

UCISA Award for Excellence 2009 - Application Form

Institution Name London School of Economics

Originating Department IT Services

Contact Name (and email address) Amber Miro (a.miro@lse.ac.uk)

Objective of the Service

To deliver effective and cost-effective just-in-time IT training to staff. By re-purposing remote assistance technology being used to deliver end-user support, the service integrates new technology into non-academic teaching and learning, and delivers return on investment through staff time efficiencies .

Description of the Service

Virtual IT Training (Riding on the back of IT support)

The IT training team at London School of Economics adopted the use of remote assistance technology already being used to deliver end-user IT support to provide short and effective training sessions for staff at the point of need.

In 2007, the IT user support staff at London School of Economics started using remote assistance technology (LogMeIn Rescue) to provide real-time “virtual assistance” to all staff and students. Using features such as live chat, remote control of the user’s desktop and remote file transfer, they were able to troubleshoot and resolve a wide range of IT problems without the need to pay a deskside visit (to staff) or for users to visit the help desk in person.

The IT training team recognised an opportunity to use the same technology as a means of delivering virtual training sessions for staff in need of just-in-time training in order to undertake a task using IT. The fundamental difference between this practice and end-user support is that the trainer does not take over control of the computer in order to fix a problem or carry out the task on behalf of the user. Instead, the trainer simply observes the user’s desktop and behaviour, whilst delivering telephone-based training that enables the user to learn how to undertake the task themselves.

The use of remote assistance technology for training at LSE has proven to be more effective than blindly giving “how to” instructions over the phone; it allows the trainer to see what the user is doing and enhance the training accordingly. Crucially, for a team that provides the IT training resources for over 3000 members of staff, virtual training also saves a substantial amount of staff time, as it can be delivered immediately, without the need to undertake a deskside visit.

Supporting information about the Service

Existing Staff IT Training Provision at LSE

Two Training Specialists (1.6 FTE) are responsible for delivering the IT training programme for over 3000 staff at LSE. Focused on office and productivity applications training, the programme consists of trainer-led standard courses, trainer-led tailored courses, seminars, workshops, task-focused scheduled one-to-one training (usually at the user's desk) and just-in-time training at the point of need¹.

Until Summer 2008, just-in-time training was delivered over the telephone. Users called one of the Training Specialists to find out how to carry out a particular task, and if the trainer felt they could explain it relatively easily, they would talk the user through the process. However, this was often unsatisfactory. In many cases the user proved unable to describe the desktop well enough for the trainer to picture the situation and guide them through the task in hand; both trainer and user could get lost in the process; and even when things appeared to go well, the trainer had no certainty that the task had been performed successfully and that any learning had taken place. As a result, just-in-time training often gave way to a scheduled deskside visit.

Drivers for Introducing Virtual Training

"Virtual training" using remote assistance technology, was seen as a means to address the drawbacks of phone-based training, deliver more effective just-in-time training, and thereby increase the amount of just-in-time training the team could deliver, relative to scheduled one-to-one deskside visits. It also offered a way to extend the use of an existing resource (LogMeIn Rescue) and get even better value from the investment.

LogMeIn Rescue was the tool selected by London School of Economics in late 2007 to enable support teams to provide real-time remote IT assistance to users on campus or offsite. The web-based software allows IT staff to view and assist with a user's computer, no matter where the user is located.

Once the session is initiated and a user grants permission for remote assistance, support staff can view the user's desktop, take dual control of the user's mouse, and transfer files. Users communicate with the support staff through a chat window or by phone².

Since the service was launched, it has proved very popular with users (achieving over 90% satisfaction ratings in the 2009 IT Services user survey), and producing a demonstrable and significant return on investment through staff time saved by not having to travel to a user's place of work in order to assist them with their desktop problem. It therefore made a compelling argument for extending the use of this resource to deliver virtual training.

¹ For further information about the IT training programme at LSE, see:

<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/divisionsAndDepartments/itservices/training/home.aspx>

² For further information about the Virtual IT Assistance service at LSE, see:

<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/divisionsAndDepartments/itservices/about/serviceCatalogue/vita.aspx>

Virtual Training in Practice

With virtual training, users still call one of the Training Specialists, who evaluates the request in order to assess how best to respond. As a rule of thumb, training requests are deemed suitable unless they are extremely simple (and can be addressed with one or two verbal instructions) or very time consuming (anything over 20 minutes is often best fulfilled through a deskside visit). Examples of suitable requests include training users how to modify document styles, how to edit slide masters in PowerPoint and how to map a network drive.

If the user agrees to a virtual training session, the trainer emails them the URL to log on to a session, whilst still on the call (see Appendix, Figure 1).

The trainer talks the user through the very simple logon process and can view their desktop within a minute of sending them the logon information. At this point, they can address the training request, making use of features such as the virtual laser pointer and drawing tools in order to highlight areas of the screen, and even record the session to send to the user after the training is complete (see Appendix, Figure 2).

Benefits and Limitations

Virtual training has enabled the LSE IT training team to fulfil a greater number of training requests from staff without having to arrange a deskside visit. The end user benefits from having their training requirements met at the point of need, enabling them to continue with their work without undue interruption. Pedagogically, virtual training supports established good practice in IT training methodology; since the trainer does not take control of the user's desktop, the user engages in experiential learning³ and the guiding questions and directions required to direct that learning come easier to the trainer when watching a user's actions rather than demonstrating the techniques involved.

Virtual training is not appropriate for all learning objectives or for all types of learner. It is however, a very effective way to fulfil brief and relatively simple training requests, and when the user cannot postpone what it is they need to learn. The following comment from an end user is typical of the feedback the service has received:

"I found the Virtual Assistance very useful - it provided quick, easy and immediate help. Importantly however, it also taught me how to deal with the problem in the future. So it both helped me out, but also provided a learning experience."

For the organisation, virtual training can save money in terms of staff time. At LSE, it is used on average two to three times a week. Assuming that an equivalent deskside visit would involve 15 minutes travel time (there and back), this equates to around 31 hours of staff time per year, or nearly a whole working week. In financial terms that is worth c. £1000, which is four times as much as the cost of the additional annual "technician licence" to use the software powering the service.

³ For information about experiential learning, see Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiential_learning

At the recent UCISA-SSG User Skills event, at which LSE demonstrated its use of remote assistance technology to deliver end-user IT training, a straw poll of delegates attending the session indicated that although over half were from UK higher and further education institutions using the same or similar remote assistance technology, it was only being used for IT support, not for training. Yet, it would be extremely easy and inexpensive for those institutions to adopt this service and realise the same benefits as LSE.

Name of Staff involved (including job titles and email addresses)

IT Training Team at London School of Economics:
Jeni Brown, Training Manager (j.l.brown@lse.ac.uk)
Chris Steele, Training Specialist (c.steele@lse.ac.uk)
Linda Heiden, Training Specialist (l.heiden@lse.ac.uk)

Support of Institution UCISA Representative

Name: Jean Sykes

Virtual IT Training (Riding on the back of IT support) Appendix

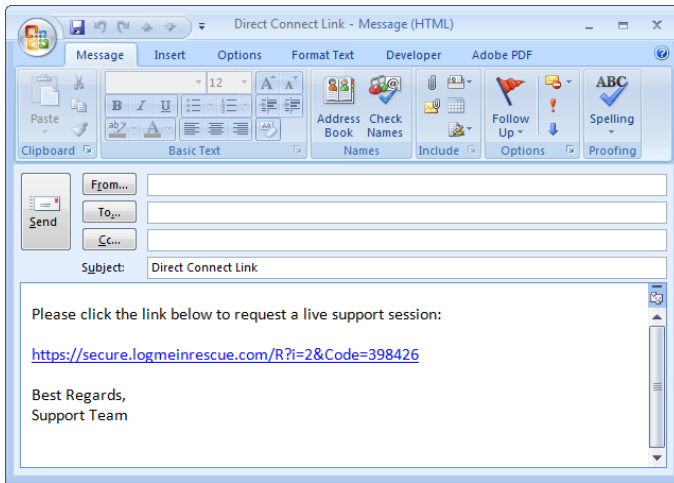


Figure 1: Initiating a virtual training session



Figure 2: In-session view of the trainer's screen, displaying the remote desktop of a user wishing to learn how to map a network drive.