



Reply Requested

Trainers often complain about the lack of interactivity in their programs. How better to remedy that than with an audience-response system?

By Jacqueline Durett

Are you a trainer in search of validation?

If soul-searching isn't cutting it, perhaps an audience-response system will. Why? You'll get instant results and find out if the information you're trying to impart is actually getting through. You can tailor sessions based on your audience's knowledge and find out if they really did that prework you assigned, all while feeling as if you could teach those game show hosts a thing or two.

"In the beginning, people were asking simple yes/no questions, and they were getting used to the technology, but the fact that you are able to seamlessly collect data now throughout any facilitated session, it really changes the dynamic of the training environment," says Tony DeAscentis, vice president of marketing for Youngstown, Ohio-based Turning Technologies, whose TurningPoint is just one of many audience-response systems available today.

Knowing the technology is key in selecting a system. While up until a few years ago most systems employed infrared technology, the industry standard has become radio-frequen-

cy. "Infrared is very short range; it's also compromised by bodies, tables [and] barriers in a room," says Pat Moody, vice president of sales and marketing of the Fleetwood Group in Holland, Mich., which sells a variety of systems, including the Reply line.

Demand continues to drive the technology. "People have played with it now for a few years, and people understand the value it delivers," says

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—Tony DeAscentis, vice president of marketing for Turning Technologies

Rob Meissner, GTCO CalComp's vice president of marketing. The Columbia, Md.-based company's latest offering, InterWrite PRS RF, is part of the company's interactive conference room suite. "[An audi-

ence-response system gets] them engaged and to really think about what's going on," Meissner says.

But what good is data collection without context and comprehension? "There's a bunch of ways you can slice and dice the data after the fact," Meissner says. InterWrite allows administrators to collect information instantly in graph form, but the data also is saved for additional analysis.

DeAscentis says the immediacy and breadth of results saves not only time and puts power at people's fingertips but also is more reliable than a trainee's self-reporting and more efficient than compiling data manually. "[Data collection is] really moving at the speed of light because people are really starting to understand the kinds of things they can do with tools they are so used to using."

The technology continues to evolve and drill down to the most local of levels. Meissner says all sorts of organizations can—and are—using the technology for very individualized goals, ranging from town councils looking for feedback on building a bridge to the National Institutes for Health using them for grant proposal evaluations.

So is one of these systems right for your training program? Take a look at four of the products on the market—perhaps one is right for you.

Name: InterWrite PRS RF Manufacturer: GTCO CalComp

What It Does: This radio-frequency audience-response system features a two-line LCD display on the remote, as well as presentation software.

Why It's Different: It's Mac, Windows and Linux compatible.

Cost: The 32 pack, which includes 32 transmitters, software site license, receiver hub and a carrying case, costs \$2,220.

Web site: www.gtcocalcomp.com

Following the 2004 purchase of audience-response maker EduCue, Columbia, Md.-based GTCO CalComp was able to expand its interactive offerings from just white boards to audience response as well. "It looked like a great complimentary product for us, and in fact they work great together," says Rob Meissner, the company's vice president of marketing.

InterWrite's latest version debuted this

spring, but Meissner says the product first launched about six years ago. He says audience response is growing ever more popular, so much so that sales have been increasing at a rate of 100 percent annually, and now half a million clickers are in use.

Many of the company's clients are universities, but he says pharmaceutical companies also use them in training sessions, and the market continues to expand.



"If you put a clicker in their hand, and they get to respond, all of them have to think about the question and their answer and provide that feedback."

—Rob Meissner, vice president of marketing, GTCO CalComp

Owizdom CEO Darin Beamish says there are a few things to keep in mind when selecting an audience response system. "There are a number of systems, and a number of them are pretty good," he says, explaining that people often buy what they see first. But, "[buyers] tend to get sold." However, some ways to get the product that best suits your needs are:

- Compare your options
- Make sure you see it in use; try systems out
- Work with someone who understands your needs
- Make sure the system does what you need it to do

Name: TurningPoint Manufacturer: Turning Technologies

What It Does: Uses radio-frequency remotes and software that works with PowerPoint to create questions inside slides. A small receiver plugs into your computer's USB port and can receive 1,000 responses at once.

Why It's Different: Question-creation is as simple as using PowerPoint. Program aims to have limited learning curve. Slides from old presentations can be used with this software and don't need to be re-created. Licenses are needed only for data collection.

Cost: \$695 for the TurningPoint backbone application (which puts the toolbar into PowerPoint) and includes radio receiver, and the smallest bundle kit bag, which holds the response cards. Every response card costs \$89.

Web site: www.turningtechnologies.com

TurningPoint is designed to work effortlessly with Microsoft PowerPoint, which makes it ideal for trainers who are looking for something powerful that doesn't involve learning a new program in the process.

Turning Technologies' vice president of marketing Tony DeAscentis says data collection is getting more and more sophisticated as users understand the different ways they can analyze the information they are gathering.

And now, trainers all over the world will be able to poll their audiences using TurningPoint, as the company expands its technology to multi-lingual formats in 33 countries this year.



"You don't have to re-create the wheel to get started."

—Tony DeAscentis, vice president of marketing for Turning Technologies

Name: Qwizdom
Manufacturer: Qwizdom

What It Does: This two-way radio-frequency system, which is available in two formats, Q4 RF and Q5 RF, is designed to work well in groups of all sizes.

Why It's Different: Keypad uses an LCD screen, and users can request help by using the keypad. Presenters in multiple rooms can use systems next to each other without conflict. Personalization also is available, and the system is designed for game play.

Cost: Qwizdom is priced per device, and the hardware comes with the software. Qwizdom CEO Darin Beamish estimates that the cost of 30 devices would be about \$4,000.

Web site: www.qwizdom.com



"Price wise, it's a fairly competitive device," Qwizdom CEO Darin Beamish says, adding that one of the primary benefits of this system is the instructor device. "We have an instructor remote that can be used with all of the sets, which allows you to view how people have responded privately. They can pose questions from that RF remote, navigate and see who has requested to ask a question." The system also can work through PowerPoint or other programs.



Name: Reply
Manufacturer: Fleetwood Group

What It Does: This two-way radio frequency system has a few different versions, including Reply Worldwide and Reply IQ.

Why It's Different: Elements such as scalar responses make it ideal for interactive meetings, employee attitude surveys, focus groups and group decision making. Reply IQ also features an LCD display. The company has been selling radio-frequency systems since 1991, so it's been around long enough to know what clients need.

Cost: Fleetwood offers a list price for Reply Worldwide of \$79, Reply IQ of \$179 each. The system bases cost \$595 and \$1,595, respectively. Often the product is resold, so the price can vary. Polling software is sold separately.

Web site: www.fleetwoodgroup.com

Fleetwood Group is a manufacturer of a variety of radio-frequency audience-response systems; the Reply series is just one line of them. The company can not only customize systems for businesses and schools, but also creates entire lines for other companies to resell. "We're pretty much everywhere now, and we've done it in a way that has deliberately preserved our behind-the-scenes role," says Pat Moody, who is the company's vice president of sales and marketing.

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