New York Public Library offers public online job-skills training

Created in 1895, the New York Public Library (NYPL) provides free access to print and electronic research and circulating collections that total more than 65 million items. In addition, the NYPL each year presents thousands of exhibitions, public programs, and classes.

At its iconic 42nd Street location, at three other scholarly research centers, and at 87 branch sites, the NYPL serves Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island. More than 18 million patrons pass through the library’s doors annually, and millions more around the globe use its resources at www.nypl.org.

Challenge: expand web-based job training opportunities

The NYPL opened its Science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL) in 1996 to provide free information and training to start-up companies, established businesses looking to expand, and job seekers at all levels of the workforce. Located on Madison Avenue, SIBL has 38 full-time staff and assists more than 1,500 patrons a day. Staff members provide roving point-of-use assistance as well as consultations on the spot and by appointment. In addition, advisory sessions are offered on-site by experienced business owners, career coaches, and financial planning specialists.

To help fulfill its mission, and to supplement and expand complimentary hands-on database and software training sessions for the public, SIBL sought a provider of online video instruction that could deliver a wide range of technology, creative, and business skills tutorials.

Solution: lyndaKiosk

SIBL had experience with lynda.com video instruction; in 2011, the NYPL Learning and Development division gave library employees access to the service to promote professional development and support the IT staff. “NYPL’s professional development unit couldn’t keep up with staff demand for lynda.com. There was always a waiting list,” said Kristin McDonough, SIBL director.
The high quality of lynda.com content—including its clarity, expert instructors, and robust search functionality—played a big part in a subsequent 2012 decision to offer lynda.com to the general public, McDonough said.

SIBL purchased several licenses of lyndaKiosk, which connects designated workstations to lynda.com and is specifically designed for libraries, learning labs, or similar settings. SIBL deployed lyndaKiosk in training classrooms, a bustling electronic information center, and its career center, Job Search Central (JSC). In partnership with lynda.com, SIBL soon expanded its lyndaKiosk license count. This allowed SIBL to meet its own public demand and extend online training to six additional NYPL locations, including the Mid-Manhattan library, which is the busiest NYPL circulating branch, and the Career Education and Information Service (CEIS) located in the Bronx Library Center.

“lynda.com fits with our mission of leveling the playing field, of offering our patrons at any stage of career development—from entry to executive level—the tools needed for advancement,” McDonough said. “The people we serve are trying to figure out their futures. We realized lynda.com could help extend what we do. It provides people the ability to plug technical and skill gaps in their resumes.

“We’ve spent a lot of time promoting lynda.com on-site with flyers, and via email blasts to audiences that include metro area technology meetups and entrants in our annual New York StartUP! Business Plan Competition. We’ve seen a return on this investment of time. Usage continues to grow,” McDonough said. “Our JSC coordinator and a dozen or so coaches steer people toward lynda.com during one-on-one advisory sessions. Likewise, we make it a point to mention lynda.com in hands-on classes as well as during after-work and lunchtime presentations by experts.”

**Result: job skills for career advancement**

Self-directed learning at a personal pace is a big benefit of lynda.com instruction, said John Cardillo, coordinator of JSC, which provides job seekers with counseling, resume writing advice, interview tips, networking strategies, and more. Cardillo said he refers the majority of his clients to lynda.com, and that more than 80 percent of them use it.

“lynda.com users can learn different tools, as well as tricks of the trade, that relate to the actual process of finding a job,” Cardillo said. “There are so many different types of courses that can help. It’s an amazing tool.

“If someone comes to me and says, ‘I think I know how to find a job, but I don’t think I’m going to be very marketable. I don’t really know Microsoft Word,’ I can automatically refer them to the Word 2013 Essential Training course and say, ‘Hey, take lynda.com for this.’ Or they can learn to use social media tools to build their own personal brand and expand their online presence. Or perhaps they would benefit from lynda.com courses on business skills,
such as Job Search Strategies, Managing Your Career, or Acing Your Interview. All of this can make someone more attractive to employers.”

One NYPL patron who used lynda.com landed a contract position doing database work and creating custom Excel® templates for a big insurance company, Cardillo said. “Her entire background is in technology. She had retired from IBM and was doing some consulting work on the side, but it was it was very hit-or-miss over the last four or five years, and not as lucrative as she needed. She said, ‘I don’t know how to brush up on my skills considering I’m not working and I’m not involved in the technology space anymore.’ I immediately referred her to lynda.com. I saw her using it over the next month, and she credited lynda.com training with helping her get that job.”

SIBL visitors have used lynda.com to learn the Adobe® Creative Suite®, SharePoint®, Excel, QuickBooks®, and other applications. Still more relied on the service during the StartUP! Business Plan Competition hosted by SIBL. “The audio, presentation, and speakers for all these tutorials are great,” one patron told SIBL in a recent survey. “It’s easy to use,” said another. “I am amazed at the variety.”

“I find that the movies are much easier to follow than a book,” noted one user. Said another: “I told a friend about lynda.com. He came to this library for the first time ever because of it.”

Over at the SIBL reference desk, Reference Librarian Laverne Clark steers patrons with questions about software or other job-related issues to lynda.com. “It’s a great resource for anyone designing websites, presenting a product, or brushing up on business skills. There is such a wide range of videos in those particular areas.

“Many people don’t realize there is a closed-captioning toggle. I point out the transcript section available with all the videos. Sometimes we assist people who have a disability. I always make sure people see the accessibility features.”

lynda.com also benefits enrollees in software training classes held in person at the library, Clark said. “Our classes here are only 75 minutes, so the trainer points people to lynda.com for additional instruction and practice.”

In addition, Clark told the New York City chapter of SCORE about lynda.com. A national nonprofit with an office at SIBL, SCORE provides free counseling and workshops to small businesses. “I put together a package of flyers. They now know they can refer people to NYPL for online training.”

Looking ahead

SIBL plans to continue offering free, hands-on database and software training, and looks forward to helping more patrons grow professionally, McDonough said, adding the library will explore new ways to promote lynda.com and potentially expand its reach.