

## **Beam Me Up, Scotty!**

*An Anecdotal account of an entrepreneur transforming a traditional training business into an online e-learning platform.*

It was always there at the back of my mind. Somehow, I had to get us onto e-learning. I didn't know how, or what, or where to begin, but I knew it was simply the place I wanted us to go. The world was changing fast. Every day in every way I felt the pulse of change but I was often so distracted, running the business and chasing planes in different airports, on the go almost daily.

I grew weary of all this traveling, striking out from one airport to another, waiting at the boarding halls, always waiting. I would barely be around in my office for 10 days in a month. The rest of the 20 days went by flying, literally flying, waiting, teaching, waiting, flying, waiting again at the cab line to make my way back home.

It was especially difficult when one of the kids fell ill and I had to leave home for work. Those were the moments when I would wish so desperately that I could just click a button on my transponder and beam myself into the classroom, much like how Captain Kirk did in Star Trek whenever he asked Scotty to beam him up.

If you believe in the law of attraction then you'd have thought that I wished it real hard. Then Bang we're into year 2020 and there's news about a virus outbreak in China. Honestly, at that point I just thought it was one those SARS things that had occurred way back in 2003 and that this too would be contained within 6 months. I was sure this wouldn't even reach our shores and continued with my life in the fast lane.

My last flight for work was in March of 2020. I remember taking the flight and seeing an almost deserted airport with two or three flights scheduled to arrive and depart. When I arrived at the hotel where I was staying and conducting the training, it was deserted as well. It sure did not take long for our first nationwide lock down.

What a shock, I felt like the world had come crashing down on me. We had to abruptly stop all in-person training courses and weren't even allowed to go to the office. The

entire country was brought to a standstill, in total upheaval and confusion everywhere.

I felt depressed for a whole week, visited by the uninvited beast, the black dog!

I beat myself up for not moving onto e-learning sooner, groaning and moaning for that whole week, rested and sulked for a bit. Thankfully for the internet or else I would have lost my mind. I cannot imagine how awful it would have been if this had happened way back in the 80s.

By the second week I started playing around with trying to create animated content and tried my hand at making videos. I scoured my network and the internet searching, learning and studying different methods for creating content online. And figuring out how to get a good, user friendly learning management system-LMS, that's also affordable. Ah! The importance of networking.

Days turned to weeks and weeks into months. Sometime into lockdown, I threw in an idea to a women's forum (Women in Logistics and Transport – WiLAT Global) I am actively involved in, asking the ladies if we could all connect together in a virtual meeting to share some insights and practices on managing the pandemic. Seeing as we are spread across the globe and some of the countries were leading the way in tackling this crisis, like Hong Kong, Taiwan and New Zealand, we could immediately tap into their experience. The idea was immediately taken up and the following week we started running virtual meetings to collect, collate and share information on how our sister countries were coping in these unprecedented times.

I was really lucky they allowed me to moderate these sessions, giving me the opportunity to practice and develop skills in engaging with a virtual audience. These sessions were not just insightful and knowledgeable, they gave me hope.

Learning from my gurus, these amazing women and especially one of them who in my mind in a Tech Guru was a heaven-sent opportunity all enabled by the internet. My Tech Guru began sharing more and more information on various systems and software that were available out there.

I started with 'GoTo Meetings', moved from there to teams, cisco's Webex, and a series of others, while always toying around with zoom because its free and everyone seemed to have it.

By the 2<sup>nd</sup> month into the pandemic, I realized I couldn't possibly master everything. But I knew enough to know that my strength is in the development and delivery of the material, not in managing a series of tech tools to build some sort of makeshift LMS.

Initially, I thought I could use zoom for the virtual classes, pass the pdf materials via the chat box. Later I came to the realization that to assess the learners I would have to move them to the 'Classmaker' software. Crazy right? Well luckily, I squashed that insane plan, recognizing that I ought to leave the tech to the techies. All that had to be done was to find that provider.

By the 3<sup>rd</sup> month I had already identified a partner to work with. Again, thanks to networking, I recalled a meeting I had with one of CILT (Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport) Malaysia's corporate member who were working with the institution to offer a digital library to members.

Post-haste, I sent them an email and arranged for a demo. They were agents for a very robust learning management system-LMS developed in Turkey which offered a link with zoom to offer the virtual classes, an online examination tool, performance tracking abilities, recorded video and a link to the digital library. The cloud-based system was a dream come through, and it was also affordable. But as with any new digital adventure it was paved with a series of early adoption challenges.

I took the whole 3<sup>rd</sup> month to move the content online, get approvals from our government agencies to run our courses online and by the 4<sup>th</sup> month, i.e. June 2020 we launched our first online intake.

The first few sessions were challenging. Our online learners weren't used to learning online and it took much effort to convince them that if anything, the online classes were much better. What would normally be an eight-hour training day, was now broken into 4 hours online per day. To keep the learners engaged we had more

quizzes to help them track their progress on the topics they were learning. We created an online discussion forum for engagements outside of class and we started adding more and more of them onto this forum, which has now become a networking and knowledge sharing virtual space.

I realized as well that in a virtual environment the trainer has to work really hard in engaging with their learners. They had to put more effort in their presentation and delivery in order to engage and communicate the learnings. They also had to constantly explore methods to keep learning and being updated on new interesting e-learning solutions. Merely being online now was not enough.

A year and six months have passed. We have run approximately a hundred over sessions online. Now I am dreaming for an angel investor to help move us further up in the e-learning value-chain by incorporating virtual experiential learning and gamification. What a journey and it is an ongoing one!

Its 8.30am, the show is about to start. I click and enter the room. I am here physically but my transponder has transported me into my virtual classroom. I now whisper to myself ever since I first moved online; 'Beam Me Up, Scotty!'

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