



Empowering sales professionals nationwide

CPSA takes a data-driven approach to online professional development with D2L Brightspace

The CPSA wanted to make its national professional sales competency framework accessible for salespeople throughout Canada—but a reliance on in-person training and paper-based exams made it difficult to extend beyond the major cities. By harnessing D2L Brightspace, the organization has successfully moved to an online model and built partnerships with postsecondary education providers across the country.

At a glance

Client: Canadian Professional Sales Association

Learners: 15,000+ members

Industry: Associations

Website: www.cpsa.com

Platform/Features:

- Brightspace Core
- Data Hub

Interviewees:

- Nick Crowe, VP of Learning Solutions

Highlights:

- Moved all courses and exams online, making professional development more accessible
- Doubled the number of accredited postsecondary education partners in just two years
- Increased insight into members' needs by harnessing powerful data and analytics tools



Challenge

Serving a national need for sales skills

Founded over 140 years ago, the Canadian Professional Sales Association (CPSA) has a long history of helping salespeople develop their skills and improving professional standards.

In recent years, the organization has been focusing on taking professional development to the next level by creating a national professional sales competency framework. Designed through consultation with more than 100 sales professionals from across the country, the competency framework has been built by the industry, for the industry. It aims to support salespeople throughout their career, from new starters through experienced negotiators to senior sales leaders—providing professional development for all.

Nick Crowe, Vice President, Learning Solutions at CPSA, explains: “Once we had our competency framework in place, we needed to make it accessible to as many of our members as possible. That was a challenge, because we had traditionally used an in-person, paper-based approach to delivering training and exams, which made it difficult for sales professionals outside of the major cities to engage with us.”

Accessibility is particularly important because Canada is facing a skills gap in the professional sales sector. To help bring new people into the profession, CPSA also aimed to build an accreditation program that would enable postsecondary education providers across the country to deliver accredited courses aligned with CPSA standards and exams.

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Nick Crowe, Vice President, Learning Solutions at CPSA

Solution

Switching to an online learning model

The CPSA decided that the best way both to expand its geographic reach and to extend its accreditation program was to make it possible to deliver all its courses and exams via an online teaching model. To accomplish this, the organization would need a powerful learning management system (LMS).

“We were already using D2L Brightspace for a few small online courses, but we had only scratched the surface,” says Nick Crowe. “When we decided to really invest in online learning, we took a closer look. We realized that Brightspace had first-class support for competency-based education, which was exactly what we needed.”

The CPSA team was also impressed with D2L Brightspace’s integration capabilities, which made it simple to connect with payment services and third-party platforms. For example, when the CPSA embarked on a joint initiative with the federal government to build a National Accreditation Portal, D2L Brightspace integrated seamlessly with the association’s growing education technology stack.

Harnessing powerful analytics

D2L Brightspace’s Data Hub was another key selling point. “We’re using Data Hub to manage the integrity and quality of our courses and exams,” explains Nick Crowe. “For example, we can monitor learners’ performance on each exam question, to make sure the questions are neither too easy nor too hard. And we can match exam performance to course participation, which shows whether our courses are effectively helping learners develop the skills they need to succeed.”

The CPSA has also used insights from Data Hub to create a recommendation engine that uses data from online self-assessments to understand where each learner is in his or her professional development journey, and to automatically suggest courses and activities that will help them take the next step.

Adapting to the new normal

Thanks to its adoption of D2L Brightspace, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the CPSA was already in a good position.

“In fact, COVID-19 was almost an accelerator for us, because it made sales leaders more willing to invest in online learning,” says Nick Crowe. “The fact that we already had our courses and exams in D2L Brightspace enabled us to reach a larger proportion of our membership.”

To meet the needs of salespeople who now had to fit professional development time around all the other pressures of the COVID-19 lockdown, the CPSA team focused on developing more bite-size, asynchronous training components. For example, learners can now earn badges for developing specific competencies in a few hours when they don't have time to commit to a full-length course.

“The experience in D2L Brightspace and the variety of learning activities that we’re able to serve up consistently comes up as good feedback from our members.”

Nick Crowe, Vice President, Learning Solutions at CPSA

Result

Professional development for all

With D2L Brightspace platform in place, the CPSA has been able to meet its objectives of increasing its geographic reach beyond Canada’s major cities and empowering a much broader section of its membership to take courses, earn credentials, and take exams whenever and wherever works for them.

At the same time, the organization has been able to expand its partnerships with postsecondary education partners significantly. Twenty-four colleges and universities across Canada now have courses accredited and aligned to CPSA’s sales competencies—a network that has doubled in size over the past two years.

Nick Crowe explains: “From a business development perspective, we’re seeing much greater uptake of our courses and exams. That’s partly because we’ve made everything much more accessible online, partly due to our new partnerships, and partly because our

data-driven approach means we can recommend much more relevant and engaging courses to members at different stages of their career.”

Best of all, he reports that members are delighted with the results: “The experience in D2L Brightspace and the variety of learning activities that we’re able to serve up consistently comes up as good feedback from our members.”

In conclusion, Nick Crowe credits D2L for helping CPSA achieve its goals: “Our D2L account team have been great, and we really appreciate the effort that D2L puts into working with its user groups and listening to our feedback. To have that type of interaction with one of our technology partners and be able to work through that feedback with the team is something that I haven’t seen with other LMS vendors.”