CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
MONTEREY BAY

Weight Watchers eTools Workshop & Online Training Program

CAPSTONE PROPOSAL

Submitted in partial satisfaction of requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE in

Instructional Science and Technology

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Capstone Approvals: (At least one advisor and capstone instructor should approve)

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Introduction/Background

Background on Project

Currently, Weight Watchers offers a proprietary online support system for their paying members called eTools. By using eTools, Weight Watchers members can track their food intake, activity goals, weigh-in results, recipes, and use other program tools to support their weight loss efforts. Over the course of the last three or four years, the availability of eTools to members has increased due to a monthly payment plan called the “Monthly Pass” which includes the free use of eTools for these members. However, while eTools availability has increased, the training programs available to members (currently consisting of an online tutorial with pop-up window explanations) have not kept pace with the increased exposure to the program. Due to the large eTools member population, offering a broader eTools training program would create more knowledgeable and happier members, which could impact revenue for the company.

Problem Description

Through Customer Service call data, member email surveys and member feedback in the meeting rooms, results indicate that members are expressing difficulty with a variety of eTools functions. Company data indicates only about 30% of Monthly Pass members use free eTools features. Initially, members express a lack of understanding about how to access eTools and create their accounts. In addition, members express difficulty finding online tools needed (such as Restaurant locator or Recipe Builder) to support their weight loss goals. Also, data indicates that members are using the program simply as a tool to support online tracking of food choices and are unaware of the full capabilities of eTools. Finally, members express confusion over how to use Weight Watchers mobile applications and the syncing capabilities with their online eTools.
account. Members’ inability to use eTools creates a gap in brand perception and loyalty, creating frustration and negative perception with regards to the company.

**Target Audience**

The learner population will comprise all members of Weight Watchers that have access to eTools which is close to 70% of membership, based on recent statistics from the corporate office. The initial launch of these workshops and accompanying online training program will be offered at the Monterey, California Weight Watchers store located in the Del Monte shopping center. This store averages 500 members a week with an average of 13 members joining per week. All in-person workshops will be free of charge for Weight Watchers members and will be advertised in meeting room posters. Initially, the online training programs will be offered both to eTools Workshop participants, as a free additional support tool, and also will be advertised to Monterey store members who are not able or do not wish to attend an in-person workshop.

**Literature Review**

There are two industry research trends to consider when reviewing the creation of the eTools Workshops and online training program. First, the efficacy of online versus in-person training programs was examined to ensure that providing the in-person workshops would provide the level of support required by Weight Watchers members. There are advantages of online training, such as decreased long-term cost and convenient consumer access, which provide a powerful argument to support the use of the online training program. However, there are some inherent advantages in a face-to-face environment that provide the level of interaction that Weight Watchers’ members are accustomed to as part of their meeting room experience. By utilizing in-person learning, it promotes discussion and interaction among participants and fosters further learning. In addition, “another hugely important consideration is that skillful
facilitation can elicit self-discovery from participants…[and] it creates a strong buy-in where students can say: ‘I figured it out for myself!’” (Ward, 2010). Therefore, the in-person eTools Workshops will help to foster that buy-in that is so important to weight loss success.

The other industry research trend to be examined is the impact of online tools as a support for weight loss efforts. There are a variety of weight loss plans available to the general public offered through online components. Numerous research studies have been conducted to review both the level of interest in online weight loss programs, as well as the ease of use of these programs. While there are specific studies examining the weight loss results of Weight Watchers members, there is little information about the use of Weight Watchers online program, eTools, as a support mechanism for Weight Watchers members. General feedback regarding online weight loss programs indicates that utilizing structured tools for weight loss, such as food journals, as well as utilizing the programs on a more frequent basis increased the weight loss results. “Online programs that helped participants lose weight emphasized dietary and physical activity changes, used cognitive and behavior strategies and provided personalized feedback and support” (Saperstein, Atkinson, & Gold, 2007). The eTools online training program will increase member familiarity with the online environment, knowledge of various functions of the program, as well as encourage members to utilize these services on a regular basis.

**Solution Description**

**Goals of the Project**

The goal of instruction is to help members belong more familiar with eTools and use the program as a tool in the weight loss efforts. This would be realized by offering a two-pronged approach to achieve the learning outcomes, including an in-person eTools Workshop and an
online training program. The eTools Workshops will be formatted as an in-person training program modeled off the group support structure of the existing Weight Watchers group meetings. Using this delivery tool, members would immediately feel more comfortable with the familiar format of the training. As in existing Weight Watchers meetings, this training would include a Leader who facilitates learning through information sharing and group discussion. Also, members would be able to share their eTools experiences with other members, increasing their knowledge through a collaborative environment in the meeting room.

The online training program would provide an opportunity for members to learn about the various features of eTools at their convenience and in the comfort of their own environment. The online training program will provide an opportunity to practice using these features prior to the members accessing them with their eTools account. The objectives of both the in-person workshops and the online training program would be to provide members with a familiarity of the basics of the eTools program, as well as, a variety of modules that would include a more thorough exposure of some of the additional benefits eTools offers during their weight loss journey.

**Proposed Solution to Fill the Gap**

In the interest of making sure each in-person workshop and the online training program are relevant to both new members and current members, each would include novice and advance skill training with eTools. Each in-person workshop will begin with a basic skills introduction to eTools which will support all novice users by educating them on how to gain access to the program. Then, various modules will be designed with PowerPoint slides that outline the basic “how-to’s” of a particular tool available to the members through eTools. Finally, there will be a
discussion component to encourage existing members to share how they use the online tool to support their weight loss efforts.

The online training program will offer a variety of training modules that can be selected by the participant. For the novice user, there will be an introduction eLearning program with highlights for each of the main modules to be examined and a video that details how to create their eTools account. For current eTools subscribers, the online training program will provide a variety of modules with both information and highlights of a particular aspect of the eTools program, as well as an opportunity for the members to practice that particular eTools activity.

**Media Components**

For the in-person eTools Workshops, the delivery method will be through PowerPoint slides displayed either on the meeting room television or printed on to large size flip charts. These PowerPoint slides will provide examples of screen shots so members know where to find the tool. In addition, a Job Aid handout will be provided to attending members at the end of each eTools Workshop to remind members of the instruction provided during the Workshop.

The delivery method for the online training program will be through a secure website that can be accessed via servers such as Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer and Google Chrome. Access for the training will be password protected as it will contain proprietary information that is only provided to existing Weight Watchers members. Navigation through the site will allow the viewer to access the modules that interest them and/or bypass the modules in which they have an existing expertise. Videos, software simulations and practice activities will be used to display the various modules of the program. Quizzes during the online program will provide a means of evaluation of the success of the modules and whether or not new modules should be developed.
Anticipated Challenges

Due to the diverse member population, it will be important to provide training tools that provide education for differing levels of need, from novice to expert eTools users, as well as the various member learning styles. The two types of training being offered, the in-person eTools Workshops and the online training programs, will face unique challenges. These concerns are addressed in both the format of each eTools Workshop, as well as the creation of the media component for the online training program.

The in-person eTools Workshops will have a time limitation of 30 to 45 minutes per training meeting that must be factored in to each module in order to provide the information desired by the members. Also, consideration must be made for the delivery tools available at various meeting locations. Some locations will have access to televisions and PowerPoint slides, other locations will require preprinted flip charts in order to provide the required training.

Due to the nature of the online environment, the online training program could run into some issues of user-navigation such as server compatibility issues, slow internet connection, and unfamiliarity with online tools. Consideration will need to be made to provide a delivery mechanism that works across a variety of browser platforms. In addition, the training navigation will need to be easily understood by a novice internet user but still entice viewers that have a high degree of internet knowledge.

Methods/Procedures

Design and Development of Project

There are a variety of resources available in order to design, develop and implement both the in-person workshop and the online training program. Both training programs will rely on
access and use of the online program, eTools, by the ID. In addition, the ID will be utilizing a variety of Subject Matter Experts that have been delivering a modified version of the eTools Workshop to a small group of members. Also, the initial launch of this combined training program will be to a group of members in a single Weight Watchers center in Monterey, CA. The feedback and data collection from these existing members, as they participate in either one or both training programs, will provide the necessary formative evaluation to adjust the instructional product to best suit the member’s requirements. Finally, the company will be providing support and information, including feedback on changes to member’s usage of eTools, as well as members signing up for the Monthly Pass option, through their conduit, the Territory Manager for the Monterey area.

**Finalizing Steps**

In order to ensure that the eTools Workshop and the online training program are solving the issues addressed by members, it will be important to offer an opportunity for members to evaluate the efficacy of the training. During the in-person workshops, the members will be encouraged to freely discuss their concerns and problem-solve as a group. Then, a post workshop survey will be provided to all members with a request to turn the surveys in to the member’s meeting Leaders within the month. Once the surveys have been received from the members, their feedback will be used to ascertain the effectiveness of the eTools Workshop. Changes will be made to the modules to provide the appropriate level of learning requested by members, as well as to update any discussion questions to provide effective questioning choices for the eTools Leaders. The online training program will provide a quicker turnaround in the formative evaluation data by using quizzes during the training. Once evaluation data is
collected, online modules will be updated with information requested by members. In addition, any technological issues or problems with user-interface can be quickly addressed.

**Resources**

**Time/Money/Hardware/Software/Etc.**

The planned launch of the Weight Watchers eTools Workshop will be in two stages. The initial “beta” launch is scheduled for September 2012 with the final launch scheduled for January 2013 in Monterey, California. There is no funding for the “beta” launch and therefore costs must be kept to a minimum for this launch. The ID will be producing the PowerPoint slides to be shown on the existing television in the meeting room at no cost since the software (Microsoft Office PowerPoint) is already purchased. All SMEs are participating on a voluntary basis and therefore there is no cost for additional personnel. Additionally, the existing hardware (meeting room television) and meeting room space (Weight Watchers meeting location) are being provided free of charge.

The online training program is not tied to the “beta” launch in September and therefore can be launched closer to the January final launch, in order to coincide with the eTools Workshop final launch. Again, there is no funding for the online training program so costs must be kept to a minimum. The ID will use a screen capture software (Captivate, Jing, Camtasia, etc.) to highlight the software simulations and most of the software is either purchased or freeware. Video will be taken at the Weight Watchers store location in Monterey or at the CSUMB studio. All talent, support and SMEs for the online component will be participating on a voluntary basis.
As of now, the only perceived cost for this Capstone is printing the Job Aids for Weight Watchers members participating in the eTools Workshops. After examination of the “beta” launch by the Weight Watchers Corporate Office, a potential budget will be developed in order to provide compensation for any additional launch.

**Technical Skills**

The ID will require technical skills in order to produce professional looking PowerPoint slides, screen capture video and audio, website creation and instructional Job Aids to be distributed to members. These skills can be developed through online training, class exercises and additional support from SMEs. As such, the project will probably need to be completed with some support from other personnel.

**Timeline/Progress Report**

The company would like to launch this program in January, which is Weight Watchers’ peak enrollment and member month. Therefore, a full launch of the program is forecasted for January 2013. In order to reach a full launch stage by January 2013, the trial launch should be started no later than summer of 2012. Once the initial formative evaluation is completed during the summer, a second influx of membership, which occurs in September, would provide an optimum opportunity to beta test the training program. The initial cost of producing the training program is limited to time spent by the ID for the initial stages of production (analysis, design and development) as well as that of any SMEs questioned by the ID. Final launch costs of the program would be determined based on the level of launch forecasted by the company, whether a nationwide launch, or a more focused launch on a limited number of Weight Watchers Territories.
References
