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Web-Based Counterterrorism and Security Training

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Counterterrorism training and awareness programs are important considerations today as U.S. security management and other executive personnel in government and industry look for effective training systems to meet their needs against this global threat. Until recently, counterterrorism training has been offered via classroom, video, and CD-ROM formats.

Use of these three methods for conducting counterterrorism and security education reveals significant shortcomings in meeting our current and future security training requirements. Although classroom training provides important hands-on experience, it is impractical for students located throughout the U.S. and the world. It requires coordination of disparate schedules, is time intensive and can be expensive for students who might have to travel to remote training facilities. While video-training programs are more convenient and allow students to easily rewind or fast-forward the videotape to locate or repeat interesting segments, updating information using a dying technology with little consumer demand can be expensive and counterproductive. At first glance CD-ROM technology seems to have all the markings of today's favorite training delivery system, or does it? On the plus side, CD-ROM is a mainstream technology that is convenient, easy to navigate, and allows for bells and whistles like colorful graphics and embedded audio and videos. However, information on the CD-ROM can become quickly outdated; valuable time and money is necessary to update, reproduce, and distribute new disks.

Today, the Internet is opening the door to improved training effectiveness and efficiency. Web-based training offers distinct time- and cost-saving advantages over alternative methods. Important advantages of a Web-based training system involve ease of updates, self-paced learning, 24/7 availability, training on demand, self management of the program, and increased student satisfaction. For example, since a Web-based curriculum resides on an Internet server, updates are fast and easy; it has rendered disk reproduction obsolete. Self-paced training means that when individuals have time, they can sign on to the site from their computer (or handheld PDA in some cases) anywhere in the world and click on the required Web pages. The Internet is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so a Web-based curriculum provides training

on demand. Essentially unlimited ability to research information and troubleshoot problems helps students self-manage their system, increasing overall satisfaction. It also provides a meaningful tool for counterterrorism and security equipment and service providers to reach a competitive marketplace.

Combining a Web-based curriculum with conventional classroom instruction brings together the best of both worlds. Offering Web-based pre-course training for those who will be participating in classroom sessions will enable all participants to become familiar with the same information before they arrive. A level playing field enhances the classroom experience for every student.

Security equipment manufacturers and service providers benefit from Web-based training because it provides customers with a convenient, cost-effective service. Manufacturers can also monitor site hits to expand popular topics of interest, identify the need for in-depth classroom training sessions and recognize possible system problems by noting frequent access to troubleshooting information. A dedicated e-mail address at the site can link customers with support staff and product experts.

As more organizations realize the importance of servicing the educational and training needs of their employees, they are sure to capitalize on unique Web-based training opportunities. However, building an effective training program accessible via the Internet requires a substantial investment of resources for site design, curriculum development, and technology. Not every organization is prepared to commit to a hefty long-term investment in a rapidly changing technology. However, contracting a private training enterprise that provides customized homeland security e-learning packages can be a viable and cost-effective alternative.

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