

General Electric

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getAbstract as a key enabler of learning at GE

Enabling executives to become the very best at what they do is a declared goal of General Electric's prestigious Leadership Center in Crotonville, New York. In this getAbstract webinar, Peter Cavanaugh, operations manager for GE Global Learning and leader of Crotonville Operations, explains why getAbstract is a key asset in GE's Global Learning portfolio and how GE has integrated getAbstract into its existing learning processes to expose managers to leading-edge thinking outside of GE, and to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Take-Aways

- getAbstract allows GE to expose the company's managers to leading-edge thinking and breakthrough knowledge from outside the company.
- At GE's Leadership Center in Crotonville, the learning specialists focus on on-demand learning, material that is available at the point of need, so that managers and employees can take advantage of “teachable moments.”
- GE uses on-demand learning material, such as getAbstract's summaries, to flank course material, to support knowledge sharing and to promote informal learning.
- GE has observed an “explosive desire” for on-demand learning material among its employees.
- In less than half a year, GE has measured 3,000 new users of getAbstract's service and more than 50,000 summary downloads.
- getAbstract's large amount of content and the various languages it supports were two reasons GE selected getAbstract for its learning portal.
- getAbstract's many formats make its service easily accessible, and therefore valuable, to an increasingly mobile workforce.
- getAbstract summaries provide a basis for team discussions and contextualize key initiatives, corporate values and the needs of affinity groups.
- Seeing the value of the getAbstract library, GE's top executives have become ambassadors of the service.
- GE looks at the number of portal visitors and downloads. When people return to a source to download more content, that shows they have found it useful, which is the best proof of success in learning.

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“We really believe that once people get to the getAbstract site, they see the value. We’ve proven the value of referenceware when they return and look for more material.”

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GE - More Than 100 Years of Innovation

GE is a company with a very rich history that started previous to the last century – more than 100 years of innovation, of thinking about what products and services are going to be required in the future and of change orientation. We are allowing ourselves to be different and better, using external thinking and bringing that to bear in the world that we are creating. We have very diverse groups around the world, more than 300,000 employees.

GE Global Learning

We have bricks and mortar all over the world. As we moved into the emerging markets, we saw that we needed to continue to drive learning across the globe. Many of those locations lack an embedded culture. How do you get the message to somebody at a location with 10 employees, half of which were maybe only hired last year or the year before? How do we build a learning culture in places where we don’t have bricks and mortar yet or may never have them because of the changes in technology and the capabilities that we have going forward?

Global Learning Portal <http://globallearning.ge.com/portal/site/globallearning/>

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Global Learning

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GE Global Learning

GE Global Learning
Access a world of development opportunities

- Crotowille Leadership
- Functional Skills
- Business Knowledge
- On Demand Learning
- Customer Education Programs
- Locations
- Global Contacts

Whenever you work, whenever you learn. GE's robust on-demand learning platform gives you the flexibility you need to learn on your terms.

Why On Demand:

- Increasingly employees want/need real time access
- Job Aids/Referenceware becoming expected
- Contemporary learning methodologies

imagination at work

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Global Learning as an entity is a new brand for GE. We wanted employees to understand the value that the company places on their education. We wanted to help them see that GE invests in them hoping that they become the best they can be in their particular function, that they can solve customers’ toughest problems and that they learn about leadership.

On-Demand Learning: Learning Here and Now

When we started looking at this Global Learning portal a couple of years ago, we asked ourselves, “What are the future ways in which people are going to learn?” As we developed the Global Learning portal, we focused on on-demand learning. Employees need to get access to material in real time. They can’t necessarily wait a week or a month or a year for that class they signed up for; their teachable moments may be right now.

As managers see those teachable moments, they need to have learning material that they can access and deliver. We had to change our view of on-demand learning that is only e-learning, only courseware. Just because something is not a course doesn't mean it's not learning or that it's not valuable. We need to think about job aids and referenceware as key elements of on-demand learning. Sometimes people have five minutes for a dialogue or for reading an abstract or something like that, but they don't have an hour or two to take a class.

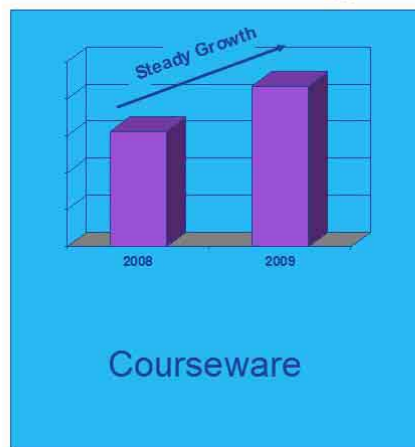
Also, adult learners, even if they go to a class, need constant reinforcement of that material. For scalability, you need to be able to have things you can give them over time. So the on-demand learning is a key element of our Global Learning portfolio.

Among the employees, we have noticed an explosive desire for referenceware and job aids. It has pushed the envelope for on-demand learning. To measure its success, we look at access as one of the most important elements: We do get value when people start to understand what's available to them by being exposed to it and start to access it. We really believe that once people get to the getAbstract site, they see the value. We've proven the value of referenceware when they return and look for more material.

"Just because something is not a course doesn't mean it's not learning or that it's not valuable."

"Among the employees, we have noticed an explosive desire for referenceware and job aids."

Global Learning On Demand...



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At GE, all our on-demand learning assets are in one place so people know where to find them. Before we launched the Global Learning web portal, some things were in this location, others in that location. Our challenge was to have all the material in one location and to have people access it without additional cost to their component or function.

We created a five-minute presentation that describes all the on-demand offerings. Whether you play that at the beginning of a class or during the break, whether it is at Crotonville or around the world, it allows people to be more exposed to all the on-demand assets.

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“getAbstract is one of the coolest things I have seen the company do for us. This is an awesome service for the BlackBerry.”
(GE employee and getAbstract user)

“getAbstract solved a challenge for us: the breadth of knowledge and great external thinking that is out there in books by really smart authors.”

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Key Success Factors

When we started looking at the on-demand learning for GE, we honed it down to three elements that we call key success factors: Content, Context and Accessibility.

- Content – The content needs to be valuable and understandable.
- Context – We have to provide the context of how the content relates to people’s overall job function or their learning. That can be through a class or by a manager who is providing the context for a particular aspect of someone’s role, for example.
- Accessibility – People shouldn’t have to go far to look for referenceware. We want them to feel comfortable that the company’s providing them with the information they need to be successful leaders or successful individual contributors in the different areas. A big part of accessibility is mobility: How do we enable our employees, with their BlackBerrys, iPhones and iPads, to access the material when they need it?


Why getAbstract?



On Demand Criteria for GE:

- Content
- Context
- Accessibility

...and Mobile



- ✓ **Content Depth**
 - 5,000+ abstracts
 - 50 new per month
 - Multiple languages
- ✓ **Service**
 - Ease of implementation & use
 - Proactive alignment with business
 - Creative partnership approach
- ✓ **Quality**
 - Abstract design – engaging
 - Trusted thought leaders
 - Harvard book summaries

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getAbstract as a Key Enabler of Learning

getAbstract solved a challenge for us: the breadth of knowledge and great external thinking that is out there in books by really smart authors. We want to bring external thinking into our employee base, but the number of books and, more generally, the amount of knowledge becomes very difficult to manage. How do you bring that to bear for your employees so that they, their managers or some thought leader in the group can select titles and make that part of the conversation in a particular work team?

We must have external thinking; we must enable our employees to see the complexity of the world and allow our leaders to see around corners and to understand the future that is being created inside and outside of the company. getAbstract is a key enabler.

Valuable Content

getAbstract is valuable in terms of content because it has a large number of abstracts and multiple languages. The languages are becoming increasingly important for us because of the number of markets that we serve and the number of places where we have manufacturing and service bases.

Providing Context

Any on-demand asset needs to be aligned with the key initiatives to provide context. It needs to fit in with our growth values, and also with other elements, such as our affinity groups. We have the Women's Network, for example. We present all the on-demand assets to its members. We have created a getAbstract reading list that is contemporary and targeted to that particular audience. Providing this context can make any individual look at it and say, "Oh, they're speaking to me. These are things that I'm interested in. It's kind of neat how they knew." Part of that model is understanding the groups that are using it and making it look so that the individual will feel that these things were selected for him or her (and, in fact, in some cases, they actually are).

"getAbstract is valuable in terms of content because it has a large number of abstracts and multiple languages."

"getAbstract has been a key element of our on-demand portfolio."



No matter what I am able to do in Crotonville, no matter how important we think we are, it comes down to the context that a manager, a location learning leader or a particular HR manager is giving to the employee. So no matter what I consider to be the best, what is really relevant is determined by the individual person and his or her work teams or affinity groups.

Accessibility

If someone types "motivation," for example, inside the GE firewall, a list of abstracts of books on motivation pops up. You find the abstracts at the outermost layer rather than having to dive into getAbstract to search. That is a really neat feature that allows us to show that a lot is available and that it is easy to access. If someone clicks on the book covers in the list, he or she will get to that particular book on getAbstract.

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“Peter, this is great stuff. I save them up, print a few extra to read on the plane or at the beach. Thanks again.”
(GE employee and getAbstract user)

“We have set a target for ourselves to reach 20,000 users by the end of the year. Some may say that’s a little of a stretch goal, but I think it’s completely doable.”

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Mobility is something that we’re really pushing. People are busy; they don’t want to get chained to their computers. They are probably, as often as not, on a plane or in a car or on a train, and they may be in other places where they have time that they can use to expand their horizons. As part of our mobile initiative, we are pushing out the audio abstracts and promoting the ability to download those to your iPhone or iPad. I have a long drive home every night. I listen to them and 10 minutes go by really fast. As you’re listening, it really gets you the broad context for it and, in many cases, I want to listen to more – and then another abstract comes on. It’s a really neat engagement.

getAbstract Success

Since March, we have measured 3,000 new users and more than 50,000 downloads. We consider the number of people, but we also consider the number of downloads. Somebody who downloads more than one abstract is saying, “I see a value in what I’m getting.”

We have set a target for ourselves to reach 20,000 users by the end of the year. Some may say that’s a little of a stretch goal, but I think it’s completely doable as we move forward in getting the viral view of the messaging around the company for getAbstract.

One of the top executives shared this story with me. He was going to attend an eight-person table discussion with a Harvard professor. The professor had sent his book, which was two-and-a-half or three inches thick, to each one of the dinner participants. The GE executive searched getAbstract and found a couple of the author’s books in the getAbstract library. At dinner, the professor asked whether anyone had read the book and no one had, but the GE executive said, “I’ve been able to get some knowledge from different abstracts that I’ve read of your work and here’s how I’d like to frame the dialogue.” This created the situation where you could have the dialogue even if you hadn’t been able to get through some of the complexity inside the book itself. So this is how getAbstract is used.

Q&A

What you've demonstrated is the clear demand for informal learning in organizational development. Would you agree with that?

I think you're exactly right, Norman. It's a structure where the informal learning happens and you can have that teachable moment. It's up to us to help our managers be prepared for that teachable moment so that they can help someone develop at that teachable moment – not a month or two later or a month or two before. I think you're right on; it is part of the informal learning and a key element of a learning portfolio.

How is getAbstract included in the leadership program content? And when do people use classrooms, and when do they use your on-demand learning portal?

The "course as an event" is not the structure that we want to push forward. The course experience starts when someone gets the email. That should be very attractive and it should welcome them to the experience that they're about to undertake. Whether it's a course on emotional intelligence or business acumen or career power or your personal brand – all of those become things that we can reference in the pre-course material, because all of us know that the more you prepare for something, the more open you are to that experience. And the more you prepare for it, the more you get out of it. One of the things that we're starting now with getAbstract is referencing it after the course. And yet, on-demand learning has to be more than an extension of your courseware. Our whole view of it is a much broader context. It is pre-work; it is post-work; it's accessing the teachable moments that happen when you're on-the-job learning and that's really where you see the explosive growth in the material that we have for referenceware and job aids.

What are the top subjects in terms of learning at GE? And what is the preferable way to deliver knowledge in those areas?

We do an annual process called Session C, where people get to talk about their own development needs and those of the organization. We talk about what would help them become more effective than they are today and not to become too internally focused, too focused on their desk, too focused on their location – too internally focused for the company. Some of those themes work across cultures.

And then there is that visible time when somebody says, "This is a decision I need to make now!" Sometimes you can enable that in a class, and sometimes you need people to read about it as they are in the middle of a difficult situation. And that is really where getAbstract helps the structure. We had a team that was having some challenges. We gave them the abstract of *Crucial Conversations*, and it helped them change the way they looked at their issues and how they approached them. That's informal learning. Those are the kind of themes that we've come across.

How did you launch getAbstract internally and how did support from getAbstract help you to achieve the high levels of usage?

Basically, my technical team and getAbstract's technical team worked closely together to provide a SAML connection, that is a single sign-on connection that allows the accessibility we are looking for. Anytime we launch one of these, the key question at the end is, "Is it accessible to the employees?" With the GE firewalls, there's a lot of back and forth that we have to do to make sure that it's working for everybody all the time. Relative to other SAML-type connections that we do, I would say this was a very smooth implementation with getAbstract.

How do you fund this?

We fund it at a Crotonville level, so it's centrally funded. As an organization in Global Learning, we decide that some assets should be available to all employees. For us, getAbstract became part of that. We want to see the benefit of that external focus for all employees.

"Over the past 2 days I got further exposed and educated on the very deep and broad learning capabilities at Crotonville and specifically on-line learning content. An amazing wealth of high quality knowledge in written and video form at your finger tips."
(GE employee and getAbstract user)

"This was a very smooth implementation with getAbstract."

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“Without exception, every leader-in-residence I talked to has said, ‘This is very cool – I need to share this with my team.’ So those people become the ambassadors for getAbstract.”

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Do you measure any return on investment (ROI)?

I don't have a particular calculation for ROI. The company doesn't ask me to do that. Where we have assets like this, you have to develop that and it has to be a key part of the portfolio or you're not going to attract the talent that you need to attract today or in the future. So I always look at it like this: There's not much of an ROI on email, but the fact is that's what everybody's using and that's where you have to be. We believe strongly that there's a huge value in it, but I don't have a calculation associated with that value.

How important is it that executives are involved in developing the learning culture at GE?

It's critical. A good percentage of the vice presidents come into Crotonville and experience this and help inform us as to what we want to deliver and how we want to deliver it. It's very exciting to see this engagement. While the Leaders Teaching Leaders has always been a part of what we've done, we've really hit the accelerator on that a little bit. It's been critical. It's been great.

Are you planning to introduce other languages?

Regarding courseware and assetware, we want to make sure that we're accessing the employees in the language they're most comfortable with, in the skill building and referenceware and job aids that they need. We're going to be offering more languages, not fewer. The broader the offering in a particular language, the more it will resonate. The amount of the asset that is available in multiple languages is going to be increasingly critical over time.

To what extent are managers at GE embracing social networking or collaborative learning?

We are embracing collaborative learning in a lot of different forms. First off, we have an internally developed software called GE Connect. Different teams can have a GE Connect site. I would say, in a shorthand, it would be like Facebook for inside GE, but more work-related. That is an element of the collaboration. We have teams that get together before their in-person training – that is collaboration: allowing people to collaborate before the course or after the course. And then we try to have managers host a Virtual Business Forum on some aspect with their team (either at lunch or at another time during the week) so that they can be visible thought leaders for their teams – be that virtually or be that in person. And part of that is that the collaboration becomes stronger as people understand more of who other people are.

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