



# M-Abler<sup>SM</sup>: It's Simple And It Works

## USCCG Introduces New Blended Learning Solution

Ensuring that employees are trained quickly, efficiently and regularly is a persistent and often overwhelming management task. Just scheduling training creates manpower nightmares because it frequently requires pulling employees out of the work environment for days of seminars or asking them to assimilate new information outside of normal working hours. Neither scenario is conducive to productivity.

But training becomes particularly critical when a company embarks on a mission to improve productivity, streamline operations, conform to required new industry standards or change its corporate culture. Bringing employees up to speed just isn't easy or cheap. And finding qualified trainers is sometimes as insurmountable an obstacle as scheduling the training itself, even when the budget is available.

### A New and Better Option

Recognizing these difficulties and how they can adversely impact a company's bottom line improvement efforts,

USC Consulting Group has developed a unique blended learning solution designed specifically to address the issues of time, resources and location.

*"M-Abler...offers a convenient, easy-to-use desktop learning system that comes complete with instructional consulting and on-the-job facilitation to help achieve maximum results in a short period of time."*

M-Abler<sup>SM</sup> (a contraction of "methodology enabler") is an integrated learning system that draws upon the best of technology and human intervention to deliver instructional content that is as easy to access as it is to assimilate. It offers a convenient, easy-to-use desktop learning system that comes complete with instructional

consulting and on-the-job facilitation to help achieve maximum results in a short period of time.

"This product is for any company that wants to initiate new or accelerate ongoing training efforts," says Jim Ostrosky, USCCG senior vice president, product development and technology. "Unlike a lot of computer and web-based training programs, it's simple and it works."

Built on an advanced learning platform, M-Abler is both SCORM and AICC compatible, but its courses can be configured to work with all major Learning Management Systems. M-Abler can be delivered via internet, intranet or on compact disk. It is flexible, cost-effective and performance-oriented.

"When you add the 35 years of experience USCCG used to develop M-Abler's content to the latest delivery technology, you get the most robust and effective learning system currently available," Mr. Ostrosky believes. "On top of that, M-Abler was designed to be used by employees

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with average or even limited computer knowledge. It has a detailed on-line help system designed so that anyone who can use a mouse can access the system quickly and easily.”

Some of the other features that make M-Abler so user friendly include:

- Generous use of colorful graphics to maintain visual interest
- Choice of text-only or voice-enabled options
- Interactive learning design
- Embedded glossary
- Administrative database and archive
- Built-in electronic notepad for user's comments
- Employee specific log-in and record keeping
- On-line testing to verify knowledge transfer
- Built-in placeholder for interrupted sessions
- Personalized text book generation at course completion

“The interactive aspect of M-Abler,” says Ed Enquist, USCCG manager of distance learning, “is what makes it such an engaging and powerful learning tool. For every concept that is presented, there is an animated screen. The user can change the font size of the text for easier reading. A voice-enabled option is available for those who better assimilate information through hearing than reading. To reinforce the learning process, each session has embedded questions that must be answered correctly before the student can move on. And there is a post-test for each section that documents what students have learned while taking the course. Recorded test results allow companies to easily track and

verify student progress as the basis for certification and/or reward and recognition.”

“M-Abler does it all,” says Mr. Ostrosky. “It is invaluable for personnel evaluations, particularly where technical skills are essential for satisfactory on-the-job performance.”

### The Blended Learning Approach

The real value of a product like M-Abler, though, comes from the blended learning approach used by USCCG.

“There are dramatically different benefits between using a tool like M-Abler

*“At USCCG, blended learning means using distance learning modules to bring students to a base level of conceptual knowledge and using on-site instructors to relate the information to real work situations.”*

in USCCG's blended learning approach versus a more traditional approach,” avows Mr. Enquist. “The blended learning technique clearly delivers more value to a client than either traditional classroom or distance learning alternatives.”

At USCCG, blended learning means using distance learning modules to bring students to a base level of conceptual knowledge and using on-site instructors to relate the information to real work situations. It allows on-the-job skill assessment that is not available through the training-only avenue.

“This is a just-in-time approach that provides training as needed to support process improvement,” says Mr. Enquist.

“M-Abler also gives clients a cost effective way to sustain gains already achieved in the course of improvement initiatives by enabling them to provide refresher courses and train new employees on a continuing basis.”

So, are USCCG trainers needed to train everyone in a plant- or company-wide M-Abler implementation?

“No,” says Mr. Enquist. “We have developed a train-the-trainer approach that uses a combination of USCCG and client trainers. This ensures that clients will have adequate in-house resources to handle long-term training needs. The distance learning modules ensure that everyone is getting a consistent message, even though they may be scattered across several geographic locations and the individual skill and experience levels of the in-house trainers may vary.”

To do this, USCCG employs a secure, interactive web conferencing service for simultaneous training at multiple locations. This can also be done via a company's intranet.

### The Course

A comprehensive Lean Operations course is the initial offering in the M-Abler series. It includes 17 individual modules ranging from the Six Pillars of Lean Production Systems, Continuous Flow and Plant Layout, to Mapping the Value Stream, Lean Procurement and the Supply Chain. Each of the segments requires about an hour to complete. Each also includes two hands-on exercises that can be tailored to a client's actual circumstances.

This course will soon be supplemented with additional options (such as Six Sigma), which will offer the best methodologies

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M-Abler<sup>SM</sup> continued

and USCCG approaches to a variety of operational problems and opportunities.

### The Reviews

David Shouldice, USCCG VP and senior operations manager, says that clients who have previewed M-Abler have been “very impressed with how easily it tracks use, retention and proficiency with the Lean Operations content.”

## Glossary

**M-ABLER<sup>SM</sup>:** A contraction of “methodology enabler,” USCCG’s proprietary blended learning solution combines the best of human intervention with the latest technology to deliver a wide range of instructional content.

**SCORM:** Shared Content Object Reference Model is the new standard adopted by the distance learning industry. It states how data will be transferred and shared between courses and learning management systems (LMS).

**AICC:** The aircraft industry was the first to adopt standards for computer-based training. Their Aviation Industry CBT (computer-based training) Committee (AICC) is an international association of technology-based training professionals. The AICC standard was developed to support e-learning in the aircraft industry. The SCORM standard is now the defacto standard used outside of this industry.

For more information on M-Abler<sup>SM</sup> and other USCCG products and services, visit the firm’s web site at [www.usccg.com](http://www.usccg.com) or call 800-621-6943.

# Business Development Execs Meet in Tampa

## *New Tools Unveiled for Fully Integrated Approach to Operating Excellence*

USCCG senior executives unveiled a whole new toolbox of business performance improvement products for its national sales force, which met recently in Tampa.

Topping the agenda was M-Abler<sup>SM</sup>, the firm’s innovative blended learning solution (see p.1), demonstrated by Distance Learning Manager Ed Enquist, who was instrumental in developing this new training tool. A comprehensive Lean Operations course is the initial offering in a series of course options currently in development. The sales team can easily demonstrate M-Abler to clients and prospects via their laptop computers or by accessing it in real time through a secure, interactive web conferencing service.

Dr. Ed Popovich, who holds a Six Sigma Master Black Belt, introduced USCCG’s new Six Sigma assessment methodology. Designed to diagnose problems and accelerate improvement initiatives, this new product allows companies to analyze nearly 200 individual aspects of their organization to determine where and how to best reduce costs, improve productivity and define the initiatives that will have the greatest financial impact.

USCCG’s automated business solutions library was presented by

Operations Manager Ken Staresinic and Senior IT Project Manager Andrew Johnson. The firm’s software can be configured to meet the needs of any client to provide a level of detail that helps close information gaps in a company’s operating systems. “These are basically automated versions of USCCG’s 35 years of problem solving experience,” explained Mr. Staresinic, “configured for ease of use.”

In addition, Western Regional Manager Dave Riggs and Senior Operations Manager Dave Shouldice reviewed USCCG’s in-depth approach to optimizing the supply chain while Senior Regional Managers Eric Clerk and Jerry Moody briefed the team on asset and facility planning rationalization.

“We have never been in a stronger position to meet the many and varied needs of our clients who share a passion for operating excellence,” observed George Coffey, SVP/business development. “With the addition of automated business solutions and M-Abler, we can now address virtually every point along the improvement continuum from planning and preparation through execution and reinvesting the rewards of continuous improvement.”



# The Rules of Engagement

## Getting the Best Performance from your Consultant

By: **Richard W. Gross**



During its 35 years of operation, USCCG has learned that following a few simple rules can significantly improve a company's chances for a successful consulting engagement that can generate significant business performance improvements.

### 1. Put aside your preconceptions

Senior decision-makers are often skeptical about using consulting firms based on horror stories they've heard or bad experiences of their own. The Y2K information technology debacle, when many companies spent exorbitant sums on ERP systems that produced less-than-stellar results, only served to reinforce that negative perception.

Then there is the erroneous belief that internal company resources can produce the same results in the same amount of time at less cost than an external resource. The reality is far different: As many companies "lean down," staffs are often more burdened than ever. Loading improvement initiatives on top of day-to-day responsibilities can bring an operation to its knees.

Good consulting firms offer two powerful tools:

- An unbiased perspective of a company's business processes, which allows them to quickly identify and address problem areas; and
- An experienced staff to augment a

client's employees to drive results in a much shorter time frame.

### 2. Training and/or technology alone will not improve business performance

Managers often believe that education is a less expensive way to drive improvement than outside intervention. While training is a necessary component of performance improvement, it alone will

*"Following a few simple rules will greatly improve your chances for a successful consulting engagement."*

not make the numbers better. The reason is simple: Without reinforcement at the point of execution, the concepts will not take root and the changes required for improving those performance numbers will never occur.

The same goes for technology. It is only as good as the people who use it and the process that supports it. If staff members do not change their processes to use those new systems effectively, the investment will have been wasted.

### 3. Exercise due diligence

No one selects a surgeon, a home builder or even an employee without thoroughly checking their credentials. The same goes for consultants.

Challenge the consultant. Question him closely on the quality and depth of the team that will work with your organization. Make sure you're getting qualified, experienced people with solid business acumen.

And finally, don't hesitate to spend some time with the team to ensure that these are people you can welcome into your business home. The right fit can be just as important as the experience.

### 4. Avoid "discount" consulting

Managers frequently look for "buy now, pay later" or "pay for performance" engagements that appear to be safe bets because of the minimal up-front financial investment.

Inevitably, these arrangements lead to serious disagreements between the parties. The consulting firm will push for the kind of change that will net it the most income, which usually is not the kind of change that will optimize the client's business performance. Costs spin out of control, results diminish and the engagement is a bust.

A better approach to the fee structure is one in which:

- a feasibility study conducted by the consultant defines the engagement's parameters and objectives;
- the parties agree on the fee and projected improvements; and
- the "team" (consultant and client organization) is held accountable on a weekly basis for delivering projected results.

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Rules continued

## 5. Insist on top-to-top dialogue

Developing a strong professional relationship with the consulting team will earn the broadest and deepest benefits they have to offer. With a top-to-top dialogue, clients can avail themselves of a wealth of insight that may never surface under less open circumstances. This can result in even more significant business performance improvement than originally anticipated by either party.

### The Wrap-up

Consulting engagements can run the gamut from successful beyond imagination to obscenely expensive to bitterly disappointing. A senior manager's responsibility is to recognize the circumstances under which outside intervention is the right course of action and then do everything possible to ensure a positive experience.

This means accepting the fact that, if your organization was *really* capable of making necessary changes, it would have (or should have) already done so.

Recognize, too, that the success or failure of your company rests with its people, not its hardware. The best technology in the world will not overcome a poor process or even a good process poorly implemented.

And, lastly, exercise common sense. A consulting engagement is a lot like a marriage. You wouldn't marry someone you didn't know, who wasn't a good match or who wouldn't talk to you. Hire the consultant that will make the best partner for your company.

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*Richard Gross is vice president, manager of analysis for USCCG and a certified ISO auditor. He joined the firm in 1981.*

# Progress Report



## Former Chase Executive Joins USCCG



Stephen T. Iovino, a 30-year veteran and former senior vice president of the Chase Manhattan Bank, joins USCCG as the firm's north-eastern regional manager, based in New York. He will be responsible for developing close working relationships with Fortune 1000 companies that want to strengthen their operating and financial performance through the use of innovative process improvement methodologies.

"Steve brings some special talents and expertise that make him particularly important to USCCG's growth plans," said George Coffey, SVP/business development. "His financial services background, IT experience and process orientation give him strong credentials

for expanding our presence in the non-manufacturing and service sectors."

Mr. Iovino began his career with Chase in 1968 in technology management and development. During his tenure with the bank, he held such posts as president and CEO of their education finance arm; SVP/worldwide executive for operations and systems over most of the bank's consumer product companies; and SVP/business executive for Chase Manhattan Global Trust Services. Most recently he was an independent management consultant for such clients as the Nature Publishing Group, Great River, NY, and Brown & Company, a Boston-based discount brokerage firm. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in mathematics from Hofstra University and has attended the Harvard Management School of Business.

## Kenneth Sharp New IT Specialist



USCCG has hired Kenneth A. Sharp as an information technology specialist. His primary responsibilities will include maintenance of the firm's IT infrastructure and providing technical support for its field sales and operations staff. He will be based in USCCG's Tampa office.

Prior to joining USCCG, Mr. Sharp

held several IT positions with Sykes Enterprises, Inc., among them senior business consultant, senior programmer analyst and application development manager. He held similar jobs at T-Netix Monitoring Inc.; GEAC Publishing Systems; Computer Systems Excellence in Healthcare, Inc.; and Financial Information Technologies, Inc. He earned an associate degree in computer programming and analysis from Hillsborough Community College.





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