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Online continuing education: More compelling than ever

October 18, 2011 - Spotlights

For over twenty years appraisers have been required to regularly complete continuing education to keep and renew their licenses. Continuing education (CE) is viewed by many as an onerous and expensive license renewal obstacle and not as a valuable tool in keeping current with appraisal trends and regulations.

The annual appraiser CE market of \$30 million has created many options for classroom and online courses from different providers. Today's cost-conscious appraisers are looking for less expensive CE but may be reluctant to consider online courses due to a well-deserved perception of poor content and technology problems that plagued online offerings in the past.

Times have changed. Recent internet technologies and regulatory requirements have had a dramatic effect on both the content quality and the delivery of online courses. Online courses are required by all states to obtain approval from state boards and the International Distance Education Certification Center (IDECC). Additionally, most states require content approval from the Appraisal Foundation's course approval program. All of these approvals are intended to ensure that online courses are both functional and contain accurate and high-quality content.

Online courses used to consist solely of words on a screen that the student had to scroll through to get to a quiz or exam. Today's better courses are far more interesting and engaging with audio and video narrations, interactive exercises and case studies, and multi-media content. The old-style course is rapidly being replaced via intelligent and demanding consumers with the newer style offerings. One appraiser in Massachusetts said:

"I prefer online courses to classroom courses for cost, convenience, and quality. With online courses from a reputable provider you are certain to get high-quality content presented in a thoughtful manner. In a classroom, even with a well-known instructor, you don't know if the audience will be active and alert and if not, you're in for a really long day."

The convenience of online courses has always been a huge benefit over classroom offerings. A student can take an online course in one sitting, or many sittings over time, from the comfort of their home or office instead of taking a day off and sitting in a classroom.

Convenience isn't only a subjective merit with online courses. It is also a measurable economic benefit. Two days of classroom education to get 14 CE hours costs you the lost income from two days out of the office, travel expense, and for many, lodging.

Online course fees are significantly less than classroom education fees. A recent survey of classroom education in N.E. shows that a one-day seminar (7 CE hours) averages \$187. A national survey of online courses shows the average 7-hour course costs \$135. Other new business models drop the cost of online education even further, such as that by Appraisal University who doesn't sell courses individually, but instead sells 12-month subscriptions for under \$140 that provide unlimited access to all of their courses at no additional fee.

Can online education change the overwhelming opinion of appraisers and make CE a valuable tool regularly used by appraisers to hone their skills instead of an obstacle for license renewal? Says John Hauschildt, co-founder of Appraisal University: "Online CE can be inexpensive and compelling. The technology exists to make presentations interesting, finely tuned, and even exciting. When done right, CE is something that students do regularly rather than right before they renew their license." You're an appraiser-you need CE. If you haven't checked lately, take a look at the new online offerings available.

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