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MAJOR TRENDS



## Online training brings added value

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*In response to the increasing cost of travel (and time) to attend the Alstom Grid Technical Institute, the launch of Instructor Led Online Training (ILOT) delivers a full Technical Institute training experience on network management systems – without the travel constraints.*

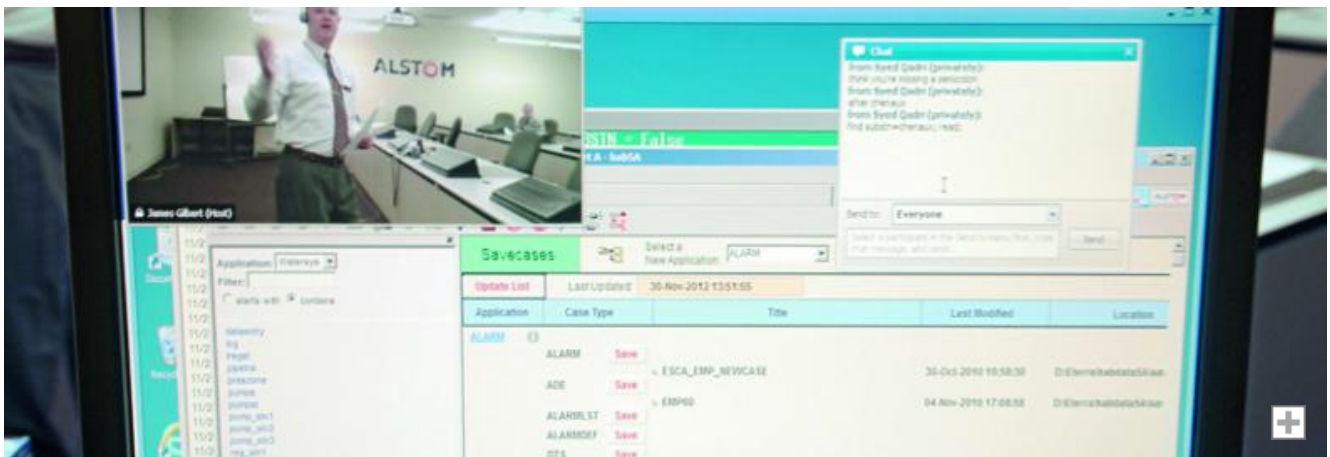


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The sessions cover everything from basic introductory programmes to intermediate level courses on software training such as “Building a SCADA model with e-terrasource”, and the most advanced courses, such as programming in e-terrasource, which requires connectivity between 2 workstations. In the USA, over half of Alstom’s customers are located east of the Mississippi River. Many of them have to spend 2 days travelling (one day there, one day back) to take part in training sessions at the Technical Institute in Redmond, near Seattle, on the west coast. “At a time of cutbacks in travel budgets, this inevitably resulted in declining numbers of attendees for Alstom Grid training programmes,” says Rusty Rae, manager of the Technical Institute in Redmond. “The Instructor Led Online Training concept, using innovative technology, was developed in response to this situation.” ILOT uses webinar (web conferencing) software such as WebEX to deliver the lectures synchronously to the remote trainees and incorporates cloud resources to give them access to a “training machine” on which they practise what was learnt in the lectures. “There is also a video feed that gives remote learners a view of the classroom, which is used when the instructor is writing on the whiteboard,” notes Rae.

**The cloud application allows the instructor to work with remote students as if they were in the classroom and “look over their shoulders” in the practice sessions** to ensure that they are progressing on the assignment. “And if a student is having a problem, the instructor can give him or her hints or even take control of their machine to show how to continue,” adds Rae, “though that does not happen often.” The learning experience provided for those attending ILOT training sessions is very similar to the experience of those attending the same course, physically, at the institute itself. Rae admits that participating in an ILOT session is not exactly the same as attending a course at the institute. “This is because they do not have the advantage of talking with other participants following the same course, nor do they have the opportunity of interacting with members of the Alstom Technical Team.” However, they do get a fully comprehensive learning experience. “And feedback from remote learners has been very positive.”



## Additional benefits for all customers

During the initial rollout of the ILOT delivery system, the Technical Institute in Redmond was able to restore the participation in training delivered by the institute to former levels, and it is even increasing slightly with time. **Every course offered at the Alstom Technical Institute in Redmond is now offered with an ILOT option.**

A further advantage is that numbers of remote attendees invariably make it possible to meet minimum student requirements for courses to be organised, thereby avoiding the possibility that some courses would be cancelled. This has enabled more customers to be instructed in managing their systems within an acceptable time frame.

Rae adds, “With ILOT, customers are able to gain the knowledge they

require to manage their power transmission and distribution systems in a timely manner. This in turn means that systems are running smoothly and, because the people are trained and competent, there are fewer inquiries to handle. As a result, the Alstom support team can turn their attention to solving the next level of critical issues.”

## The way ahead

Plans are now under way to extend the ILOT programme to other technical institutes delivering software training, beginning with Massy, near Paris, followed by Noida, India. “We still have to overcome a number of technical challenges – mainly concerned with bandwidth and latency of the communications networks, particularly if long distances are involved,” says Rae. “But once the programme is up and running, it will give these institutes the opportunity of meeting the training needs of those customers who are inhibited from attending them by travel budget restrictions (or for any other reasons).”

The ILOT delivery system has also proved to be a persuasive tool for the tendering team to use when submitting bids. Customers (particularly the more price sensitive, often smaller, organisations) are quick to appreciate the advantages offered by this system, as it gives them the assurance that their team will get the training it needs, when it needs it – and without stretching the budget

### **Training in your “pyjamas”**

It’s an interesting option. In fact, many learners actually prefer to do their training sessions from home – for several reasons. For example, they do not have to handle any LAN and WAN firewall issues, which corporate networks often impose. They may also have better connectivity and they can concentrate better without the distractions of phone calls or interruptions from colleagues. Since there is not yet a two-way video link between the Redmond Technical Institute and learners’ workstations (although it will become an option eventually), it is not possible to see how casually remote

attendees are dressed. But in the end, of course, it doesn't matter – because the bottom line is all about learning, and feeling comfortable is always a key aspect of really effective training. News of the remote learning option is spreading. By early November 2012, a total of 196 learners had studied at the Alstom Grid Technical Institute – 105 of them remotely using the ILOT protocol (54%). In July 2012, 25 people attended courses via ILOT, compared with four in person, while in June all 30 attendees preferred the ILOT system

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**Rusty Rae**

*Manager of the Technical Institute in Redmond*



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