

a whitepaper from



Interpreting Online Survey Results

When Training Participants Spoke, We at NSF Health Sciences Listened

In April 2014, we contacted past, current and prospective NSF Health Sciences training course participants and asked them to respond to a brief online survey about their preferences and experiences regarding training. Who did they use for training and education services? If they have ever chosen NSF Health Sciences, why did they choose us? How did they measure the success of a training session? What was their preferred mode of training? Did they prefer training onsite at their worksite or traveling to a training location? These were just some of the questions we asked.

A total of 145 training participants responded to our email and LinkedIn survey requests. We originally thought the survey would help us plan, manage and market our training programs more effectively at NSF Health Sciences, but we soon realized the results were meaningful in other ways as well.

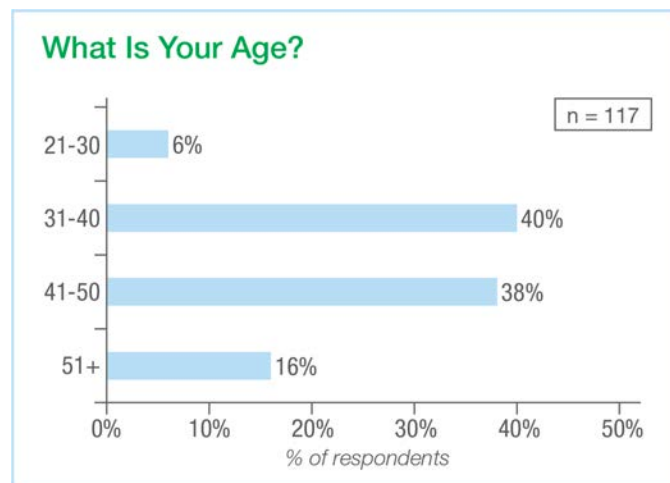
For instance, what was the average age of survey respondents? The vast majority (78 percent) were between 31 and 50 years old. Only 16 percent were over age 50. And only 6 percent were under 30. How do we interpret this data? The low number of participants under age 30 may be linked to career progression and experience. Perhaps very few young professionals in the pharmaceutical industry are invited to attend company-paid, external training events. Their positions and job experiences may limit them to internal training opportunities. But what about those age 51 and older? Does their low rate of online survey participation suggest that people of that age need less training of the type that NSF Health Sciences provides to help them perform their current roles or to enhance and advance their

careers? Or does the low participation rate simply indicate a lower tolerance for online survey solicitations?

The information uncovered by the online survey was certainly useful to NSF Health Sciences training developers and marketers, but it also has the potential to reveal many unexpected opportunities for our clients.

How Do You Prefer Your Training?

When asked how they prefer to attend pharmaceutical training courses, 75 percent said they preferred “external, public courses”. Of the remaining respondents, 17 percent said they like “in-house course delivered by external expert,” 4 percent said they prefer “webinars” and 3 percent said they prefer “e-learning courses.” One percent selected “other”.



What does this tell us about our customers' preferences for training opportunities? The most important message is that, despite the fact that many training companies – and customer companies – are now promoting webinars, e-learning and desk-based learning packages as the future of “lifelong learning”, the vast majority of

people receiving the education prefer face-to-face training courses. Comments indicate that a real, live tutor, via an external, public course provides a better, more effective learning experience, as well as a rare and valuable opportunity to interact with peers from other companies, to share common challenges and experiences and explore networking opportunities.

As one survey respondent said,

“I believe nothing replaces face-to-face training, but what is equally important is the discussions generated during the training by various participants. I believe this would not be of the same quality and content if it were a webinar and we’d lose the networking opportunities which allow us to form relationships amongst various experts in other companies. I find this invaluable.”

Clearly, getting away from the day-to-day work environment and its demands – and meeting new people without your office mates and superiors looking over your shoulder – is a valuable part of the “external, public course” experience.

Some participants (17 percent) prefer an “in-house course delivered by external experts” due to the ability to customize content for a particular group. One survey respondent noted,

“It is easier to tailor requirements to the needs of the attendees and it is often more efficient in terms of both time and cost.”

We agree with this point of view, which is why we put great emphasis on offering all our public courses as in-house events, where we work with clients to ensure they get exactly the course they want when they want it.

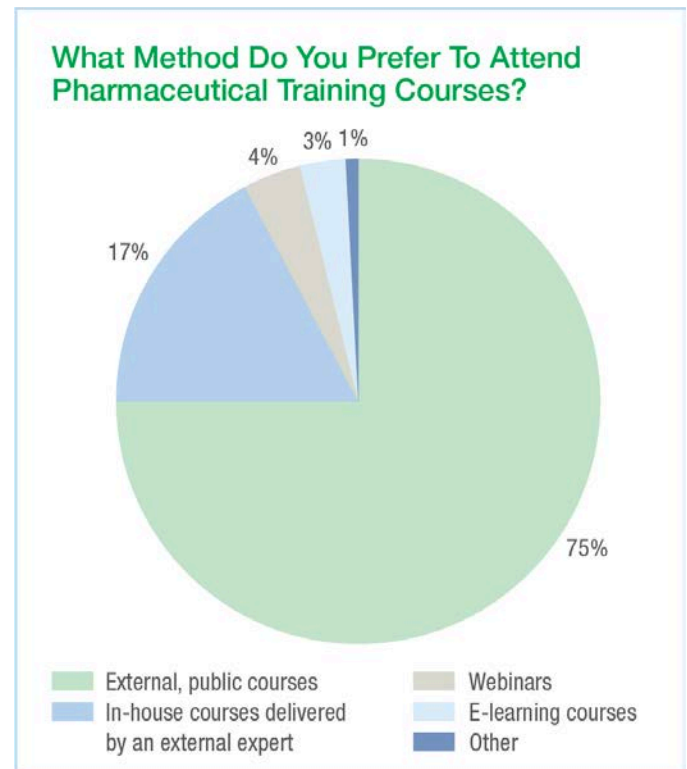
Only 7 percent of survey respondents prefer “webinars” and “e-learning courses”. They cited lower costs and flexibility as the main reasons. One survey respondent wrote,

“E-learning is good because you can do it whenever you want. There is a lot of flexibility and follow up via email correspondence to tutor.”

Another said, webinars and e-learning are

“...usually cheaper, and less travel, therefore easier to attend.”

So, despite the growth in electronic means of conveying learning, a massive 93 percent of respondents to our survey said that they prefer face-to-face training. This validates what we believe and we suggest that those in charge of learning and development at pharmaceutical firms keep this in mind when deciding on what training modalities to adopt to fully engage their employees in training and education.



Whom Do You Trust?

According to the survey data, 76 percent of respondents have used up to three training suppliers in the past five years. Most people had experienced two or three training providers. Respondents were asked to select up to five training companies they’ve used most frequently in the last five years. More than 80 different training providers were mentioned in the survey, but NSF was the clear leader with mentions by 69 percent of respondents. The next most popular training provider was mentioned by only 21 percent of respondents.

NSF Health Sciences Pharma Biotech

2001 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 950, Washington, DC 20006 USA
Tel: +1 (202) 822-1850 | USpharma@nsf.org | www.nsf.org/info/pharmabiotech

The Georgian House, 22/24 West End, Kirkbymoorside, York, UK YO62 6AF
Tel: +44(0)1751 432999 | Fax: +44(0)1751 432450 | EUpharma@nsf.org

Trainer expertise and course content were most frequently mentioned reasons for choosing NSF over other training providers. Company reputation and quality of training were also frequently mentioned. One respondent wrote,

“I have always liked the fact that NSF has active participation during the course by having lots of discussion, exercises and group work. The teachers/presenters have a lot of experience and knowledge about the industry.”

Another respondent summed up the NSF training experience like this.

“They are the best and deliver the easiest material to learn from and train you to the right level of detail.”

This is very reassuring to hear and it makes all the hard work we put into our courses worthwhile.

So What Have We Learned From You?

We have learned many lessons from this survey. Perhaps for us (and for you too?) the most important messages are...

- Despite the growth in webinars, e-learning and other “modern” forms of education, the vast majority of you prefer traditional, face-to-face training from real, live tutors
- You put immense value on being able to meet with your peers from other companies and to learn from each other
- While duration of training courses, timing, location and cost can influence your choice of training provider, nothing is more important to you than the quality of the training and the trainers.

We are delighted to find that your views coincide exactly with our own and these messages will help to shape our strategy for education in the future. We believe that education plays a key part in maximizing the contribution of all people at all levels within the pharmaceutical industry and is essential to establishing a strong and sustainable quality culture in our industry. We will continue to embrace new and emerging technologies where they help us to reach people that we might not

otherwise be able to reach and to enhance the quality of the learning experience for our customers, but we will not lose sight of what matters most – the effectiveness of the training and the enjoyment factor for the participant.

If you participated in this survey, we would like to offer our very sincere thanks. Your thoughts and recommendations have been immensely valuable to us. If you did not participate in the survey, we hope that you found this article informative and thought-provoking.

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2001 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 950, Washington, DC 20006 USA
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