

Dale Carnegie Training Invests Heavily to Launch Virtual Classes

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Dale Carnegie Training courses used to be delivered mostly in-person. A quick pivot to virtual sessions began in January.

Dale Carnegie Training, a global franchise with 200 operations in 86 countries, had early warning signs from countries hit the earliest by COVID-19. Its quick pivot to online vs. in-person classes was possible because of heavy investment.

"In late January we started talking to our Chinese franchisees, and to help them we created a global task force," said CEO Joe Hart. "Then as it spread to South Korea and other places in Asia, we expanded the scope of what we were doing."

Dale Carnegie Training had a live online offering available for 10 years, but only in North America. Elsewhere, most training was done in person, whether within a corporation or with participants in another public setting.

The online offering is far more sophisticated than the janky video calls or disembodied talking heads so many people are experiencing for the first time these days as workplaces turn remote. "It's not like Zoom or a webinar; It was whiteboards, breakout sessions, polls; the kinds of activities of what you might do in person. It simulates an in-class experience. So it was very difficult for the franchisees, for their trainers" to make the switch at first, Hart said.

"We ramped up quickly to teach them how to do it, to teach them how to sell it, and to support them as they took it to their clients. It really has now started to get traction."

To make the switch to virtual classes, Dale Carnegie required hours of certification for both the trainer and the producer who is involved in each class. In many cases franchisees "have been very successful transitioning the classes online. Some of our franchisees have been more successful than others, and this is all very new as well," he said.

"It clearly is a crisis, and at the same time, crises can sometimes bring people together and create new opportunity. First it was Asia, and then we started to see this happen in Italy, and now North American and Latin America," he said.

Headquartered in Long Island, New York, Dale Carnegie Training has about 100 employees at the franchisor level, and about 3,000 employees at the franchises.

He said investments to enable the quick switch to online classes included 10 years' worth of developing the technology platform and content in North America, and then hours and hours of training and certification provided to franchisees by corporate staff when the online offering went global.

Reached in early April, he hoped not to lay off any franchisor employees, but "like every business we are having to watch the world and the economy."