



Monarch Media, Inc., Case Study

## **Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division**

**Iowa ABD Boosts Training Access  
and Cuts Costs with  
Online Tobacco Retailer Course**

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## Industry

State government

## Challenge

To provide greater access to tobacco vendor training across the state with the goal of reducing tobacco sales to minors.

## Solution

A self-service eLearning course developed and hosted by Monarch Media that provides training in how to deny youth access to tobacco products. The course is delivered via a Web-based, hosted learning management system (LMS) that provides program administration and a certification program database. Monarch Media delivered the course and LMS on time and on budget to help Iowa ABD meet its goals.

## Key Benefits

- The LMS provides a self-service platform that supports multiple users with minimal technical support required
- Interactions and behavior modeling components indirectly support learning outcomes, building on traditional factual information that is integrated throughout the training
- A complete administrative toolset allows state employees and law enforcement to easily manage and run reports on certification program details



## Overview

The Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division (ABD) took over the Iowa Pledge Program in 2000. This program asks Iowa's kids to pledge that they will not use tobacco products; retailers to pledge to not sell tobacco products to underage users; and law enforcement to pledge to enforce the state tobacco laws.

The goal for providing a Web-based training program is to support voluntary compliance of Iowa's tobacco laws by offering education and backing it with enforcement. This training allows employees at retail locations that sell tobacco products to sign up, participate in the interactive class, and take a test to become Iowa Pledge certified. Utilizing the Sakai learning management system (LMS) and Articulate authoring tool, Monarch Media developed the current Web-based training system.

In addition to offering Iowa Pledge certification, the platform has built-in query tools that allow administrators and the general public to look up the status of vendor or employee certification at anytime. This tool directly supports Iowa communities by making outcomes transparent to everyone from parents to law enforcement.

Currently one of the only courses of its kind in the country, employees of tobacco retailers in the state of Iowa are required to complete the training and certification every two years to remain Iowa Pledge certified.

## Reaching the Vendors

After the Iowa ABD took over tobacco compliance initiatives in 2000, it partnered with local law enforcement agencies across the state to provide tobacco vendor training. "We had to offer the opportunity to take the class in each one of our 99 counties once a month," recalls ABD Communications Director Tonya Dusold. "If there weren't enough participants signed up, the class would get canceled and interested vendors' staff would either have to wait for a month or travel to another county."

Iowa ABD staff also had to devote a lot of resources to training the trainers. Its four tobacco investigators were spending time training local law enforcement in how to deliver the course, which reduced their capacity to conduct compliance checks around the state.

*Among Iowa ABD's goals for the system were that it be easy to use, require little technical support, and offer a full suite of administrative and communications tools, including certification reporting.*

There were also consistency issues. Because the law enforcement officers who were conducting the training did not teach it frequently and often went months between presenting the materials, they were not always covering everything consistently. Furthermore, ABD staff had no way, beyond the certification test results, to ensure that tobacco vendor staff were getting all the information they needed to spot fake IDs, for example.

Finally, the state's software for managing compliance testing and certification was on its last legs. "At least once a week the system was going down, which resulted in a lot of phone calls, running around, emails back and forth, and lost time," says Dunsold. "We were in desperate need of a technology update."

## Taking the Training Online

Seeking to improve access, reduce costs, and increase consistency in the tobacco vendor training, Iowa ABD began to explore moving the course online. After carefully planning the transition and adapting content for online use, the state brought in Monarch Media in 2010 to develop a platform and produce the training. Monarch's project team began working on the project in August 2010 and launched the course and platform on time and on budget in October.

Among Iowa ABD's goals for the system were that it be easy to use, require little technical support, and offer a full suite of administrative and communications tools, including certification reporting. In order to meet these requirements, Monarch Media implemented a customized version of the Sakai LMS.

Sakai is an enterprise-ready, open-source platform that provides training, portfolio, library, and project tools. It is the enterprise system of choice at more than 160 organizations, with production settings ranging from 200 to 200,000 users. Monarch Media's implementation of Sakai includes a suite of tools that were ideal for Iowa ABD's training program, including:

- Course self-registration
- Account management
- Advanced reporting capabilities
- The ability to create and manage online tests and other assessments
- The capacity to host and manage almost any file format needed for training, such as videos, audio files, and much more



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-- Nicki Nelson,  
Monarch Media

“Sakai offered a lot of advantages as a platform for the training,” says Monarch Media CEO Claire Schneeberger. “It’s highly scalable, can support a virtually unlimited number of registrants, and it offers enterprise-level stability and security, which was important for the ABD.”

“As an open-source learning management system, it’s also more customizable than many proprietary LMS,” adds Schneeberger. “It allowed us to easily tailor the design, toolset, and reports to meet the ABD’s requirements, and it lowers ongoing costs because there’s no annual licensing or seat fees.”

## Developing the Course

Building a successful eLearning compliance training that engages learners while presenting factual data requires the careful use of instructional design strategies. Iowa ABD’s tobacco vendor training course covers an extensive array of topics, including:

- State-specific laws
- Valid forms of identification
- How to spot altered and fake IDs
- Techniques on how to refuse to sell tobacco to minors in a manner that minimizes confrontation

To incorporate all these topics into a cohesive, engaging course requires special attention to applying instructional design strategies that maximize learning.

Iowa ABD staff knew how important interactivity is to an online training program and had scripted a number of scenarios demonstrating the correct ways to handle situations in which minors seek to purchase tobacco products. Monarch Media’s animated implementations brought these scenarios to life.

“A main goal of the training is to teach vendors and their staff how to read a drivers license and how to behave when pressured to sell tobacco to minors,” says Monarch Media project leader Nicki Nelson. “Because sales staff at gas stations and convenience stores are often underage themselves, it’s critical for them to learn how to professionally and confidently say no. One of the best ways to teach this in an online environment is to provide models of the desired behavior.”



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*-- Claire Schneeberger,  
Monarch Media*

A second approach Monarch Media's instructional designers took was to apply active learning strategies throughout the training. Active learning strategies involve providing learners with practice opportunities that are similar to actual encounters they will experience on the job. To accomplish this, Monarch Media designed six animated "How to Refuse" scenarios using Flash-based animation to create realistic 3-D environments in which tobacco retailers can practice and develop the skills they've been taught.

Finally, to ensure that required information has been understood and to improve retention, the training includes frequent self-checks and assessments throughout. These ask learners to reflect on what they've learned and put the key information into practice. "Studies show that one of the best ways to ensure learning and retention is to test someone on new material right after they've studied it," says Monarch's Claire Schneeberger. "Including frequent assessments throughout an online training accomplishes this goal."

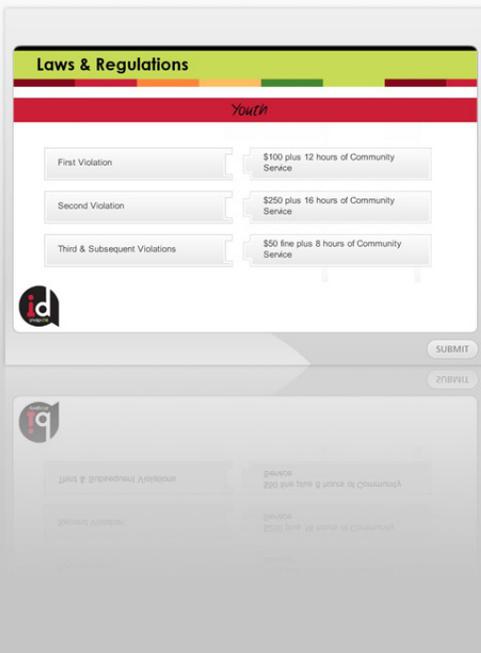
## Containing Costs

In addition to increasing access, Iowa ABD staff members also believe that moving the training online has reduced the cost of offering it. "When we were offering the training in person and working with local law enforcement, we were paying them a \$100 flat fee for each class that was held," says the ABD's Tonya Dusold. "We were spending about \$30,000 a year just in paying the law enforcement officers."

In addition, the new tobacco vendor-training platform has freed up staff time for other projects. "Our tobacco enforcement team is spending less time out there training law enforcement and more time doing compliance checks," says Dusold. "And office staff no longer has to spend time providing life support for the old certification tracking and printing system."

## Rolling Out the Training

Although some Iowa residents initially feared that moving the Iowa Pledge tobacco training program online would cause problems, Iowa ABD staff report that reaction since its launch has been overwhelmingly positive. "We first presented the online training at the Petroleum Marketers & Convenience Stores



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of Iowa Association's annual conference," says ABD's Education Outreach Coordinator Shannon Pogones. "They were very excited about it. At the corporate level, executives and managers are aware that this training exists and that employees at the branches and stores, right down to the clerks, have it available 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Dusold agrees. "Being able to take the course online anytime versus possibly once a month in your county is huge. Additionally the ability for the students to learn at their own pace and then come back and review the materials, watch a module again if they didn't understand it well, is great."

Both Pogones and Dusold credit Monarch Media for launching the project on time and within budget. "We were unsure about releasing the online training platform on time because this project was several years in the making," says Pogones. "We hit it dead on. It has been pretty amazing how well it worked out."

"Monarch Media far exceeded our expectations both during development and since launch," adds Dusold. "From day one of working with Monarch, the speed of the project just was astounding."

## More information

The Iowa Pledge Online Certification Program can be found online at <http://ipocp.iowaabd.com:8080/portal>.

To learn more about how Monarch Media can help you with your next eLearning project, please call, email, or visit our website:

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