

TRAINING SPACES

Inn⊕vate

TO MEET CUSTOMER NEEDS

Conference and group training providers adapt to customer expectations and emerging industry trends.

By Ann Pace





It has been said that the only thing that never changes is change itself. For the three training space organizations below, the concept of change is not new, but the methods by which they respond to economic decline, customer expectations, and industry trends are continually shifting. These companies have successfully adapted their technology offerings, package pricing, event features, and custom solutions to remain on the cusp of evolutions in the learning and development profession.

+ Learning Tree International

Since 1974, Learning Tree International has served more than 2 million people from approximately 65,000 organizations across the globe with its classroom, online, and on-site training options. Known for its hands-on and intensive exercises, activities, and simulations, Learning Tree believes that experiential learning allows for greater retention. The training provider specializes in practical, relevant, and immediately applicable content for management and technology professionals, delivered by instructors who average more than 20 years of experience.

Learning Tree creates customized training to meet clients' specific needs, from pre-course consultations—including needs assessment, skills gap analysis, benchmarking, or curriculum maps—to post-course coaching. Learning Tree is also recognized as the leading provider of vendor-independent training to the federal government, offering compliance and regulatory courses tailored to public sector employees.

Like most training space providers, Learning Tree has felt the recent impact from clients operating with smaller training budgets and the need to justify the return-on-investment of every training choice. "The economy has curtailed travel and training budgets, but organizations still need to provide training to bridge existing knowledge and skill gaps," says Nicholas R. Schacht, president and CEO. "For those reasons, we developed Learning Tree AnyWare, which we designed to effectively

connect online participants to an actual classroom. This keeps participants engaged throughout our two- to five-day, hands-on courses and provides them with a best-of-breed training alternative that accommodates tighter budgets and schedules."

AnyWare is the industry's only training solution that connects online participants to a traditional classroom, Schacht explains. Its unique format enables participants to interact with their classmates and instructors through live video, audio, and chat mediums, without ever leaving their offices.

Industry-standard certification is another customer expectation in greater demand recently, driven by the down economy and government regulations. "Employers are turning to certification training to develop new skills, enhance employee knowledge, and improve performance while supporting organizational growth," Schacht notes. "Learning Tree helps meet these needs with a wide variety of certification courses that include Achieving APMG Change Management Practitioner Certification, Preparing for the IIBA CBAP Certification Exam, and CompTIA preparation courses, including Preparing for the CompTIA Security+, CompTIA Network+, and CompTIA A+ certification exams.

"More specifically, there is an increase in the demand for project management and ITIL certification, which is driven by requirements to maximize performance and

drive down costs. Learning Tree provides a full range of courses relating to ITIL certifications, and offers courses focused on preparing for PMI, Prince2, FAC-P/PM, and other industry-standard project management-related certifications.”

Additionally, clients seeking training in cloud computing can find resources at Learning Tree to build their awareness and implementation of this emerging trend in the learning and development profession. “We’ve developed courses that cover everything from cloud computing overview and cloud computing technologies to more advanced courses such as Securing the Cloud and Windows Azure Platform Introduction: Programming Cloud-Based Applications,” explains Schacht.



+ The National Conference Center

The National Conference Center (NCC) in Leesburg, Virginia, is a 110-acre campus designed for conferences, meetings, planning sessions, and executive education. NCC serves corporate, government, association, military, and religious organizations in a distraction-free setting, with several decades of experience hosting diverse groups.

NCC offers 265,000 square feet of meeting space, 250 meeting rooms, and 917 guest rooms. Individual meeting communities include a cluster of conference rooms and lodging in private wings, allowing for a more personalized and intimate environment for group meetings.

NCC is located a mere 12 miles from Dulles International Airport and 45 minutes from the nation’s capital. For groups interested in going off site to explore area attractions, NCC created a shuttle program that offers monument tours of Washington D.C., trips to local wineries, and shopping and dining excursions.

NCC is implementing progressive and innovative services in response to customer expectations and a growing demand for sustainable business practices. “We are in the final stages of planning a \$2.5 million renovation of our 800-seat guest dining room to feature a wide assortment of action stations and many health options,” says Eric Whitson, director of sales and marketing. “One of the offerings we are particularly excited about is the Farm to Table station where, working with the Virginia Farm Bureau and local farms, we can bring fresh, local produce directly to our conference guests. All this fits with our Food for Thought program, where specific items known to improve health, blood circulation, and memory

are featured on our refreshment breaks, in our dining room, and at our banquet events.”

Additionally, NCC has expanded its environmentally responsible features and is gaining greater recognition as a green campus. The company has a green team in place that makes and enforces policies to reduce, reuse, and recycle. NCC also follows the recommendations of the EPA 14-point Checklist and is Green Seal GS-33 Silver and Virginia Green-certified.

Customers looking for a technologically advanced training space will find it at NCC, where a DS-3 circuit ensures virtually unlimited bandwidth, and where wired HISA is available everywhere on campus. Whitson notes that computer software training has been in demand in 2010 and foresees this trend growing in the future. “Our preferred vendors, great bandwidth, and professional technical team make hosting this training turnkey,” he adds.

While NCC has continued to develop cutting-edge products and services in the midst of the economic downturn, it has not been immune to the recession’s effects on its clients. “Many corporate training customers have cut back or cancelled their residential training, relying more on less effective, but more efficient regional and online training,” Whitson says. “However, we have seen the opportunity grow with groups looking for more value for their training dollars. Programs that had previously gone overseas or to high-end hotels and resorts have looked to us as a more productive training environment and a more budget-friendly option.”



+ Q Center

Located in scenic St. Charles, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, Q Center has supported meetings, conferences, and executive learning for more than 40 years. The 95-acre property built by training professionals for training professionals is the largest of its kind in the midwestern United States, boasting 118 meeting rooms—a total of more than 150,000 square feet certified by the International Association of Conference Centers—as well as 1,042 guest rooms.

Known for its cutting-edge technological savvy, Q Center offers guests T3 Internet bandwidth, wireless and LAN set-up, secure data centers, and complimentary wireless Internet in guest rooms. Additionally, “Q Center is the only property with a full service on-site events and media team, high-speed print production facility, and state-of-the-art technology offerings,” says Armon L. Haagen, director of sales and marketing.

Like its sister organizations, Q Center has recently observed changing customer needs and expectations in the midst of the down economy. As companies attempt to do more with fewer employees, Q Center is rising to the occasion by filling a greater support role.

“As a result of the recession, many of our clients have less staff available to plan and run their meetings, so they depend on the support and expertise we provide more than ever,” explains Haagen. “Q Center’s online registration is one way we help save our clients time with planning and logistics. Our dedicated conference planning managers, technology team, and full-service business center provide the support needed to run a flawless program. Meeting planners value this because they can be successful with less support staff of their own.”

Clients have also come to trust Q Center for its comprehensive meeting packages, which allow for operational ease and financial peace of mind. “During tough economic times, customers need budget certainty,” Haagen says. “For this reason, there is increased appreciation for complete meeting package pricing. By including guest rooms, conference dining and breaks, function space, and technology in one price, we eliminate surprises.”

Q Center’s staff is the driving force behind its commitment to provide a successful and comfortable training experience for groups from 10 to 2,000. In addition to on-site skilled technologists and culinary professionals, a personal conference planning manager is assigned to guide each client through the meeting process, from pre-planning to posttraining.

Q Center is unique because of its location in the Fox Valley area, with easy access to the Chicago area’s popular attractions, sporting events, and cultural landmarks. Attendees can enjoy a trip to the Art Institute of Chicago, a stroll on Navy Pier, or an evening at Wrigley field, with local shuttles or public transportation options available.

Additionally, Q Center hosts an array of teambuilding possibilities. Recreational activities include team and multi-event athletic tournaments, fitness classes, and massages. Customized structured activities are designed to challenge participants in myriad skills such as time management, project quality, and risk assessment. Finally, Q Center’s adventure program teaches participants trust, communication, and cooperation in a safe environment.

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