

# Back to (the Internet) Classroom?

By Richard C. Wells. This is the 2022 "update" of the original article published March, 1999 in **Training Magazine**, Lakewood Publications, Minneapolis, MN.

Current opinion:

## LIVE-INTERNET

For Meetings? → **YES**.

Stand-alone online Classroom? → **NO**

**BACKGROUND:** We recently returned to the world of programmers and marketers from the live-internet classroom "industry". We did this to please one customer, who wanted us to teach and coach our **Critical Thinking for Leaders** concepts to an international group of their leaders located in Europe, Asia, and North America using the live-internet classroom software.

The company held licenses for two live-internet classroom choices. One was better known as a meeting platform. The other, a specialty software product, was designed exclusively to serve the live internet classroom market. The better-known meeting platform choice, we discovered, blocked us from using some of its classroom features because we were located outside of our customer's licensed network. They wanted us to pay \$1,200 to upgrade per year. The price was a minor concern, however compatibility with our customer after the upgrade was not assured, so that was a bad bet, we thought. The clock was ticking!

With 3 months to prepare for the online class, we were confident we could master the specialty software. The content on hand included: detailed texts, pocket guides, electronic workbooks, self-paced online video lessons, quiz questions and in-depth demonstrations. Content development would not be needed. We also were prepared to coach them while they applied course concepts to their current Concerns, Problems and Decisions.

So, we contacted the software account executive for the more specialized live classroom product and were very favorably impressed by what they said about their functionality and ease. We were most interested and excited thinking:

*"At last, a live internet classroom that is more than a glorified ZOOM meeting!"* We dove into the recommended learning process with high hopes.

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A Ed. Psych expert with an engineering degree, an admin expert with years of experience teaching, and a Blackbelt Master Problem Solver working with a very upbeat and optimistic Software Account Exec could NOT get us to “fly it”! Without a seeing eye dog! We never soloed. Never even got off the ground.

Tic-Toc. → Now 2 weeks before the class!

So, we settled for using an internal stand-in to run the presentations and abandoned ship. We would not be able to show our videos, move participants or ourselves in and out of breakout rooms, set up whiteboard forms in the breakouts, all so we could just get through the class and not cancel it.

The energy - rhythm and pace of the workshop was like fingernails on a chalkboard for us. The participants took it well, very stoic – it helped that their boss was in the class with them. Likelihood of a rebellion was very low. The good news, the leader team has had success using the tools and are launching an ambitious project created from their new learning. So, they are thinking better! (Pain can do that.)

Some things I’ve re-learned?

[1] Never have the customer set the time and the desired outcomes without consultation about tradeoffs. (But, in this case, the parameters were set before we knew about the necessary third party work-around, way too late!)

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[2] I must never believe that experience in one technology (e.g. the live classroom) will eliminate the learning curve necessary to master a new one (a live internet classroom). Riding a donkey around the corral vs. driving a borrowed old bus, down a mountain dirt road, in the rain.

[3] Never trust a new technology to work as advertised out of the box (i.e., no bugs, surprises, or needing work arounds), no matter who recommends it to you - or how much they love it - especially the account exec.

[4] Most useful → Be humble enough to have someone else\* demonstrate the software on a live class and you watch.

\* Sign on bulletin board at the **Canadian Airforce Flight School**

“Learn from other’s mistakes, you won’t survive your own.”



So, the class was not a total disaster, but the skill improvements we are accustomed to seeing did not materialize because key aspects of the technology were not well suited for third party delivery. The lead instructor was frozen out of flying the ship.

Two months after the online class we are still allowed to pilot the classroom software. But we are facilitating a sub-group of leaders tasked with a major process reengineering project requiring critical thinking skills.

As lead instructor, I will be facilitating this work and so should be able to improve their understanding of the methods. In fact, doing a series of applications to present issues is the best way to improve mastery for team members.

