enforcement, officers must learn certain skills (i.e., practical firearms training) in a face-to-face environment. But with more general certifications (i.e., crisis intervention) that don't require that in-person environment, how can you find a balance between budget cuts and sound compliance training?

The solution rests with online training courses. By entrusting your classrooms to a virtual workspace, you ensure the certification of many officers at once and save time and money in the process.

The figure below outlines some of the positive aspects of favoring an electronic training system over an in-person course environment.

Face-to-Face Classrooms	Online Courses
❌ Miscellaneous paper forms and Excel spreadsheets to track employee certifications and course history	✅ Virtual database of student and certificate history, with automatic certificate expiration
❌ Primary focus is on schedules and locations	✅ Primary focus is on course content and learning
❌ Individual course proctor(s) and schedules that may require course attendees to be paid overtime	✅ Self-taught and self-paced learning environment
❌ Continual budget pulls to secure proctors, locations, and course materials (paper, pencils, etc.)	✅ Single software purchase
❌ Fee tracking may get lost among multiple course administrators	✅ Online tracking assigns fees automatically

Step 1: Engage

Consider your most recently hired officers. In this day and age, they are most likely used to computers, and may even be dependent on modern technology. Embracing change and growing as trends do is and always has been the mark of success, however challenging that growth may be.

Online training allows you to engage your employees in a way that makes them want to learn. Instead of being forced to sit in a classroom and have to be paid overtime, they can learn from the comfort of their desks or even patrol cars. No two employees are the same, so a self-paced course environment is an ideal training solution.

With online courses, your officers:

- Learn within a paperless environment, with tasks they can complete with the click of a mouse
- Work training in around their own already-busy schedules, and at their own learning speeds
- Are automatically notified when their certifications are going to expire
- Have the ability to note necessary offline coursework, such as hands-on firearms training

Online courses also give you the ability to attach multiple types of elements to your learning environment, eliminating issues such as forgetting a video at the office or not having enough syllabi for everyone. In many online-learning workspaces, the following elements are attachable, and can be crucial to your officers retaining the most relevant, up-to-date information regarding a necessary training certification:

- Documents (policies, memos, etc.)
- Media files (PowerPoint presentations, videos, audio clips, etc.)
- Knowledge assessments
- Satisfaction surveys

Imagine a single environment that gives your officers all the information they need to know without conflicting schedules, delegating proctoring duties, spending money on course materials, or confusion over who needs to be certified and when. In an economic environment where budget cuts are common, and training needs are as integral as always, online training is a sound investment.

Step 2: Track

How are you currently managing your employee certifications? Many officers keep paper lists of certification history or Excel spreadsheets of this information. While these methods of tracking may be more manageable for a small agency, imagine the scrolling, filing, and paper-shuffling that transpires within larger organizations. Hundreds of employees on a paper list is a surefire recipe for missing or out-of-date certifications – not to mention messy eraser holes. Excel and Word files are a bit more progressive, but they require administrators to update them manually. And even further, multiple administrators can confuse who updated a certification list and when.

An online training environment helps track necessary certifications and holds the right people accountable. Automatic notifications ensure your personnel know what certifications are required, and when. This eliminates the risk of missing out-of-date records in a time of crisis, saving your agency money and retaining your credibility. In many cases, you can also upload an image of the certificate(s) attached to a course, so officers can print them out and have something tangible to take away.

The following is a natural path that online certifications take.

Officer needs certification → Takes class to earn certificate (Policy, Video, Offline, Audio, Test, Survey) → Perform job correctly → *Certification Expires* →

Step 3: Assess

It's easy to have your officers read a policy, sign off on it, and certify them based on a training-course completion. But this process doesn't guarantee your officers have retained knowledge, which is crucial for using your policies on the field when it matters most.

As you know, in a field like law enforcement, understanding and knowledge retention are key aspects of developing and implementing your policies and procedures. Online training can ensure your officers practically apply the information they learn.
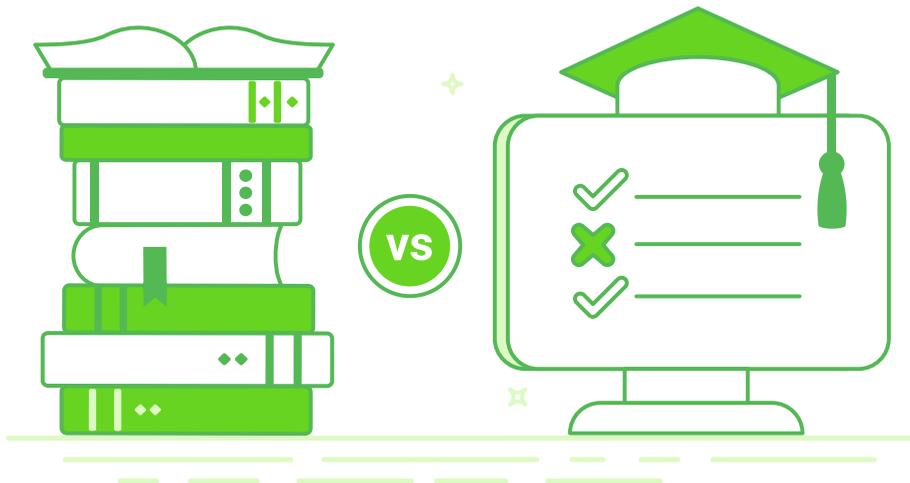
As you develop your training programs, consider the following:

1. Do you feel like your officers sometimes sign off on documentation without full comprehension, just to "get it over with"?
2. Would a test of your officers' skills benefit them on the job?
3. Would your agency benefit from reduced paper costs?
4. Would you like a way to grade assessments automatically without having to worry about papers getting caught in a machine, or providing pencils or other supplies?
5. Are your officers comfortable in a computer-based environment?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, a paperless environment designed to assess your personnel could be the solution. Online tests give you the ability to be more flexible with your testing environments. You can associate them with documents and courses, or distribute them on their own. Most of the time, they are graded automatically, and save you time and money by allowing officers to take them on the clock when they aren't busy.

Sometimes, online environments even let you channel your creativity and build dynamic tests. Unique questions types like the following keep your officers' interest piqued:

- Multiple selection
- True/False
- Fill-in-the-blank
- Short answer

Electronic testing within courses also increases confidentiality, reducing the chance of students copying from each other.

Step 4: Listen

Have you ever felt voiceless or overlooked in a professional environment? Studies show that being heard increases morale and productivity in the workplace, which can only benefit the safety and success of your organization. Online tests can provide you with important opportunities to receive feedback from your officers so you can optimize their work environment, in turn optimizing their work as a whole.

With online courses, you can promote honest feedback and open communication with opportunities for your team members to type out a detailed answer rather than simply agreeing or disagreeing. This method empowers you with rich, helpful feedback to better your agency.

Sometimes, with paper surveys, handwriting can keep participants from complete honesty, even if you assure your personnel that their answers are 100% confidential. In an online environment, remaining anonymous isn't an issue. It's just part of the process.

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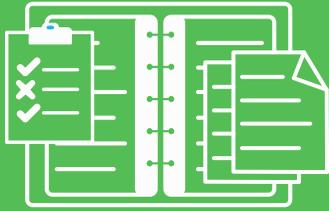
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