SCC’s bottom line reflects the value of training

By Amy Haigh, Associate Editor

What advantages can a company — or a laboratory — realize when it understands the importance of providing its employees the knowledge and skills necessary to excel at their jobs and to ensure its business objectives are met? MLO discovered how one LIS provider maximizes the benefit of both employee and client training.

Award-winning training

SCC Soft Computer’s (SCC’s) Director of Educational Services, Don Keller, has creatively built a successful learning environment. In February 2005, SCC’s education department was cited as one of Training magazine’s “Training Top 100” companies — an honor it also received in 2002 and 2003. The Training Top 100 ranks organizations that “excel at human capital development” by assessing a range of qualitative and quantitative data, including financial investment in employee development; the type, scope, and quality of training programs provided to employees; and how closely such development efforts are linked to business goals and objectives.

Importance of employee training

SCC embraces employee training as a mission-critical strategy because, according to Keller, “quite simply, our products are only as good as the support our employees offer our clients. Our role is to be expert collaborators with our clients. To support our suite of products as a true business solution, we offer our employees continuous, ever-evolving training.”

Each employee completes about 28 classes, ranging from two-hour online modules to weeklong classroom sessions, on an annual basis. The company’s commitment to training has become an integral part of its culture and has helped improve performance and attitudes among its employees. One SCC employee explains, “Coming from a different industry to a healthcare company is a definite change. Through our training courses, I have gained true knowledge of our products and how they affect our clients on a daily basis. The courses in project management ensure that I manage people, projects, and clients to my best ability.”

Expert advice on starting a training program

As a recognized leader in the education/training area, Keller is frequently requested as a keynote speaker and serves on two education advisory boards. What suggestions does he have for anyone setting up a training program?

“When starting an education program, do your homework up front, and consider performing a full training-needs analysis,” he says. “A commitment to staff development can decrease turnover rates and improve employee satisfaction and effectiveness. Many studies have shown that companies can double or even triple their return on investment in education in a five-year period.”

Instead of merely creating a learning environment, the most successful companies create a “teaching environment” in which learners are encouraged to master the subject matter to the point that they can teach it to someone else. Thus, Keller continues, “We encourage subject matter experts to teach their peers. In an era of continuous, rapid technology change, a commitment to ongoing staff development is critical to maintaining a competitive edge in business.”

It is important to recognize that a commitment to training requires a large financial investment. Keller has proactively pursued state educational grants to supplement the SCC budget. These state-funded grants of over $1 million have allowed its training program to thrive, even in tough economic times.
Curriculum delivery

The company’s curriculum covers a broad range of topics, from laboratory software training — including P.A.C.E. continuing education programs — to professional development. The educational services department also maintains a repository of R&D resources that provides continuous training for SCC technical staff. To accommodate different learning styles, the department offers a blended approach to training — a combination of instructor-led training, CD-ROM, streaming Web-based, live e-learning, step-by-step training manuals, and quick-tip guides. The department implemented a learning-management system in 2002 that hosts over 200 online and webinar classes available worldwide. A variety of professionals and subject-matter experts who develop courses, teach programs, and work with training vendors (who supplement the company’s in-house programs) are employed — they bring the SCC training philosophy to life.

A little help from their friends

Its relationship with Mindleaders, a provider of Web-based e-learning solutions for business, started in 1998. Keller notes, “Partnering allows us to significantly enhance our repository of expertise. Not every education department can be everything, which is why partnering helps us provide the best possible training.” Mindleaders offers a strong technical suite of courses that are certified for continuing education in many areas, including Microsoft certification, and also works with SCC to customize classes to meet both client and internal staff needs. The educational services department chooses classes that benefit not only the LIS administrator, but all lab personnel as well. Mindleaders classes offered to SCC clients range from project management to programming classes.

Clients benefit

SCC’s clients are located all over the world and in many different time zones. Schedules, time zones, and learning preferences must be considered when curricula are being prepared. In its overseas colleges, SCC staff members work flextime to conduct webinars and classes that can accommodate everyone. The organization also offers a complete catalog of Internet and CD courses. “Blended learning enables our customers to train any way they like,” says Keller.

Both clients and employees benefit from SCC’s product and technical training. The only classes available to employees but not clients are courses in business skills and customer-service certification. According to Keller, “Our clients walk away from training not only having improved their skills with our products but — because our training methods focus on retention — also better prepared and more confident.”

As one client states, “We have continued to take advantage of ongoing educational offerings to upgrade our technology skills and learn new software programs. We have utilized many of SCC’s expanded and redefined training methodologies — interactive classroom settings, self-training e-modules, online training demos, ‘helpful hints’ training guides, and user-group workshops — to acquire practical training tools to teach and mentor our staff.”