



Linklaters

Using Microsoft Office Specialist to successfully deploy Office 2010

Case Study material supplied by: Jamie Mardell, IT Support Team Leader at Linklaters

Linklaters LLP (Linklaters) is a global law firm with 26 offices in 19 countries and a staff of 5,000 people. For more than 170 years, Linklaters has been acknowledged as one of the premier law firms in the UK. Later this year, Microsoft Office 2010 is to be deployed globally across the organisation.

Linklaters IT Support operates a 'Follow The Sun' approach, with teams in Colchester, New York and Hong Kong. The team in Colchester is headed up by Jamie Mardell & Toby Moore, IT Support Team Leaders. We caught up with Jamie to discuss how Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) training and certification is supporting the impending deployment of the Office 2010 software across the organisation.

Why Microsoft Office Specialist?

When we decided to move to Office 2010, we recognised the need to certify our team in 'Microsoft Office Specialist for 2010' prior to the launch. We have been proactive in our approach by making sure our analysts started to study early to be in the best position possible to continue offering the highest level of service and to be truly prepared for the roll out.

The roll out, sees us jump straight from Office 2003 to Office 2010. It's a huge jump, and that's why there is a big drive to get certified in advance. With so many changes in functionality, we need to feel comfortable and ready to answer any questions that come our way. As a law firm there is a high dependency on Word and Outlook so we are predicting high call volumes.

Why is Microsoft Office Specialist important to your team?

Linklaters is heavily dependent on Microsoft applications. Our role supporting the firm means we are asked questions on Microsoft Office day in, day out. MOS certification qualifies us in the bread and butter of our role. We are always encouraging our team to develop and learn. We recently won the Service Desk Institute award for our dedication to learning, demonstrating that continual improvement is imperative for this team to develop and continue to deliver a high level of service to the firm.

Tell us a bit about your team and the support they offer?

We support a global law firm with a 'Follow The Sun' approach which sees our UK team operating from eight in the morning to six at night. We then handover to New York, who subsequently handover to Hong Kong and then back again. We cover all weekends from the UK as we have the largest team out of the 3 locations. We are a high performing team, currently supporting over 5000 end users. Our analysts are taking on average 45-50 calls each per day, with a resolution rate of 87%.



Success Story



How do you offer the Microsoft training and certification?

In January we got in touch with Prodigy Learning and started looking into the possibility of bringing the MOS training and certification in house. I am not a trainer but I know how much it costs to go elsewhere and sit the MOS exams. Due to our location in Colchester, we had to go to London to sit our exams. That takes time, and we generally lose an analyst for a total of 5 hours to sit a 50 minute exam!

Taking into account time out of the office, travel, parking and the cost of an exam, we worked out it was costing about £215.00 per exam on average. The solution Prodigy Learning offer is saving us time and money by delivering the exam on-site. Their bulk license pricing brings considerable savings.

We also bought the Step By Step Microsoft book series. To help team members study they are able to take home the book and a laptop with Microsoft Office 2010 installed. I do not think that studying by solely reading a book is a solution that fits all, so when we had the opportunity to use GMetrix as a hands-on learning application it was brilliant. In my 13 years of being in IT support I have not come across a single application that has received so much interest and enthusiasm from a team. To the point where the team in Hong Kong are emailing me telling me how easy and beneficial GMetrix is to use. We can easily sit practice questions in between calls and at weekends. Through repetition of use you start to learn where things are. I was telling a colleague today that it's the single most beneficial tool I've had for training since I've been in this industry.

Have you done exams yourself?

I have, I said I would lead by example. I passed the four Core MOS 2010 exams straight away and I plan on doing the 'Experts' at a later stage. I believe it's important to achieve a Microsoft certification on Microsoft products and the syllabus is pitched at exactly the right level. The core exams cover questions we are asked regularly and the expert exams cover more advanced areas we need to support.

The expert exams are tricky, but that's how it should be. The expert shouldn't be a breeze because that devalues the programme. The expert really makes people work for it.

What certifications do you offer?

We started this in February and encouraged all team members to pass two MOS exams by the end of April and another two by the end of June. We will then look to get everyone through the Expert exams before the roll out.

That was the intention, but this team has blown that all out of the water straight away. We have one person who already has MOS Master status, (all 6 exams passed) and two others in the team who only have one more Expert exam to pass. As a team we have now passed almost seventy exams in the first few months.



Success Story



We said to our contractors that it's mandatory to pass two exams to ensure they have the right skill set. All of them have passed the four core exams already!

What benefits do you see from offering MOS?

Going forward it will increase productivity for the end user. That's where the benefit comes for us. If an end user calls in with a problem and the team member who answers is qualified and has full awareness of 2010 they will be comfortable enough to deal with the questions in a timely manner. This increases productivity back into the firm.

You can tick the benefits off. Financially it saves us a small fortune. By being able to bring it in house we have been able to maintain our high levels of service. We're not losing team members who have to leave for London for the training - which is a major benefit. It is now just 50 minutes in another room and they can return straight back to their desk, as opposed to 5 hours out of the office. It gives us the flexibility to provide people with the opportunity to sit exams. Put it this way, we would never have completed almost 70 MOS exams in a few months if we were not a Certiport Testing Centre. We would've probably managed two or three exams a week, at most, but now we can do five or six a day if need be.

Also, the GMetrix interactive online learning solution has been brilliant. It means they can study at their desk in between calls and has provided us with that extra flexibility we needed. Additionally, if they have Office 2010 installed on their home PC, then they can study at home as well using GMetrix.

How would you best describe the support that you receive from Prodigy Learning?

Fantastic, everyone we've spoken to has had time to help us out. We've never felt we're hassling or bothering them. Any issues we've come across they've talked us through them, spent time on the phone making sure it's been resolved before they get off the line. The support and back up has been fantastic.

What's next?

The plan is to make sure everyone in the team is up to MOS Expert level by September for the deployment. I know what this team is like and I don't expect that will be a problem at all. Hong Kong and New York are studying hard and they won't be far behind.

From the success of this initiative, we will be looking to extend the in house certification to other roles and functions within the London office, ultimately improving productivity even further.