

# STARTING with SIMS



PARTICIPANTS IN A REALITYPLUS COURSE GIVEN BY LEARNING TREE INTERNATIONAL.

**D**velop an objective that has as its core a need for improved critical thinking in the targeted audience around whatever topic needs to be addressed, advises Ken Spero, CMO, Humentum Corporation. "This can be defined as a function of three criteria: 1) that the targeted population needs to think or exercise judgment, 2) once they make a decision, they experience consequences and 3) they receive feedback on what happened so they understand why."

Adds Henrik Ekelund, CEO and founder of BTS Group, "Find out what the business outcome is. How will you run a better business after doing the simulation?"

Plus, you must understand how your culture will respond to simulations, says Adam Nelson, VP, technology and product development, Ninth House. "Take the pulse of your organization and find out what will move your employees."

Peter Honebein, senior instructional designer at

So you're ready to take the plunge into simulation training. Some tips to keep in mind before signing on the dotted line. **By Lorri Freifeld**

Darryl L. Sink & Associates, says you "have to embrace beyond-domain experiences with these courses. If your core content domain is user requirements, other related content should be allowed to emerge. For example, how does a task incorporate the political situation in the organization? What are the best practices for navigating a company's culture? What technologies are being used to complete tasks effectively?" Honebein adds that you "have to understand the tasks and the standards of performance to create an experience that simulates a situation or challenge a person would expect in real life."

**Ask potential vendors pointed questions.** BTS' Ekelund suggests: How long have you been in this business? What projects have you done? Who are your clients? Is your company a simulation-centric company or a business results-oriented company that does great simulations?

**Pick a company you won't see as a vendor and which won't view you as a client**—it should truly be a partnership, suggests James Webb, director, HR development services, Blockbuster. "When you select an employee, you want someone who fits the organization; when you select a partner, you want skills and talent, but like an employee, they need to fit the team on your side. If you don't see eye-to-eye; if you don't agree on philosophies; if you don't have verbal contracts up front as far as respect for one another, you'll never get where you need to be."

Ninth House's Nelson also recommends asking about effectiveness rates and experiencing the vendor's other simulations.

**Don't pick a simulation because it looks cool.** "The simulation has to be sophisticated enough that it challenges employees while they're

learning,” says Jonas Åkerman, president and CEO, BTS USA. “But companies often insist on adding things to the simulation that do not add to the learning.”

Adds Nelson, “The natural tendency is to try to make the simulation do a lot, especially if it’s expensive. A focused scope is the right way to go.”

**Make sure your IT system can support a distance approach to learning,** cautions Michael Leonetti, head, HealthCare Partnerships, Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc. “There is so much value in using these simulations in the workshop setting, but real cost benefits and sales force learning accrues with distance learning opportunities.”

**Determine whether the program can work off the shelf or needs to be tailored,** says Nick Schacht, president and CEO of Learning Tree International. “Every environment is unique, but most are not that unique. Most off-the-shelf programs will be fine. Customized simulations are expensive.”

**Bear in mind there’s a significant time investment upfront in making sure the simulation you build is a**

**reflection of the real-time experience.** “You have to spend time with your partner to make sure they get it. It was a bigger time investment than I originally anticipated,” says Steve Twait, alliance manager, Eli Lilly and Company. “There’s a lot more to it behind-the-scenes technology-wise than most of us appreciate.”

**Keep the materials in the simulation as concise as possible.** “I recommend focusing the material on the top two or three things you want the trainee to learn,” Blockbuster’s Webb says. “Maintain a blended solution where people can see what they need to know and are provided the opportunity to practice and give feedback on it.”

**Create a maintenance strategy plan and figure that into the initial investment,** with a focus on long-term return on investment, Webb says. “You should do more upfront work to get people to buy into the program. Given a second opportunity, I would have done a program to train our trainers on how to facilitate or use the simulation e-modules. Instead of doing that over a month or two, I would have invested 3 to 6 months to get an even bigger return.” **■**

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CHAPTER EIGHT

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