

HUMAN RESOURCES

Giorgio Armani Streamlines Employee Training and Boosts Efficiency with Outsourced Interactive Learning Tool

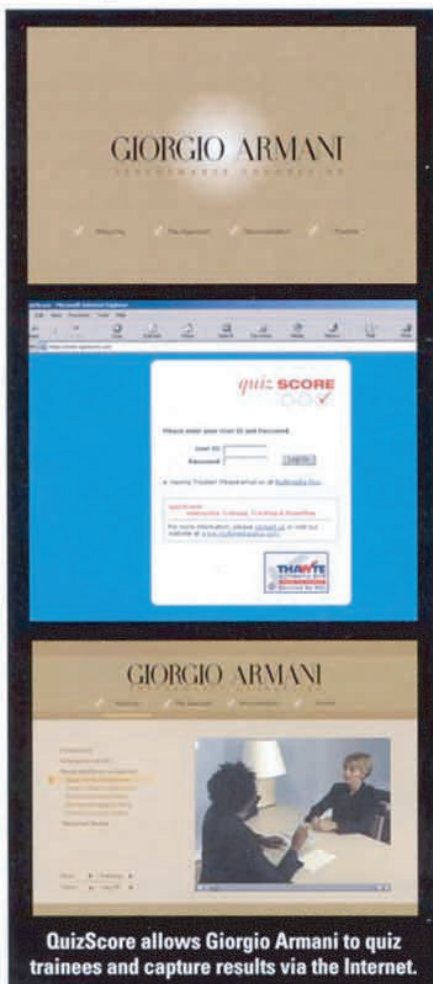
Multimedia Plus matches creative and technical expertise with retailer's needs to deliver custom-made solutions with a quantifiable ROI

Peek behind the door marked "Employees Only" at a Giorgio Armani store, and it's likely you'll see a recently hired management trainee in front of a computer workstation immersed in interactive learning.

The Giorgio Armani and Emporio Armani stores are among a contingent of leading-edge retailers using CD-ROMs as management training tools. New York-based Giorgio Armani Corp. introduced CD-ROMs into the corporate training portfolio earlier this year. One of the features the organization's human resources professionals find most appealing is the ability to quiz trainees after they've received instructions and capture the results in real time via the Internet.

"Trainees use their social security numbers to log on to the program. It consists of some instructional material, as well as an interactive segment made up of true-to-life simulations. Management trainees are asked to choose what they would do next and their response determines how the program unfolds," explains Lucinda Rosso, vice president of human resources. "At the end of the session, there's a quiz. As soon as they've completed it, I can go on-line and evaluate the results on www.quizscore.com."

By reviewing the scores – by store, region or individual – Rosso says she can immediately determine whether associates have a good grasp of the material or if there are certain points that need reinforcing. In addition, she notes that the CD-ROM program helps streamline corporate training and drive operational efficiencies.



QuizScore allows Giorgio Armani to quiz trainees and capture results via the Internet.

KEEPING SCORE Multimedia Plus, a New York-based firm that specializes in developing internal communication programs for retailers, developed Giorgio Armani's custom CD-ROM program. The company created the proprietary web-based QuizScore solution just over a year ago and is finding that a number of retailers are drawn to it because of the actionable results it delivers.

"Being able to view and track program results live over the Internet is something that hasn't been available until now," says Jodi Faye-Harouche, vice president of Multimedia, who explains that the QuizScore service can be implemented through the company's custom CD-ROMs, Internet or intranet-based training programs. "The tracking abilities we offer give a retailer a means of capturing tangible results. The program delivers the quantifiable ROI that everyone is looking for today."

QuizScore is designed to work with a retailer's existing hardware and very little bandwidth, and the IS role is minimal. Authorized retail personnel access QuizScore using a pass code, and results are delivered via a secure and encrypted connection.

Working with Multimedia, Rosso developed three CD-ROMs this year, including programs on interviewing potential candidates and progressive performance consultation. Although awaiting budget approval before outlining specific plans for next year, Rosso hopes to add to the company's CD-ROM collection in 2003 and already has several topics in mind.

Some of the retailer's training programs developed on other platforms, such as video, can be converted to CD-ROM. In addition, the format's digital quality renders it easier to update than video or print material.

ROLL VIDEO While the CD-ROM program is an effective management training tool, Rosso notes that she doesn't have enough computers to roll out the program at the sales associate level. Rather, she remains committed to a video-based training program for associates that was launched several years ago.

"Video is a very effective tool that allows us to impact all locations in one blow," she explains. "Our culture is very visually oriented. We're accustomed to seeing quick fashion clips and snippets of interviews that emphasize a key point. That's the type of style and energy captured in our videos. We still have client service manuals, but we realized that if we handed new associates a thick manual and told them to read it, most would have a hard time getting through it."

Rosso also taps the resources of Multimedia Plus for training video production. In the last two years Multimedia has created seven videos for Giorgio Armani, including three produced in the last year.

"It's a terrific vehicle for group training on topics such as wrap procedures, alterations, and basic and advanced selling," explains Rosso, who is responsible for coordinating the training for associates at more than 25 Giorgio Armani and Emporio Armani stores in the United States and about 140 associates in the retailer's corporate office.

"In the stores, we want every item we sell to be wrapped and folded a certain way at the point of sale, and we want that to be consistent whether the shopper is making a purchase in New York or in Palm Beach. Video training goes a long way toward maintaining the consistency that we consider so important," she explains.

COMPANY CULTURE Rosso works closely with Multimedia to ensure that the videos reflect company culture. She describes their relationship as complementary, with the two companies working together to develop video content and scripts and determine whether outside actors or company sales associates are used.

"It's difficult to measure the effectiveness of a training video, but we feel that since we began using this learning format our associates have a greater appreciation for

client-based training," Rosso says. "In the past when we did video training it was perceived as a bit hokey; it didn't generate the necessary level of respect. The work we're doing with Multimedia seems to be a better fit."

Multimedia Plus works with numerous retail clients, including Polo Ralph Lauren, The Limited, Coach, Guess? and Donna Karan, producing videos on subjects ranging from loss prevention and policy changes to fashion trends and corporate messages.

"Most companies have the information; what they lack is the creative and stylistic approach to putting it together. That expertise, along with the full technical support of the studio, are what we bring to the table," says Harouche. "We have technical specialists, actors, stylists and make-up artists located across the country. Such a wide range of talent allows us to deliver a higher quality product."

Harouche dismisses enduring debate over whether it's more effective and cost-efficient to outsource training programs or keep the process in-house. "Clients that we have long-term relationships with tell us that they feel that we are their in-house resource because of how closely we work together."

— Susan Reda

STORES

multimedia
plus

video and interactive solutions for internal communications

853 Broadway
Suite 1605
New York, NY 10003
Tel: 212-982-3229
Fax: 212-982-3248
www.multimedia-plus.com