

Elektro-Biergans

By Natalie Morawietz, F-BB

1. Facts about the institution

Name of institution	Elektro Biergans
URL of institution	www.elektro-biergans.com
Country	Köln (Porz-Zirndorf), Germany
Number of Employees	12 employees
Revenue in 2005	1,1 Million
Experience with e-learning since	Since 1999
Business sector	Elektro Biergans provides electric installation (trade sector)
Target group/participants in e-learning	Employees working in office management
Content	1 course dealing with office management
Form	Online education (web based)
People interviewed	Dagmar Biergans

2. How the institution used e-learning

2.1. The courses

Elektro Biergans is a micro-enterprise active in the field of trade, specialized in electric installation (consulting, planning and implementation).

For Elektro-Biergans it became necessary to have one person in charge with all office issues. So Dagmar Biergans – prior employed at the civil engineering office – decided to overtake the job in the conjugal enterprise and was searching for a further training in office management (in German: Fachkauffrau für Bürowirtschaft). She decided not to do the course offered by the chamber of commerce but to try the quite new solution with Minerva Online. Elektro-Biergans saw several advantages with web-based online training, among others the flexibility for the learner to study. For Dagmar Biergans it was not possible to join classes two times a week for one and a half years. Minerva online focuses especially on women as a target group not being able to attend face-to-face seminars because of their family situation.

The content of this eLearning course was divided into several subcategories, among that typical subjects for office management:

- Introduction into Internet
- Basics in computing
- Office management
- Economics
- Working and contractualisation law
- HR-Management
- Controlling

2.2. Number of employees involved

From Elektro-Biergans just Dagmar Biergans was enrolled in the Minerva-online course. The whole course had in the beginnings about 30 students – the course was finished by about 15 students.

2.3. E-learning platform and technology issues

The course was hosted by Minerva online. Minerva online is a virtual training further platform. The Thinkhouse GmbH addresses its offer to small and medium-sized enterprises, private people as well as to organisations and institutions. Through different learning arrangements it is possible to decide exactly for the form of learning which is fitting to the individual needs.

The Thinkhouse GmbH gained with the Minerva online project three years (from 1997 to 2000) experience within the further training offer in the range of virtual learning. The project was promoted by the initiative ADAPT. Since the project encountered large resonance, the Thinkhouse team enhanced Minerva online.

The course is available through the Internet Explorer web browser used by Elektro-Biergans, no other software was needed.

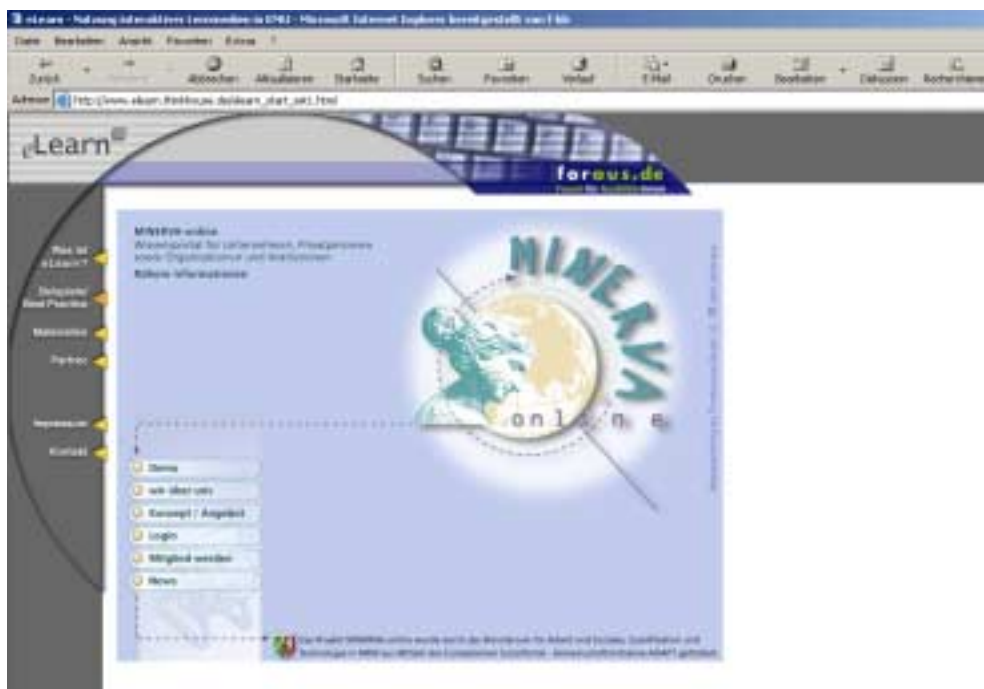


Figure 1. Screen shot from Minerva online



Figure 2. Screen shot from the Minerva online chat room

2.4. Course development

For the introduction to the eLearning environment an inauguration workshop was held. Course structure, important technical questions, access data and information about Minerva online were handed over to the students. Small groups of about 15 people gathered to one class.

Altogether the advanced training took 1.5 years. On average the student had to learn 7-10 hours a week (mainly in evenings and weekends). The learning contents were provided via email on Fridays, so that students were able to learn during weekends. Learning targets were clearly mentioned so that students were able to control themselves. For discussion and questions two times a week all students met with their tutors and trainers in the Minerva chat room. Homework had to be done and was evaluated by the tutors and teachers quickly. For the time between the chat meetings tutors were available via email all over the time.

Apart from the qualification to practical questions of office's everyday life each student could enrol himself/herself for examination at the responsible chamber of trade. Success in learning was controlled by the regular treatment of homework continuously by tutors.

2.5. Course administration

Implementation of the eLearning course was quite easy for Elektro-Biergans as the hosting of the web based training was coordinated by Thinkhouse. The course did not acquire difficult enrolment or examination procedures.

The learning media is mainly composed of text files, which are usually printed out for learning. For the learner a simple Internet connection (simple modem) is sufficient in order to participate.

3. Effects and outcomes of the e-learning activities

3.1. Completion rates

From about 30 beginners in 1999 15 students managed to finalise the eLearning course. For Dagmar Biergans the driving force was to move her company forward and be able to handle the entire office management by herself. She admits that 1.5 years just learning online is not the easiest way and sometimes it was exhausting to motivate herself – especially when dealing with difficult subjects and contents not being able to ask directly teachers and trainers face to face.

3.2. Satisfaction

Satisfaction of Elektro-Biergans and Dagmar Biergans herself is really high. She was able to enrol for further training without obligations to join classes in the evening or on Saturdays. The free organisation of learning time and learning place meets perfectly the needs of the target group. The interactive learning arrangement can be simply transferred to other topics and places.

4. Challenges and barriers

In General the biggest obstacles are seen in the deficient information policy of the enterprises regarding the eLearning, in the absence of a contact partner in enterprises, in the complicated adjustment to existing technical possibilities and in the bad suitability of the workplace for undisturbed learning.

Faults are to be found in qualification of tutors and trainers, who are able to deal with the electronical learning media and the extended requirements to the learner but have no competencies in teaching the different learning contents. Often eLearning courses are not really applicable for the precise target groups.

In the on hand case these barriers were perfectly released. Technical solutions were very easy to adapt. The only requirements for attending the course were Internet facilities, computer and printer. The adoption to the target group was managed easily. For different topics and learning contents specific teachers acted as tutors.

The main challenge of the on hand case was the long run time of 1.5 years. To keep up such a long time the main point which can be identified was the fact that e.g. Dagmar Biergans was learning for her own enterprise.

5. Success factors

The acceptance of the offered online training is high as the obtained learning contents are meeting the demand of the daily work: The knowledge in office management was useful for most of the challenges in Dagmar Biergans work. Above all the possibility in determining learning times herself was one success factor which could be identified. The second success factor and a driving force not to quit the real long lasting eLearning course was the fact that Dagmar Biergans was learning for her own enterprise. All women enrolled in the eLearning course were able (optionally) to acquire the certificate for office management of the chamber of commerce as the learning contents were harmonised. This was an additional fact which increased the attractiveness of the on-line training course.

This learning arrangement is a model of the traditional telecourse. The distribution of the learning letters took place electronically, likewise the dispatch of the tasks and solutions. The measure would receive a reevaluation if interactive, multimedia media were used

more often, which could be supported by virtual conferences in synchronous communication. The Chat was judged by the participants as differently important. But it is remarkable that face-to-face meetings were not missed by the participants. Altogether all participants were highly motivated and had the necessary self-discipline to be successful in such learning setting.

The described learning solution is transferable to other learning providers and consultants. The target group (women) is represented country wide, the learning contents are standardized. Not only for commercial topics in the trade sector, but also for a multiplicity of qualification contents such learning arrangements would be quite use- and helpful. This addresses especially to women in the triple burden "occupation, education and household".

Minerva online was promoted in the framework of a pilot project by means of the country North-Rhine/Westphalia and the European Union. To what extent a financing can take place only via participant contributions, is open. In this case the learning course would have to use surely much more the possibilities of synchronous voice communication, virtual working group environments and WBTs.

6. E-learning investments, developmental costs and operational costs

Not applicable (Minerva online was promoted). Fully paid by North-Rhine/Westphalia and the European Union funding, no tuition fees

References

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