

Project Title: ISA Online Learning Center Marketing Plan

Role: I was the primary author and data analyst for this project. When I was hired, the decision to create an Online Learning Center had already been made, despite the lack of data or evidence to support or oppose this tool as a viable learning methodology within our industry. I was tasked with conducting a market assessment that explored:

1. Industry perceptions of online learning solutions;
2. Sales projections for the first three years post-launch; and,
3. Marketing strategy and metrics for achieving profitability benchmarks set by the finance department.

The plan that follows was designed to maximize sales performance and achieve minimally acceptable financial goals in the first three years following rollout. Data sources used to create this plan included internal sales performance metrics for similar or related products, as well as commonly-accepted technology adoption rates.

ISA Online Learning Marketing Plan

In the absence of hard data that provide a reliable prediction model, I have used research and literature that suggest eLearning adoption rates are best estimated based on a normal, bell-shaped technology adoption curve. The curve is segmented into five categories. These general classifications apply to adoption rates for most types of new technology rollouts, including many different industries and types of products.

I have built a marketing plan that combines the general technology adoption curve with a selected amount of data that we have which may provide relevant trendlines for eLearning. This marketing plan addresses the first three years following the launch of the ISA Online Learning Center. After the first three years, a new marketing plan will need to be implemented. At that point, the market will have matured enough so that better sales predictions should be possible, based on actual sales data and demographic information from product purchasers.

Definition of Market Segments

The categories defined below provide a framework for structuring the marketing plan. As noted previously, best practices in marketing new technologies suggest following a bell-shaped adoption curve, in the absence of more specific adoption pickup data. Below you will see an estimate for the percentage of the target population that an individual segment accounts for, as well as general descriptors that define the segment.

1. **Innovators** - 2.5 % of the target population

General characteristics: intrinsically motivated; tolerate ambiguity and setbacks

2. **Early adopters** - 13.5% of the target population

General characteristics: extrinsically motivated; opinion leaders; trend setters; actively seek change and innovation; willing to accept bugs and developmental glitches as part of the process; seek competitive advantage through change

3. **Early majority** - 34% of the population

General characteristics: well respected but not considered thought leaders; accept change as part of evolution but don't seek it out intentionally; want things to work properly and will abandon technology if it doesn't perform as expected (even if expected is unknown); pragmatic

4. **Late majority** - 34% of target population

General characteristics: skeptics and followers

5. **Laggards** - 16% of population

General characteristics: may never adopt technology while it is in its meaningful or useful life

Each of these segments will respond to different marketing tactics because they are motivated by different forces. According to the literature, the most significant gap in the adoption timeline exists between the Early Adopters and the Early Majority. We are likely to experience a small plateau about 8 to 12 months into marketing efforts because of this transition, but a significant growth period will follow as the Early Majority gain momentum.

The last section of this plan outlines the marketing tactics that will drive the sale of courses in the ISA Online Learning Center. The tactics are tied into the growth potential of each of these segments and will specifically address how to tap most effectively and efficiently into their buying decision.

Exploring ISA’s Relevant Data

Because the ISA Online Learning Center is a new initiative, we do not have any data that directly supports the creation of targets for the first three years following rollout. However, we have four complimentary programs or products that provide data that are relevant for analysis.

1. Number of CEU transactions submitted to ISA that included relevant keywords or phrases.
2. Trends seen in the percentage of ISA Certification exams completed as a computer-based test rather than a written exam.
3. Traffic patterns on the ISA website for the ISA Podcast page.
4. Sales data for the Introduction to Arboriculture CR-ROMs, sold as a set and separately.

Each of these data sets is reviewed below, as well as pertinent conclusions that provide a basis for adoption and retention rate projections.

CEU Transactions Submitted to ISA with Relevant Keywords

Each year, the Certification department collects CEU data submitted from ISA Certified Arborists who are working to maintain their credential. Under the current system, there is no means of categorizing each type of CEU event, but they can be searched for keywords or phrases. The table below shows the four keywords that I searched for and the number of CEU transactions submitted that included any of those words. It is important to note that this is CEU transactions, not actual CEUs; one transaction may be worth more than one CEU.

Table 1. Analysis of Web-based CEU Submissions

Keyword	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Online	173	2071	3,211	3,584	4,427	4,296	4,595
Webinar	--	2	23	8	105	69	92
Webcast	--	1	58	208	285	338	419
Podcast	--	--	--	--	1	99	236
Total Web-based CEU transactions	173	2,074	3,292	3,800	4,818	4,802	5,342
Total CEU transactions	104,998	111,298	125,239	131,492	143,634	144,917	104,151
Percent of CEU transactions involving online activities	0.16%	1.86%	2.63%	2.89%	3.35%	3.31%	5.13%

**Partial year data; only includes data from January 1 – September 27, 2011*

This search mechanism is certainly not an ideal methodology for evaluating relevant CEUs, as it is based on the event title that is manually entered by a wide variety of staff and volunteers. Relevant keywords

may have been left out of the event title, making this search potentially under-representative of the total CEU population. However, it demonstrates a solid growth trendline that is very relevant.

As you can see in Table 1, the number of CEU transactions in 2005 was minimal, so it is not being factored into this analysis. It is included merely to demonstrate when web-based CEU transactions began appearing in our CEU management system.

The data indicates that submission of CEUs for online activities went from zero to more than 2,000 in about 18 months. The submission rate doubled between 2006 and 2009, where it then stalled slightly. This stall is consistent with what the literature suggests as a gap between the adoption by Early Adopters and the Early Majority. Based on the current year’s submissions to date, this year there should be growth in this segment again.

Trends in Computer-Based Testing for the ISA Certification Program

The Certification Department began offering computer-based testing as an alternative to paper-based testing for the certification exams in 2009.

Table 2. Percentage of Certification Exams Completed as Computer-Based Tests

	2009	2010	2011*
Written Exams	3,955	3,179	2,598
Computer-Based Exams	827	1,023	1,446
Total Exams Administered	6791	6212	6055
Percentage completed as Computer-Based Tests	12%	16%	24%

**Partial year data; only includes data from January 1 – September 1, 2011*

As shown in Table 2, during the first two years following rollout, the number of exams administered via computer has nearly doubled and the current year’s data is still three months short of being complete. Additional analysis might reveal useful trends in hotspots or geographic regions where computer-based testing has proven most popular among ISA test-takers. This information would be helpful in developing marketing tactics focusing on geographic location of ISA members and credential holders.

Traffic Patterns for ISA Podcasts

The ISA Podcast series launched in 2009 and immediately became a popular destination on the ISA website. External data is available and needs to be analyzed to determine how many times the podcasts have been viewed or downloaded, but the amount of traffic to that page provides us with a good snapshot of the level of interest in this learning tool.

Table 3. Trends in Visitors to ISA Podcast Page

	2009	2010	2011*
Unique Visitors to Podcast Page	17,230	32,982	27,553
Total Visitors to ISA Site	1,794,065	1,731,803	894,440
Percentage of Visitors to Podcast Page	0.96%	1.90%	3.08%
Popularity of Page within ISA site	27 th	14 th	12 th

**Partial year data; only includes data from January 1 – September 15, 2011*

In the first two years, traffic to the page has more than tripled. As you can see in Table 3, it is also currently the 12th most popular page on the ISA website, which is a significant feat given the quality and

quantity of pages that it is competing with. It is worth noting that the number of dedicated podcast topics has increased over the past two years, which has an impact on the overall interest in the ISA Podcasts page. As topic depth increases, so does traffic.

Sales of the Introduction to Arboriculture CR-ROMs

The Introduction to Arboriculture CD-ROM series has been a staple in our product lineup for more than five years. Analysis of the sales performance of these CDs is relevant for two reasons.

1. When they launched, the interactive CD-ROMs presented an alternative learning methodology for our members and credential holders. The adoption rate for this learning methodology is a useful benchmark for adoption rate projections among our target audience for eLearning.
2. The topics addressed in these CDs are the same topics that will be featured in the first 25 courses to be launched in the ISA Online Learning Center. This could provide us with some insight into how individual course topics might perform.

When looking at the data below, it is important to note that the drop off in the sales performance of individual titles is directly attributable to the performance of the full CD set that was made available after the individual titles were rolled out.

Table 4. Sales of Intro to Arboriculture CD Boxed Sets (10 CDs)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Sales of Full CD sets	--	1051	5195	3,789	4,886
Plant Health Care	669	213	46	39	37
Tree Identification	437	293	86	59	43
Tree Worker Safety	359	191	55	44	26
Tree Pruning	502	351	94	75	78
Diagnosis and Disorders	491	342	106	72	91
Planting and Early Care	377	242	34	42	19
Tree Maintenance	392	239	40	44	32
Soil and Water	--	80	60	44	19
Tree Biology	510	265	52	39	35
Risk Assessment & Protection	--	72	84	68	45
Total CDs and CD Sets Purchased	5744	5347	7861	6325	7322

**Partial year data; only includes data from January 1 – September 15, 2011*

As evidenced in Table 4, the strong and extended sales performance of the CDs gives positive indications about the performance of the related online learning courses. Repurposing this content provides a new means of getting relevant learning resources in front of ISA members and credential holders.

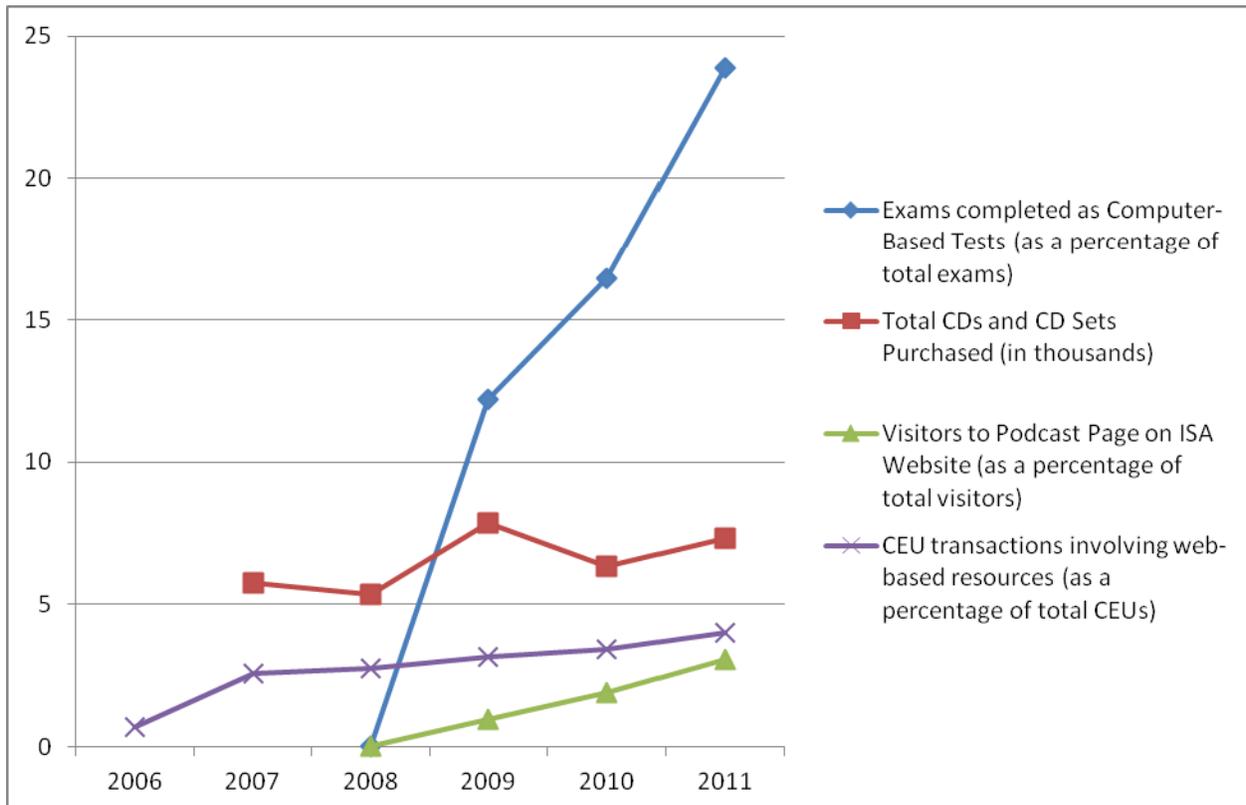
It is worth noting that bundling the CDs together into a ten-CD set had a positive impact on overall sales for the CD series. Moving forward with content development for online courses, this would indicate that we should explore how to bundle appropriate courses together for maximum profit.

Overview of Performance of Relevant Benchmarks

The goal of this analysis was to create some benchmarks for expected performance of the ISA Online Learning Center during the first three years of its launch. I believe that these four data sources, combined with the technology adoption bell curve, provide us with the best predictions about the pickup and retention rates for this new learning technology.

As you can see in Chart 1, each of these four products or programs have experienced significant growth following their rollout; most experienced a doubling of their pickup rates within the first two years. I believe that this provides solid evidence for drawing a few conclusions and making sales estimates for the first three years following the launch of the ISA Online Learning Center.

Chart 1. Trends in Online Behaviors of ISA Members and Credential Holders



Sales Targets for the ISA Online Learning Center

Target Number of Users and Courses Completed

Year One (October 2011 – June 2012)

- 750 online courses completed
- 500 unique users (average of 1.5 courses completed per unique user)

Year Two (July 2012 – June 2013)

- 1,500 online courses completed
- 850 unique users (average of 1.76 courses completed per unique user)
- 30% retention rate from year 1 to year 2

Year Three (July 2013 – June 2014)

- 4,500 online courses completed
- 2,500 unique users (average of 1.8 courses completed per unique user)
- 60% retention rate from year 2 to year 3

Marketing Strategy and Tactics

Innovators Marketing Strategy

Keywords: learn, emerge, innovation, feedback, inform, limited roll out, founding, guide

Characteristics of their Past ISA History:

1. May hold multiple credentials
2. Likely submit more online CEUs than they need
3. Have bought CD- ROMs
4. Will have completed quizzes for Podcasts
5. Price sensitivity is low

Marketing Strategies:

1. Communicate by email; very targeted communication including details of past purchases
2. Focus on their role in educating future generations of arborists

Early Adopters Marketing Strategy

Keywords: trend, opinion, cutting edge, technology, peer-to-peer, thought leader

Characteristics of their Past ISA History:

1. Participate actively on committees, in chapters, on discussion forums, and at conferences,
2. Usually submit more CEUs than they need for their credential,
3. Have purchased multiple forms of learning materials,
4. Often respond to open calls for participation,
5. Like to be included in collaborative efforts,
6. Will include people our staff know by name,
7. Have attended ISA Annual Conference on a regular basis in the past,
8. Price sensitivity is low

Marketing Strategies:

1. Recruit these members as advocates at the local level
2. Tap into their desire to be viewed as leaders by allowing them to experience learning modules and share their feedback with others
3. Focus on the novelty of this technology within our field

Early Majority Marketing Strategy

Keywords: proven, value, convenience, peers, industry standard, tested

Characteristics of their Past ISA History:

1. Have only bought a CD-ROMs in the past 2 years
2. Have a history of purchasing traditional learning materials, such as books and workbooks
3. Are good candidates for up-selling by our front line customer service staff
4. Price sensitivity is moderate

Marketing Strategies:

1. Mass marketing efforts, including ISA Today, CERT Today and catalog
2. Tap into them through local marketing efforts, such as chapter newsletters and local conferences
3. Utilize product demonstrations to allow them to test the courses to minimize their fear of failure to use the technology

Late Majority and Laggards Marketing Strategy

These two categories will not be addressed through this marketing plan, because it will take longer than the three-year horizon of this plan to penetrate deeply enough into the marketplace to reach these consumers. Their specific marketing needs should be addressed in the marketing plan that is developed to follow the first three-year rollout period.

Additional Segments to Target

There are obviously many ways that you can slice the target market. I have chosen to create segments based on scientifically-based preferences for technology adoption, as I think during the first three years following product rollout out those are the most meaningful characteristics that define an audience. For example, in the early stages of a new technology rollout, it is more relevant to tap into someone's acceptance of change than it is to market based on their age or location.

Having said that, there are a few additional characteristics that could and should be addressed in the marketing plan. Three additional audience segments that will be addressed include:

1. Convenience Buyers
2. Employers
3. Non-North American ISA Members and Credential Holders

The marketing plan will touch on the needs of these segments, though they will not be the top priority. We will first focus on those segments that have an interest in the learning delivery mechanism or those who can be persuaded to have an interest in it.

Marketing Tactics

Target Segment	Tactic	Estimated Cost
October 2011		
Industry	Press release pushed out announcing launch of ISA Online Learning Center	\$0
Industry	Include article in ISA Today with list of available courses	\$0
Early majority	Feature ISA Online Learning Center course as an incentive in the 2012 Professional Connections campaign	No hard costs; Only costs for comp'ed courses
Early majority; Convenience buyers	Include ISA Online Learning Center flyer in recertification packets mailed out for those up for recertification in December 2011	\$500 (flyer printing costs)
Influencers	Email to component executives with link to Online Learning Center, specifically highlighting the demo course	\$0
Influencers	Feature Online Learning Center during session at Leadership Workshop; set up demo stations for attendees to test courses while on-site for the Workshop	\$0
November 2011		
Influencers	Submit press release and promotional materials to affiliated professional organizations announcing ISA Online Learning Center	\$0
Innovators	Targeted email to multi-credential certificants (de-duped with other lists)	\$0
Innovators; Early adopters	Targeted email to past purchasers of CD-ROMs (de-duped with other lists)	\$0
Innovators; Early adopters	Targeted email to past purchasers of online quizzes (de-duped with other lists)	\$0
December 2011		
Industry	Feature full-page advertisement in <i>Arborist News</i>	\$0
Non-North American arborists	Provide non-North American chapters with marketing materials to promote Online Learning Center to their members	\$1,200 (translation services, distribution costs)
January 2012		
Early adopters	Send email to current ISA volunteers on boards and committees	\$0
Employers	Direct mail campaign with flyer sent to employers, bulk buyers, or anyone who has purchased \$2,500 worth of educational product in a single transaction	\$1500
February 2012		
Innovators; Early adopters	Print mailing to past purchasers of CD-ROMs, online quizzes, and conference registrations	\$2500 postage and printing
Industry	Highlight one online course as the monthly Featured Product in ISA Today	\$0
Non-North American arborists	Email sent to non-North American past purchasers highlighting available courses	\$0
March 2012		
Industry	Announce special promotional price in honor of Arbor Day	No hard costs; Only costs are discounts
Innovators; Early adopters	Targeted email to past purchasers of CD-ROMs (de-duped with other lists)	\$0
April 2012		

Industry	Publicize special promotional price in honor of Arbor Day	No hard costs; Only costs are for discounts
Innovators; Early adopters	Targeted email to past purchasers of online quizzes (de-duped with other lists)	\$0
Industry	Feature Online Learning Center in CERT Today	\$0
May 2012		
Industry	Include ISA Online Learning Center flyer in recertification packets mailed out for those up for recertification in December 2011	\$500 (flyer printing costs)
Early adopters; Early majority	Set up demo at bookstore for Western Chapter Annual meeting	\$1500 (travel and equipment costs)
Innovators; Early adopters	Targeted email to multi-credential certificants (de-duped with other lists)	\$0
Convenience Buyers	Send email to certificants who are short of CEUs needed for their credentials	\$0
June 2012		
Early majority	Distribute materials to activate a chapter advertising campaign for the fall season	\$0
July 2012		
Industry; Early majority	Feature a testimonial in ISA Today from user who has completed multiple courses in the Online Learning Center	\$0
August 2012		
Early majority	Set up demo station within the bookstore at the ISA Annual Conference	\$1,000 for equipment
September 2012		
Industry; Early majority	Feature a testimonial in ISA Today from user who has completed multiple courses in the Online Learning Center	\$0
Early majority; Non-North American arborists	Chapter advertising campaign	\$0
Employers	Email campaign to employers and bulk buyers	\$0
October 2012		
Early adopters; Early majority	Set up demo at bookstore for Illinois Chapter Annual meeting	\$800 (travel and equipment costs)
Early majority; Non-North American arborists	Chapter advertising campaign	\$0
November 2012		
Early majority; Non-North American arborists	Chapter advertising campaign	\$0
December 2012		
Early majority; Non-North American arborists	Chapter advertising campaign	\$0