

# **Lighting Education with Commercials**

**By Mark Lien**

Corporate “educational” or training facilities often offer a dash of altruism with a sprinkle a salesmanship. Manufacturers, naturally, expect a return on investment for their educational facilities. The managers of these centers know that they are ultimately expected to generate sales. One manager distilled this by stating that “corporate education has to sell the center.” A balance needs to be struck that includes valuable and relevant information for the attendee. It needs also to at least have the soft sell of associating the sponsoring company as a source of lighting knowledge. When the balance is successful it enhances the credibility of both the company and the attendee.

Education is the process that encourages and enables us to develop our potential. Its connotation is not tainted by motivation for profit. The word “training” in our industry is often perceived as short for “product training.” It infers a commercial pitch that seemingly precludes education. The most successful training however should place the product in the context of its application and explain the considerations of using it as a solution to meet a need. A fundamental understanding of terminology, color, vision, photometry, optical control, etc., is vital to the intelligent choice of products and their integration in applications. Teachers must assess and convey whatever elements are needed for comprehension.

## **ACADEMIC VS. MANUFACTURER EDUCATION**

Corporate education creates an expectation of conveying immediately useful information. If attendees do not walk away feeling that they have significantly benefited from their time they will not return or recommend the facility.

Academic education layers information over a longer period of time to create a deep and solid foundation. The focus tends to be more specialized with depth beyond the needs of most lighting practitioners but vital for research and product development. The students’ education is not complete until they obtain real world application and project experience. Conversely, many learn lighting skills on the job leaving conspicuous gaps in knowledge. Corporate training needs to be balanced with education just as education needs to be balanced with product, industry and application information.

At the IESNA Centennial Conference in January 2006, there were conversations about the need for increased academic lighting education. Promoting awareness of potential lighting careers is universally endorsed but the need for more academic education is questionable. The University of Colorado’s David DiLaura feels that “we do not need more lighting education in schools. It would be a cruel hoax.” His concern is that academia is filling the positions currently available. Hundreds of engineers and technical specialists for the U.S. lighting companies are now located in China and India. This shift limits further jobs for graduates of American lighting programs.

Meanwhile, the sheer reach of manufacturer-based education programs underscores their importance. Over 20,000 people attend corporate training centers annually, while one academic educator shared that he graduated only about 250 people in his lighting program over a decade.

The demographics of the manufacturer-based educational centers are revealing. The lamp companies focus primarily on distributors while luminaire manufacturers primarily target specifiers. Lamp centers also offer advanced classes for specifiers and luminaire manufacturers have fundamental courses. While the instructors can be effective teaching multiple skill sets, they recognize and target the groups that can most readily impact their business.

Finally, several factors can maximize the effectiveness of your visit to a corporate educational center. Ask who the other attendees are. Ideally you want to be with people of similar skill sets and also of similar knowledge levels. If there are attendees new to our industry in the class then the level of teaching will need to be fundamental. This could prove a waste of time for an LC or other skilled professional. If you are an architect in a class with electrical contractors then since your primary interests differ, so will the value of your experience. Ask the facility for an agenda ahead of your visit. Instructors and managers at all of these centers are accessible by phone if you still are concerned about how appropriate a course may be. If you are attending by invitation of a lighting agent you can influence the topics by telling them what you want to cover during your visit.

## **TRENDS TO WATCH**

The following trends are shaping the future of lighting education:

- Continuing Education Units being offered for manufacturer-based educational programs.
- Online training
- Webcasts
- Interactive webcasts
- Live streaming video presentations
- Interactive live video presentations

Some of these techniques raise concerns, however. Live classroom teaching demands your focus and a good presenter commands attention unlike webcasts where interruptions can compete for your focus and attention. Online training is increasing but we should recognize inherent limitations. The addition of video elements and interactive capabilities enhance the effectiveness but remain expensive and uncommon in our industry.

In addition to training our own we need to create awareness in the general population of the value of good lighting and how it can positively affect their life and even their health. Suggestions for this include:

1. Advertising, especially with educational content, outside of industry publications.
2. Lighting presentations in Home Depot, Lowes, showrooms, etc.
3. Feature lighting designers in TV shows like *HDTV*, *Trading Spaces*, *Extreme Home Improvement*, etc.
4. Through education and training we need to minimize the danger of lighting becoming just another commodity as our industry matures.

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