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How Walmart Logistics trains 75,000 employees

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Walmart Logistics recently collaborated with pioneering eLearning vendor Axonify to deliver a safety training program that's had some stunning results for Walmart. Here's their story.



When you're in charge of one of the largest distribution networks and private trucking fleets in the world, how do you go about continuously improving safety for sustained, bottom line results?

How do you continuously foster and improve a [safety culture](#) that positively impacts risk mitigation, injury reduction and accident cost reduction, while improving employee engagement?

That was the question facing Ken Woodlin in 2010 when he was appointed vice president of compliance, safety and asset protection for Walmart Logistics.

Ken: "When I came into this role, I was fortunate to inherit a safety program with strong compliance components such as policies and procedures already in place. But we wanted to go from a place of strong safety performance to the world's best. A strong safety culture is important to us, as it defines the characteristics, predictable operation environments, and behavior expectations that create a safe workplace. It becomes as important as any other part of the job.

"We began by implementing an enhanced behavioral based safety program, where we took components of several programs and "Walmart-ized" them, making our program specific to our culture, our facilities and our associates (employees).

"We knew a big part of continuous improvement about safety would be education. And we knew we'd need an innovative approach to education: in our workforce we have four distinct generations - Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials - each with their own learning preferences.

We have distribution centers and transportation offices all over the United States, each with their own safety culture, but on board with the corporate safety culture. In short, we needed an education solution that could be tailored to meet the needs of our different groups of learners. We turned to Axonify for help."

Carol Leaman is President of Waterloo, Ontario-based Axonify, an eLearning vendor offering a unique approach to continuous learning.

Carol: "In 2012, Walmart partnered with Axonify to run a 6-month safety [training](#) pilot to 5,000 of their distribution center employees. The pilot resulted in significant reductions in incidents in the nine safety

topics that Walmart identified as well as impressive knowledge lifts in these subjects. Voluntary participation rates ran over 80%, with employees responding positively to a fresh, new way of learning that was not only engaging and fun, but designed with the learner at its core.

“What was most exciting, though, was that in the pilot distribution centers, Walmart Logistics realized a 54% decrease in incidents during the length of the pilot.

“With this kind of success, Walmart opted to roll out the Axonify eLearning platform to their entire Logistics organization – more than 75,000 employees in total.

“With Axonify, each Walmart associate receives training in short, easy-to-digest bursts each day in a way that’s fun, fast and personalized. Associates log on to the platform at their charging stations, and spend a few minutes answering questions, receiving feedback about their answer, reviewing the correct information (if they get it wrong), and seeing how they stack up against their peers.

There are several reasons this approach is so successful:

Learning is wrapped in gamification. Ongoing studies have identified the significant value of gamified learning: it feeds people’s need to have fun, meets a growing preference towards games, offers opportunities to make mistakes in a risk-free environment, and gives people a little healthy competition – whether with themselves or their co-workers.

Learning is personalized to the individual. The Axonify system automatically identifies and closes knowledge gaps on an individual basis, adapting as each individual progresses towards mastery of the subject knowledge.

Learning is designed to work the way people actually learn and retain knowledge. The Axonify system delivers learning that is based on the latest brain science research with the following key cognitive strategies at its core:

?The *testing effect* (repeated retrieval) is the systematic retrieving of information from memory, which produces a memory trace that ensures information is successfully stored in long-term memory. In a business learning environment, companies are finding success with daily Q&A programs where employees answer questions, progressing once they’ve mastered the subject.

?The *spacing effect* (interval reinforcement) has proven that mastery is particularly strong when people learn subject matter that is presented repeatedly over time with specific time gaps in between, instead of cramming. Many companies are now choosing to implement short bursts of learning for as little as 5 minutes a day, to continuously reinforce a prior learning event, or even to deliver new knowledge.

Ken: “We have seen tremendous improvement as a result of our associates’ ownership and engagement in our safety programs, as well as leadership commitment to the program. Metrics like Lost Times have been reduced by more than 50% in the past three years, and Incident Rates and DART rates are now well below industry average. Feedback about the Axonify system has been phenomenal, and we believe the process has been a significant contributing factor to our improved performance and engaged associate base.

“We use surveys, observation data, team meetings, designated safety strategy leaders and real-time data to allow us to generate the most appropriate subject matter for our Axonify educational platform, to continue improving our safety education.

“Our safety culture is always continuing to evolve and be enhanced. We’re upgrading and enhancing the materials, increasing our precision on those areas needing focus and listening to our associates for feedback.

With the Axonify system providing daily learning and feedback, safety has become even more embedded in our associates' business life and belief systems. We've seen good results in incident and cost reductions, and our associates are discussing safety and contributing their own ideas.

“Safety is constantly top of mind with each and every associate. The conversation continues, and our results show it.”

Ken Woodlin is vice president of compliance, safety and asset protection for Walmart Logistics. He is accountable for providing oversight and strategic direction in compliance, safety and ergonomic standards, shrink reduction, and physical security. His responsibilities include Walmart's domestic warehousing and distribution network (Grocery, General Merchandise, Jewelry, Dotcom, Fashion, Imports, Returns/Reverse, Pharmacy, Sam's Club, and the Truck Maintenance Garages) as well as Walmart's Private Trucking Fleet.

Carol Leaman is CEO of Axonify, a next-generation eLearning company that combines game mechanics with brain science to drive knowledge retention in corporate enterprise. She is a sought-after speaker, presenting at high-profile events such as the Fortune BrainstormTech conference in Aspen, Colorado; HR Summit 2012 Impact99 conferences in Vancouver and Toronto, Canada; and TedxWomen in Waterloo, Canada.