

# case study

## Sony Electronics Inc.

Delivering Superior Customer Service  
With Centra®

### Solution Overview

**Industry — High Technology,  
Consumer Electronics**

### Challenge

Reduce Sony Service Company's training costs and provide more flexible delivery for more than 7,000 U.S. learners

### Benefits

- Reduce yearly training costs by two-thirds
- Eliminate training-related travel for training and technicians
- Faster distribution of product updates to the authorized network

### Solution

Centra® Symposium

### Sony Electronics' Service Company Distributed Technician Network Cuts Training Costs by Two-Thirds

The U.S. division of Sony Electronics Inc., headquartered in Park Ridge, N.J., needed a solution that would reduce its Service Company's training costs and provide them with more flexibility in the delivery of courses to their more than 7,000 learners throughout the United States. They found that solution and, in April of 1998, Centra was implemented to train technicians working in 26 Sony Electronics facilities and 1,800 authorized Sony service locations. Within 12 months of implementing Centra's virtual classroom application, 100% of its product repair courses are delivered via virtual classroom sessions. The results of this rapid adoption have been to:

- Reduce yearly training costs by two-thirds
- Eliminate training-related travel for trainers and technicians
- Distribute product updates to the authorized network even faster than before

*“Using Centra, Sony Electronics' Service Company has appreciably reduced training costs, while providing quality training that equips its technicians to provide the very best service to their customers.”*

Sony Electronics' Service Company is responsible for the repair and refurbishing of Sony consumer products. Its target audience is technicians that work in more than 1,800 independently owned Sony-authorized service facilities. To maintain their “Sony authorized” status, technicians are required to complete training for the product lines they service. Training requirements average between four and six courses for each facility every year, with a service facility typically employing from 2 to 50 technicians.

### **Reducing Training Costs, Increasing Flexibility**

In 1998, Sony Electronics' Service Company identified the need to reduce its training costs without compromising the quality of its training. The solution also needed to allow the delivery of training in shorter but more frequent courses, covering new technology and updates to existing products, giving them more flexibility to deliver quality "just-in-time" training. With the target learner audience dispersed in so many remote locations, the solution needed to operate on a variety of PCs and perform well with modems running at slower speeds.

After performing well during an extensive set of tests, Centra was selected as the solution that addressed Sony Electronics' Service Company's business needs. A pilot test, performed with select service facilities, provided valuable feedback to ensure rollout success. Input helped define the best way to register the technicians, configure Centra for the final rollout and fine-tune the course materials and delivery process. Centra performed well with modems running at speeds of only 28.8 kps. Bob Weis, vice president of technical services for Sony Electronics' Service Company, who oversees technician training, along with Tom Ryan, senior vice president of Sony Electronics' Service Company, were the champions of the Centra project.

### **Before and After**

Before implementing Centra for its sizeable, geographically dispersed network, trainers and service technicians had to travel to classroom locations. Travel time varied, with some technicians able to drive to the training location, while others needed to fly in and stay in a hotel for the duration of the course. Travel costs were covered by the authorized service facilities. The courses are provided free of charge. To deliver the training, nine Sony Electronics technical trainers were spending approximately 30% of their time on the road, traveling all over the United States to deliver eight courses each year.

Now, 100% of Sony Electronics' Service Company's eight courses are delivered using Centra. Trainers don't need to travel, improving their work/life balance and adding more productive time to their work schedules. Sixty percent of the training staff has been redeployed within the company,

using only three trainers today instead of the nine trainers used before Centra was implemented. This allows Sony Electronics' Service Company to better utilize scarce technical training talent. All training is conducted in a synchronous "live" mode, with approximately 12 technicians in each session.

Training is delivered in smaller "chunks." Technicians now receive training in consecutive half-day sessions, instead of the two- to three-day course format for classroom training. Not only do they recoup travel time that is applied to servicing customers, but they are not away from their work for days at a time.

The quality of the training has been maintained while migrating courses to Centra. Technician feedback and test scores quantify that the quality of the training is equal to — or better than — delivery in the classroom setting. Authorized service-center owners have conveyed that they appreciate the increased technician productivity gained when classes are delivered via Centra. Depending on the product line serviced, technicians attend two to three training sessions a year. By eliminating some technicians' need to travel long distances to attend these courses, Centra-delivered training could provide up to six more billable days a year.

With few logistical hurdles to deal with, Sony Electronics' Service Company is able to provide training closer to the sales start date for new or updated products. Technicians are able to provide a high level of customer service on all current products, which equates to more satisfied customers. Delivering training using Centra's virtual classroom is a smart business solution that delivers a win for Sony Electronics' Service Company and its authorized service network.

### **More Than a Training Solution**

Besides delivering training, Sony Electronics' Service Company uses Centra to conduct informal meetings and communicate more formal information, such as its strategic direction. Often teams are in different locations for project reviews, planning sessions or weekly status meetings, and Centra allows them to communicate more effectively with

the ability to show visual content and share ideas. The ease of setting up multisite meetings, along with being able to focus on the data without the distractions of physical meetings, has proved that Centra offers a much better medium than traditional business settings. Features such as the whiteboard and presentation-sharing functions are particularly useful. For larger meetings, the benefit of information delivered in a timely fashion, along with reduced travel and entertainment expenses are realized.

### **Strategic Alignment**

Using Centra, Sony Electronics' Service Company has appreciably reduced training costs, while providing quality training that equips its technicians to provide the very best service to their customers. Deploying Centra for 100% of technician training needs plays well into Sony's attempt to shrink expenses, use technology more effectively and continue to increase the number of training courses available. Sony's Centra solution cut training costs by two-thirds of what they were two years ago, while not compromising training effectiveness. The reduction in travel and entertainment expenses coupled with increased training flexibility and greater technician productivity have proved to be a successful approach for Sony.