A Bigger Playing Field: Learn to Win Expands its Technology and Customer Base through SBIR

By Julie Scuderi

Many companies tout the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program as a great entry point for selling to the federal government. This was certainly the case with Learn to Win, Inc., whose main customer base prior to its SBIR involvement was college and professional sports teams. The California-based company's business model was to help teams train faster and more efficiently through its Agile training methodology, which focuses on adaptive learning through personalized instruction.

This naturally translated to athletes and coaches who needed to learn playbooks and the company first made a name for itself in professional sports by aligning with teams such as the Pittsburgh Penguins and several NCAA football programs. But Learn to Win's involvement in SBIR through a Phase I with the Air Force and Phase II with NAVWAR and its subsequent participation in the Navy SBIR/STTR Transition Program (Navy STP) (contract N68335-20-C-0691) led to an abundance of opportunities in contracting with the Department of Defense (DoD). As well, the Navy found a niche product that helps to better equip the warfighter and ensures the current and future needs of the fleet are met.

U.S. Navy photo

Learn to Win was recently awarded a Phase III contract from The Program Executive Office for Manpower, Logistics and Business Solutions (PEO MLB), that provided 2,000 user licenses to create new training content to learners, including training on corrosion identification.

"What we're doing is bringing data and analytics to the whole training process," explains Andrew Powell, co-founder and CEO of Learn to Win. "This allows the instructor to be very targeted on where to focus attention. The ease of authoring is a key feature. You don't need to know how to code; anybody who's a subject matter expert or instructor can build their own training content and deploy it with the click of a button. It's accessible and convenient."

This Agile training method was borrowed from the software community, and Learn to Win leveraged this methodology because of its utility and ease of adoption. In the sports

arena, it proved to be much more effective than traditional training regimes in getting players ready for game day. Athletes would receive a personalized training course after they played a game and made some mistakes. Those mistakes served as the central point around which the week's training was based. It's high paced, rapid, adaptive and personalized, and it proved to be a best practice example in preparing a team for high performance.

The technology allows both trainers and recipients to

Image courtesy of Learn to Win

Learn to Win originally made a name for itself in professional sports. Through Navy SBIR, Learn to Win evolved its technology to a mobile-friendly, active learning software platform that includes iOS, Android, and web applications for students/learners as well as a web application for instructors/designers.

be on the same page. Instructors receive real-time feedback, what the team is doing right and wrong, and which spots need more attention. With this information in hand, immediate adjustments can be made. Through Navy SBIR, Learn to Win evolved its technology to a mobile-friendly, active learning software platform that includes iOS, Android, and web applications for students/learners as well as a web application for instructors/designers. This fully accredited training platform provides instructors with speed to develop content; learners with

anywhere, anytime access to content; and course administrators with instantaneous feedback on course effectiveness, learner engagement, and outcomes. For the warfighter, this means homing in on the exact skills that need to be perfected. It's everything they need, and nothing they don't.

"With Navy STP, the market analysis was extremely valuable in identifying targets for our technology and we use this for prospecting," says Powell. "We had booth space at WEST for our Navy Forum for SBIR/STTR Transition event, and that was a very beneficial event to connect with government agencies and potential partners, as well as to reinforce some vendor partnerships. We got a lot of benefit from Navy STP, and we're still reaping that benefit. Without it, we would've had a much harder time transitioning."

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Solutions (PEO MLB), that provided 2,000 user licenses to create new training content to learners, with varying applications from corrosion identification to training on night vision goggles. The assessment of knowledge may look something like this: Let's say the training is focused on how to effectively identify corrosion issues that could lead to decreased readiness. A user scores a 60-70 percent on the pre-test; the user's lessons are then targeted and built around the pain points. After completing the lessons, the user tests again. Using this model, post-test scores have jumped to over 90 percent on average.

Target platforms throughout the Navy are limitless, and the technology is also being commercialized within the Air Force and Space Force in several training units. In addition, many potential commercial applications exist for any company that would benefit from a revolutionized approach to learning, such as those in sales team training. For commercial customers, Learn to Win's approach to training has garnered a 40% reduction in onboarding time.

"No matter your industry, there are nuances on how to succeed in that role," says Powell. "Analysts say that 80 percent of training content bought off-the-shelf goes unused, and we feel that's because it's not specific to those nuances. The last mile is the most expensive but it's also the most valuable. We see ourselves in that last mile."

Today, Learn to Win is enjoying its government success and wants to build world-class commercial technology that will also serve the DoD. One of the other ways in which the company has continually improved its product is that it can now deploy in a highly secure DoD environment. Since security is a top priority, Learn to Win can post any training up to a secret clearance.

Learn to Win hopes it can continue to leverage the non-dilutive funding of SBIR to meet future government needs, and the company is thankful it took the leap of faith from commercial success to trying its hand at government contracting.

"SBIR really gave us the chance to rapidly prototype our solution with DoD stakeholders," adds Powell. "The open topics are phenomenal and it allows companies that might not otherwise get involved with the government to begin working with the DoD or companies that have applications with national security. It's a great on-ramp to transition technology."

For more information, visit the company website at https://www.learntowin.com/.