



Dixons Group reaps great rewards from new assessment approach

Introduction

Dixons Group is Europe's leading specialist retailer of consumer electronics, with operations in 14 countries and more than 1,400 stores employing more than 33,000 people. Its trademarks include Dixons, Currys, PC World and The Link in the UK and Ireland, Elkjøp in the Nordic countries, PC City in Spain, France, Italy and Sweden, UniEuro in Italy, Electro World in Hungary and the Czech Republic and Kotsovolos in Greece.

A company of this stature needs to rely on best-of-breed technology to support its growing work force and to ensure that it is fully equipped with the correct knowledge to deliver quality service and support to the end customers. In order to achieve this, Dixons has had a system in place for some years whereby all employees within stores are tested on their knowledge of products, processes and health and safety issues. Staff could receive incremental pay increases as they prove and improve their knowledge and expertise within the work place, while core competence in areas of health and safety was required.

Systems Review

The testing vehicle for many years has been a phone based system whereby an external company interviews staff over the phone. Scheduling challenges helped make the existing system time-consuming, heavy on administration and somewhat impractical. There was a clear need for something more efficient and flexible that would suit the in-store worker and that might reduce the cost of assessment for the company as a whole.

Time for change

A customer-focused approach was required and David Dixon, online learning manager for Dixons Group, was determined that the new system would see employees from all parts of the company being served by the assessments instead of hindered by them. An online approach appeared the most appropriate route in terms of ease of use, accessibility and efficiency.

He comments, "Questionmark Perception appeared to be the best assessment software on the market and it is compatible with most well-known LMS systems, so we could be sure that it would integrate with the other systems we chose to implement. Perception did everything we wanted it to do and we had seen it working in other corporate environments, so it wasn't just conjecture. We had seen the working model. It was not a difficult choice. We decided to implement Perception."

Putting new systems in place

Product training was the first area to be trialed and assessments were written to run in parallel with the phone assessment system. It was so successful that another three product categories were added almost immediately.

David Dixon says, "The users absolutely lapped it up. It was fantastic, timely and accessible. The staff understood the questions better because they could read them on-screen and they could fit their assessments around their work far easier than before. Rolling the system out to more users was simple. Word of mouth did the job for us as everyone wanted to have a go."

Piloting success

The first assessment and pilot was run in October 2004 and eight months later there were 13 assessments on the system for all areas of the Group. In fact, 50,000 assessments have been run to date – a level of use that had not been anticipated by the company.

He comments, "The success of the assessment trial has been incredible. There are major cost justifications, and the cost avoidance of using Questionmark Perception is huge. Our assessments are running more efficiently, tying up less employee time than the old system and the invoices for the telephone system have decreased considerably since the launch of the online trials."

Into the future

Managing and communicating the information generated from the assessments is the next major step forward for the team. Certificates must be generated where applicable, and payroll and legal departments must be advised of results where this is necessary. There is also a requirement to introduce some secure testing where assessments can be assigned to specific people at specified times. David Dixon concludes, "This has been a very exciting project, and it has been great to follow its success from the very beginning. The installation, training and support that we have received from Questionmark have been great, and we now have a whole team of people who are able to generate assessments. The staff are doing a lot of self assessment, which is great because it means that they are enjoying learning and they are getting more from the system and the training than they were able to gain before. The project has been a resounding success, and we look forward to even greater things over the coming months."

More information

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