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Striving for 100% Completion Rates: Getting Compliance on Your Compliance Training

INTRODUCTION

In many areas of life, cracking that 100% completion milestone can always seem just out of reach. Invariably a variety of things coalesce to keep that figure hovering at 98% or 99%.

Frustrating, we know.

In the compliance training world, however, reaching between 80% and 89% completion is closer to the average for many organizations using a traditional approach. Still, anything but 100% completion on your employee compliance training is often more than simply frustrating. Compliance audits and regulatory requirements can make anything less than 100% feel like a failure.

No wonder our own State of Employee Compliance Training Report found that half of respondents (49%) ranked challenges with completion percentage and employee engagement as the most significant when it comes to delivering compliance training.

The good news is: You're not alone. **"How can we get everyone to complete the organization's required compliance training?,"** is a common question among the compliance and training conferences our subject matter experts regularly attend.

If you've been struggling with this issue, this whitepaper is for you.

Here are some best practices from our experience running compliance training programs and tips that have been shared from a number of our customers and partners that are achieving 100% compliance completion rates with their training campaigns.

GET BUY-IN FOR YOUR PLAN

Whether you're improving on a current "once-per-year" setup or building something from scratch, you'll need approvals from your higher ups before beginning to build out our compliance training initiative. This often means proving to your C-suite the need for compliance training. We've seen a few ways this can be approached.

Involving the leadership team in the development of the plan and presenting options to them can help make or break a successful program.

First, don't be afraid to tell a scary story or two. Find industry news content about compliance-related fines or other enforcement actions; specifically those that employee training would have potentially helped prevent. Second, use peer pressure positively and to your benefit. If you're a member of any professional organizations, engage with other members and colleagues to learn what they're doing. Figure out what's working for them and match that with how your own program could be better.

For example, many organizations are opting for monthly compliance training, by breaking up required compliance training into smaller segments and delivering it throughout the year. In our State of Employee Compliance Training Report, almost a quarter of respondents said they deliver compliance training four times a year. For instance, 34% of respondents said they are conducting at least quarterly training (22% quarterly and 12% monthly). These combined figures add up to more than those who said they deliver annual training at 31%.

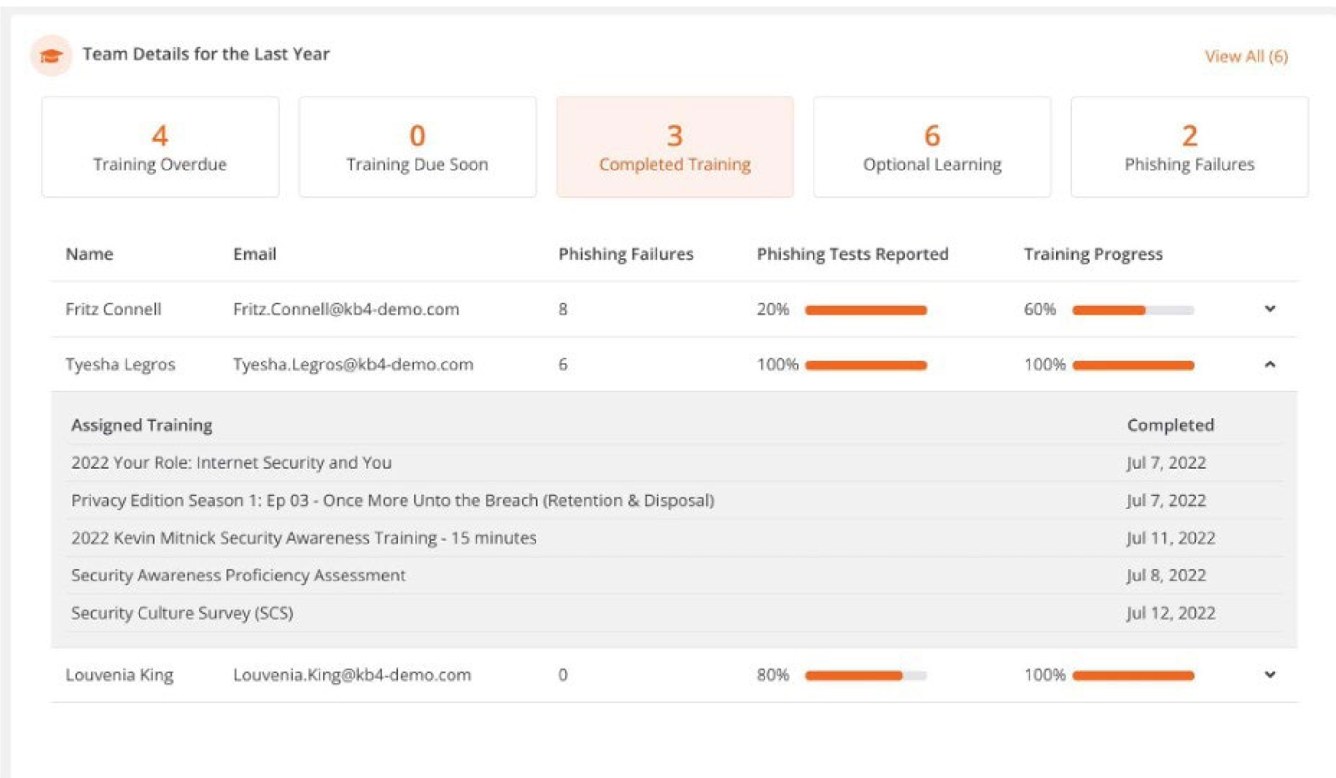
It's also important to to get buy-in from operational leaders across the organization on these timelines and deadlines, while also adhering to the deadlines for compliance requirements. This might also require different plans for different departments, divisions or worker groups, and that is OK. If everyone ends up at 100% completion eventually, that is better than trying to make a single timeline work for all employees. Involving the leadership team in the development of the plan and presenting options to them can help make or break a successful program.

PROVIDE VISIBILITY INTO THE COMPLETION PERCENTAGE

Reporting must be widely distributed to leaders in the organization and it must be benchmarked against the rest of the organization.

For example, “Your sales team is at 56% completion currently and our organization is currently at 61% completion. Below are the people who have not completed yet:” Sending a message like this to the manager or leader of a team on a regular basis during the training campaign can help spur the leaders to take action to get their team to comply.

You should also let executives get updates well before the deadlines, preferably the way they want them. This can be emailed and/or self-service, whichever medium works best for them, so they are not surprised when the deadline passes.



The Team Dashboard for Training Campaigns in the KnowBe4 platform allows managers to check on team progress by logging into the learner experience.

GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT

Your compliance training program should strive to be a conversation with your employees. Yes, the training content itself will need to cover specific, required tropics. But the method by which that content is delivered is still important. How content is delivered will have just as much impact on completion rates, if not more so, than what's being taught.

Once your training is up and running, make sure you turn on comments or opinion surveys (if they're part of your training platform). You can't shy away from feedback; especially if it's on the negative side.

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Some of the best conversations clients of ours have had with their own employees were those where some element of training was disliked. That is the best way to learn and improve. If a few employees took the time to write negative comments, chances are others may feel the same way but are hesitant about speaking up.

If you gather enough feedback electronically, both good and bad, it might be time to plan focus groups with your employees to inform future content decisions. We'll discuss the importance of mixing up your content later in this whitepaper, but focus groups are a great way to explore how different content approaches can be used. Make sure you involve employees who comment on the existing training the most. They'll likely have the most to say and trigger the most productive conversations. At the very least, involve representatives from different business units to ensure everyone's needs are being met.

GAMIFY YOUR PROGRAM

Gamification is the addition of gaming features or principles to something that typically does not have a gaming element; such as compliance training. Gamification has been shown to improve user engagement by increasing people's inherent ambition to compete, achieve or master a given objective. Studies have shown that when people are intrinsically motivated to complete a task, they learn better and retain more information.

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All this to say that gamification does not have to be complicated. This part of human nature is something marketing professionals have known for years with contests to motivate consumers. Why not train like a marketer and take advantage of the motivation of a chance to win? Here are three ways colleagues and customers of ours have succeeded with gamification:

Team Vs. Team

Break departments/divisions into teams with the leaders as the captains that compete against each other to be the first to complete compliance training programs in a given timeframe. Carry these teams over to your reporting tool and display progress at regular intervals, such as at weekly or monthly company meetings.

Gift Card Giveaway

Offer random drawings for gift cards for those that complete the training early. People love to win stuff, so a chance to win something or gain special recognition is more motivating than everyone getting something for simply completing training. For example, one organization gave out three $100 gift cards in a random drawing to everyone who completed their training a week ahead of the deadline and saw a dramatic increase in their completion rate for that training campaign.

Everyone Needs Some Stinkin' Badges

If gift cards aren't in the budget, consider recognizing completion milestones with digital (or physical) badges of certificates of completion. It may sound straight out of elementary school, but we've found badges (like the ones built into the KnowBe4 platform) contribute to a sense of employee accomplishment. The more unique the badge or recognition, the better (first one done with training, earliest in the morning to work on training, etc.).

USE QUALITY TRAINING CONTENT

Let's face it, most training content is not going to match the level of production quality of the next hit on Netflix or HBO, but expectations have certainly been raised in the last few years.

Providing the same exact module every year that is a glorified "PowerPoint" is not motivating. If the content is not clear about why it's needed, it can also be very demotivating.

The ability to mix it up with different formats such as video, self-paced interactive training modules, compliance job aides, digital signage on the organization's intranet, and examples and case studies can all get great results and make connections with different types of learners.

Employees will likely respond better to three 10-minute modules than a 30-minute course, even if it's the same content.

Varied content formats can also help you get away from larger courses and shift to a more modular approach. Employees will likely respond better to three 10-minute modules than a 30-minute course, even if it's the same content. Think about it: isn't it easier to get sucked into a season of eight, hour-long episodes rather than commit to a two-and-a-half hour movie? Also, delivering reinforcement after each module, such as mini quizzes, further encourages them to complete.

Keep in mind that this mix of content all comes down with what fits best with your corporate culture. But don't presume "this is always the way we've done it" is still the best way to go. A large bank we worked with was intent on all the training content needing to be serious and business-like. The content steering committee consulting on the training, though, thought an example of our more "fun" animated training content looked interesting and wanted to roll a single example of animated content companywide. Via surveys after they deployed this content, they learned that employees loved it! Employees were tired of the same "business-formal" training and welcomed something new, colorful and fun.

Accessibility of this content for those with various auditory or visual challenges is also a vital factor to keep in mind. Most, if not all, learning content should be able to be consumed by as many different types of people as possible. This includes but is not limited to the courseware being screen-reader compatible and including captions on all video content.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

When it comes to training content, the two main options usually are: making it yourself, or engaging with a training vendor. However, those two paths do not have to be mutually exclusive. We've seen successful approaches combine the best of both worlds.

Branding the content or adding custom elements to the campaign will help you provide the best opportunity for your organization to engage.

Making the content your own, as far as you can, will go a long way to increasing engagement. Some vendors will allow their courseware to be customized with your organization's logo or training module elements specific to your needs, such as pages with links to your internal policies. Branding the content or adding custom elements to the campaign will help you provide the best opportunity for your organization to engage.

Consider augmenting custom capabilities that vendors can provide with internally-built content to add a truly unique touch to your compliance training. But don't feel like you have to make the next hit Netflix series! For example, add a short introduction video or customized message from your organization's CEO to the training campaign to address why it is important. These can be made via Zoom's recording meetings function or on a smartphone. Showing that your leadership cares enough to take the time to create unique content for your program will drive home the significance of the training and provide further encouragement for employee engagement. Ideally, the training vendor you're working with will have the ability to upload this custom content directly into their learning management system.

STANDARDIZE YOUR SYSTEM AND APPROACH

Modern day employees have enough platforms and profiles to log into as part of their normal work life. Try not to make your compliance training program just one more set of credentials to remember.

There are few ways to go about this. The first involves seeking out a vendor with single-sign-on (SSO) capabilities built into their training platform. If you have an existing SSO tool in place, such as Okta or Microsoft Azure (Active Directory), then the training platform becomes another tile or single click for your employees to choose from as part of their daily routine. This removes a barrier for them to complete training on time.

Second, training frequency (shorter training more often) can contribute positively here by becoming part of an employee's weekly or monthly routine. People are creatures of habit, so making it easy for your employees to make training one of those habits will increase the likelihood of timely training completion. Regular training builds organizational memory for your program; exactly what you want to ensure training becomes an expected part of your employees' usual work life.

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STICK TO FIRM DEADLINES AND CONSEQUENCES

Make sure the training itself has firm deadlines. You should not be manually passing employees who have taken too long to complete their training. We've found that it's better to report to auditors that some individuals did not complete after multiple attempts than manually pass them when they haven't earned it. At the end of an audit cycle, this information will allow leadership to take actions related to these employees as needed.

Advocate that compliance training should be in an organization policy and have real teeth for it to be understood universally as important.

If people know you are just going to extend the deadline or let content build up that is overdue, word will get around fast. It is better to have a quarterly program that gets to 96% and shoot for 98% next quarter than to relent and let people think they can procrastinate, because they will.

One organization we've communicated with would shut off the email of anyone that did not complete the required training. This was working for them (surprisingly so), and is the most extreme consequence we have heard of. Another organization took a "three strikes" approach that had progressive discipline. The cool thing about this organization's method is that the employees had a way to complete additional optional training and wipe a strike away.

Try implementing firm deadlines and consequences that work for your organization. Advocate that compliance training should be in an organization policy and have real teeth for it to be understood universally as important.

CONCLUSION

Completion rates are important to track and set high goals for. Through customer and colleague discussions, we've seen that 100% is achievable.

Compliance training can be an effective way to mitigate risk, as long as it is truly intended to do so and not just a "check-the-box" approach. More and more organizations are finding that effective training, especially with the hybrid workforce of today, needs to be done much more frequently, with higher quality content, and with more planning efforts.

Think about your compliance training program as a way to engage your users about compliance issues rather than the historical mindset that they probably will not care no matter what you do. Having higher expectations for the program to resonate with your employee base and using the best practices in this paper can lead to 100% completion rates and, more importantly, less compliance risk for the organization.

Additional Resources

Compliance Audit Readiness Assessment
Take the first step towards assessing your organization's readiness for meeting compliance

Free Automated Security Awareness Program
Create a customized Security Awareness Program for your organization

Free Phish Alert Button
Your employees now have a safe way to report phishing attacks with one click

Free Email Exposure Check
Find out which of your users emails are exposed before the bad guys do

Free Domain Spoof Test
Find out if hackers can spoof an email address of your own domain

About KnowBe4

KnowBe4's new-school approach to compliance training offers an interactive and engaging experience with real-life simulated scenarios to help teach employees how to recognize and respond in a challenging situation.

KnowBe4 is the provider of the world's largest security awareness training and simulated phishing platform, used by tens of thousands of organizations around the globe, and offers a variety of ways to reduce risk in your organization including data privacy and compliance training.

With a worldwide presence, KnowBe4's platform is used by small, medium and large enterprises across all industries, including highly regulated fields such as finance, healthcare, energy, government and insurance, to mobilize end users for their vital role in minimizing organizational risk.

For more information, please visit www.KnowBe4.com

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