



Online learning works by all measures at Broken Hill City Council

Broken Hill is 1,200 km from Sydney and some 500 km away from Adelaide, the closest major city. Being so remote creates issues for its City Council in sourcing premium goods and services. In 2020, distance was compounded by Covid restrictions. Despite these challenges, CompNow delivered empowering Microsoft O365 training to Council staff, proving the value of bespoke, online programs.



The 160 dedicated staff of Broken Hill City Council, in far western NSW, serve a population of 17,000 residents. Committed to excellence, the Council boasts a supportive workplace through an organisational culture that promotes training and skills development.

THE CHALLENGE

Having elected to move the Council to Microsoft O365, Gerald VanDenHeuvel, Manager Information Services at City of Broken Hill Council, identified that "if we were going to make this work for all our staff, we needed to help them through the change. I started looking at training options, and specifically an onsite delivery model".

The Council's (BHCC) tender required a series of sessions covering the O365 Apps - including Teams, OneDrive and OneNote - for 40 key staff in supervisory and office based roles. These people were

intensive users of the products and would be responsible for upskilling their teams.

BHCC had contracted CompNow for hardware procurement but never training. "CompNow went out of their way to come up and meet our people, to get a feel for us, in context. And they presented a very good business case for using them," Gerald says.

CompNow's proposal offered BHCC the choice of onsite or remote programs. Council elected to proceed with having CompNow's trainer fly in and out for four weeks over a six week period. To cover the 40 people and the content, required a teaching timetable of 3-hour sessions twice a day.

As so many organisations experienced when Covid hit, Council staff were required to work from home. And CompNow's trainer could not travel to run the courses. "Indefinitely postponing the training was not an option. We had to quickly get staff operating productively on O365. They had enough on their plates with Covid disruptions, we didn't want new software and work practices adding to their problems," Gerald says.

"We'd not experienced remote learning and thought we had to have onsite training to achieve the results we wanted. But remote really works. And without the travel costs, we had budget left to spend on more training."

Gerald VanDenHeuvel
Manager Information Services
Broken Hill City Council

AT A GLANCE

THE CHALLENGE

Broken Hill City Council went to tender for an onsite training program in support of the rapid adoption of O365. Having not experienced the latest in online teaching methods, they needed to be satisfied of the applicability, flexibility and affordability of remote learning courseware.

THE SOLUTION

CompNow's highly adaptable content and delivery styles match the aims of the training initiative and learner needs.

THE BENEFITS

- Professional trainers match staff groupings to specific functionality and interactivity needs
- Ideal for organisations outside metro areas as remote learning provides access to the best trainers
- Efficient and flexible for office, home and remote workers
- Made ongoing PD possible, affordable
- Convert onsite travel budget to additional training value
- Running pilot ironed out any unknowns

THE PRODUCTS

- Microsoft Office 365 Remote Training Program



My apps

THE SOLUTION

In discussions with CompNow "we hatched the idea of running an online training session as a test with a small group. We wanted to gauge how it was delivered and received. CompNow was really keen to prove it would work for us," Gerald says.

CompNow knew that training in the MS environment is conducive to remote delivery due to the very nature of the platform. The training brings to life the transformation from traditional file sharing via email to the more evolved, streamlined MS Teams with video meetings incorporated in its communications functionality.

Planning looked at not only the Council's training needs but whether BHCC's existing conferencing technologies and communications links would support the program. At that point Broken Hill was still without the NBN and some parts of the city had no internet at all. This could have an impact on the staff who would be logging in from home. Testing also revealed that the training room required a larger screen and better speakers. And onsite numbers in that room would be limited due to social distancing strictures.

The selected pilot group of seven proved the efficacy of the proposed methodology. From feedback, the number of breaks during the 3-hour sessions was increased "so everyone could get away from their screens to stretch their legs," Gerald says.

The new online program devised by CompNow capped each of the 20 general sessions at a maximum of 15 people. Smaller groups were to 'attend' the remote sessions where interactivity was an essential component. The model introduced efficiencies and flexibility not available to onsite programs. Some staff could be in the same training room at the Council while others logged in from home. And "we were even able to include one new employee who was caught in Victoria," he says.

"Remote learning was an unknown format for us. But for CompNow, they're a well oiled machine and have adapted their training offering to these new opportunities. Their approach gave us confidence as it opened up all the unknowns. We worked really well together to set it all up. They made it very easy for us. We've developed a very good relationship with CompNow through this exercise."

BENEFITS

BHCC's people were able to immediately translate what they had learnt to use within their own workspaces and with other organisations and councils they deal with.

"Our people adapted very quickly. It wasn't such a huge step to remote learning because tech use is so pervasive. We're all very pleased with the outcome.

"A real positive was that we were using Teams to learn about Teams. It reinforced the things our trainer was demonstrating. As he presented his screens, our people could ask questions – they were chatting via the App. The interaction was great," Gerald says.

"It was excellent to see how our participants gained confidence in their own abilities. We have a wide age range in our staff and found that the younger tech savvy ones were helping others during the courses. It's built ongoing relationships between them. And our people are ready to accept other online training, they know it works for them."

The upshot of the sessions was the acknowledgement that the Council needed more regular training on the technologies it had invested in, to ensure its staff and the organisation made the most from all the latest functionality.

"One of the real bonuses we hadn't counted on was being able to convert the onsite travel budget to almost double the training, to put more people through. 30 up to 58 hours of training – a 40% increase in value," he says.

"We had always had instructors coming here or sent staff to capitals for training. But we've proven the value of remote learning – by all measures. Because we have access to the best trainers - not just those who are available or willing to travel - it guarantees quality professional and tech skills development. We can cater to everyone's needs within budget. And taking all those flights out of the equation is an environmental positive which is important in Council's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint.

"Remote learning is the model we'll continue with. We have a new way of approaching staff PD," Gerald says.



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