

Higher Education

United Academy's new platform for training redefines eLearning.

By Guy Ramsey

One of the most challenging issues facing the lifting and access industry today is the limited availability of comprehensive and standardized operator training that keeps pace with safety requirements and adds value to the business and individual worker. While traditional training is offered, effective delivery and tracking can be added challenges, given the transient nature of the industry's workforce, remote project locations, and an expanding millennial workforce.

Recognizing the opportunity to leverage its position, and perhaps its responsibility, as the world's largest equipment rental company, United Rentals is endeavoring to become the industry leader in providing high-quality training through innovative, cutting-edge curriculum and delivery platforms. The initiative is led by Jim Dorris, vice president—health, safety, environment & sustainability for United Rentals, whose team began collaborating last year with leading safety training experts to design and develop resources that would significantly move the training needle for the industry.

By building a platform on a foundation of the company's long-standing customer training, United Rentals wants to offer exceptional content quality and innovative delivery options not typically available to the access industry. Dorris explains that this was not an issue but an opportunity to use technology to serve a much broader group of workers. "We wanted to provide trade workers with the same exceptional level of training that is available in other industries and the government sector," says Dorris. "At the same time, we saw an opportunity to share the proven training resources we have in place to a wider audience."

Expanding on traditional training

For years, United Rentals has offered training in the classroom and online. Having successfully done this, the next horizon was to enhance the company's existing training program offerings through innovation. Armed with United Rentals' vision of "Driving Our Entire Industry Forward through Continuous Innovation," the company enlisted industry experts to develop new content and to employ cutting-edge deliv-

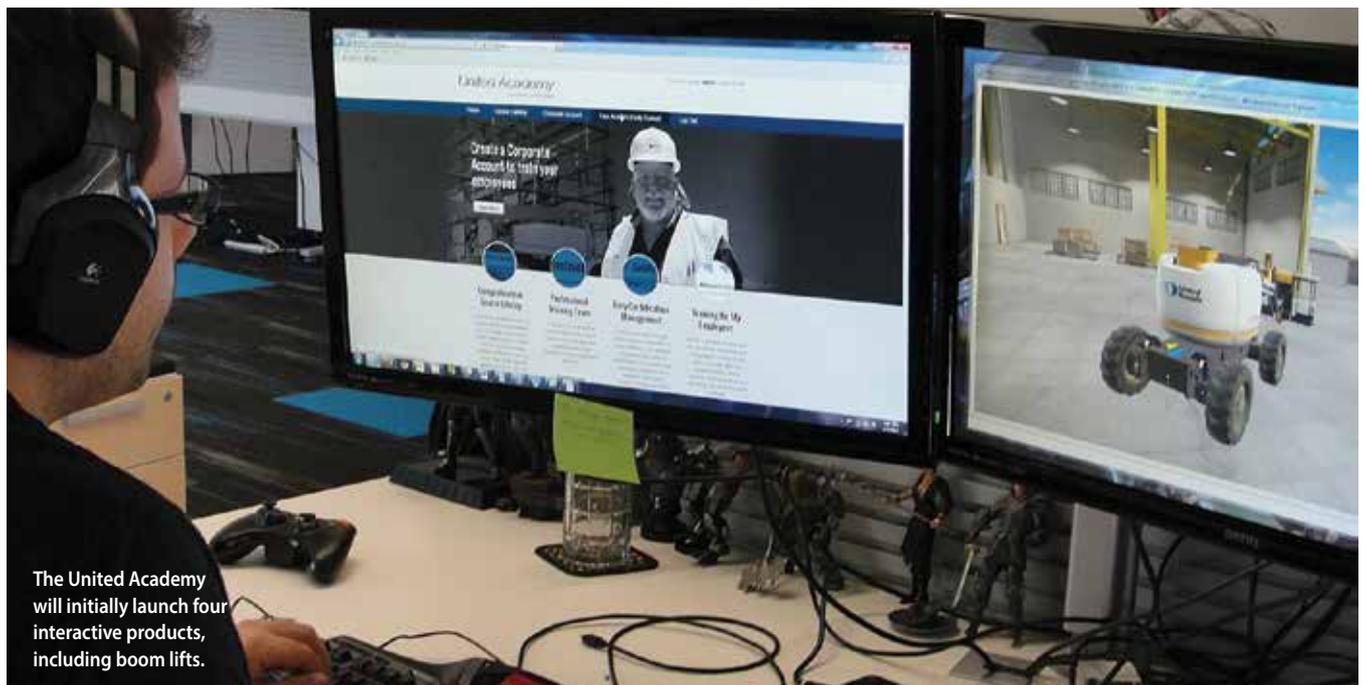
ery methods, ranging from online interactive games to immersive 3D cinematics.

After rigorous vetting, Serious Labs Inc. (SLI), a developer of leading-edge digital training solutions located in Edmonton, Alberta, was selected as one of the key partners in the development process. Jim Colvin, CEO of SLI, was proud that United Rentals chose his company from a competitive field.

"We believe our selection came down to SLI's in-depth experience in a breadth of industries, including architectural visualization, construction and energy, and mineral extraction," Colvin says. "We have deep experience in all forms of digital training product development including 3D eLearning courseware, serious game development, as well as fully immersive simulators for vehicle and equipment operator competency training."

The United Academy will initially launch four interactive products: scissor lifts, boom lifts, telescopic handlers, and straight-mast forklifts, with more to follow. Each product will incorporate engaging games in which students complete multiple levels to pass key learning objectives. The end result is not entertainment; rather, it is designed to drive home key learning objectives that can often be difficult to explain in the classroom or safely demonstrate on equipment.

"Thousands of hours were invested among our instructional design team working closely with United Rentals' subject-matter experts



The United Academy will initially launch four interactive products, including boom lifts.

► Business Issues

to develop the script and storyboards of each curriculum,” says Colvin. “After that, our team of game designers, 3D artists, and software developers took over, molding the vision into a program unlike anything currently available in the aerial equipment market.”

Dorris says his vision was to offer a blended learning model for a new millennium of workers while recognizing the old guard. By teaming with SLI, this vision is becoming a reality. The resulting product is the United Academy.

United Academy

United Academy is a leading-edge training platform that offers a well-rounded, rich eLearning experience that will elevate the level of industry training and set the global standard for safety. Customers will be able to use United Academy to purchase, organize, assign, conduct, and track employee safety training. United Academy’s online toolbox will give customers visibility into every United Rentals course offered in the U.S. and Canada, searchable by location and date range.



The program compresses overall time to train and maximizes learner comprehension.

United Academy is also mobile-enabled. Upon completing the first United Academy class, workers will receive a wallet card with a unique QR code. When scanned with a mobile device, the code will display each class completed by that worker, with associated completion and renewal dates. “The key to the United Academy is the ability for employers, contractors, and individual workers alike to maintain training records through a single electronic database, and to have real-time access to this information on any device connected to the internet,” Dorris says.

Employers and employees will also be able to add outside training courses to this view, including training that was conducted by other providers. That will let them better manage their own training and increase their value in the marketplace. In addition, workers will benefit from the creation of a “training wallet,” so their digital training record can follow from job to job and employer to employer. “You can always have access to show proof of training and what that training covered,” says Dorris. “This will be a major asset to business owners, who will now have better transparency to the training activities and records of employees and contractors.”

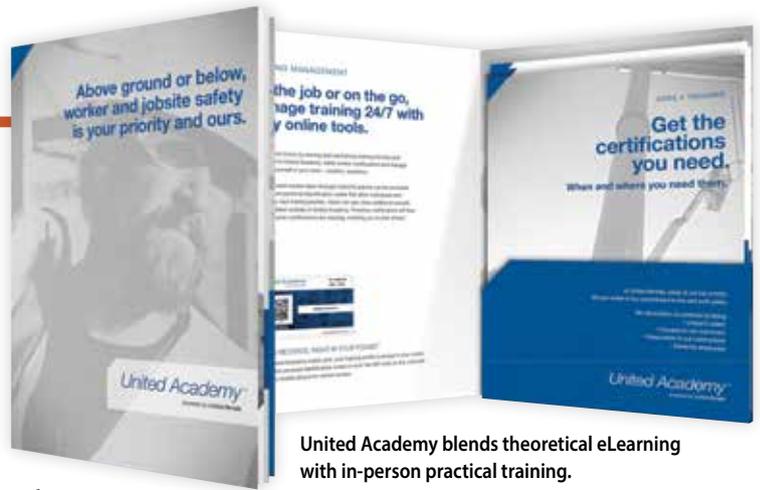
Not all learning experiences are equal

The United Academy’s standardized and comprehensive curriculum is a major advantage to businesses and workers, as digital and classroom learning experiences can vary, depending on the trainer and information provided. By introducing high-quality, rigorous, and easily accessible training developed by an industry leader in aerial and forklift training, United Academy, powered by SLI, will set a new standard for training that maximizes operator skills, and more importantly, safe practices.

“We partnered with United Rentals aerial and forklift experts and used the industry-recognized Ives training curriculum as the blueprint for our instructional design, augmenting it as necessary to best suit an eLearning experience,” Colvin says. “One of the key benefits of this effort was the ability to compress overall time to consume the course while maximizing the competency and comprehension of the learner. Furthermore, because people learn at different paces, the student can set his or her own pace in an environment of their choice.”

Technology offers unique benefits

Aside from training excellence, adding a technology component yields benefits that might not be available otherwise. For example, a properly designed eLearning course can offer invaluable insight into deep learning metrics and analytics. This real-time data shows how well trainees are performing and where the gaps are, allowing continuous improvement to



United Academy blends theoretical eLearning with in-person practical training.

be made before deficiencies in training become safety or performance issues.

United Academy offers a unique approach to blended training by making available theoretical training remotely through eLearning, followed by a condensed and effective face-to-face practical training and evaluation. This allows trainees to complete much of the training online at their convenience while still experiencing the personal touch that the practical portion of the training provides. “We have 876 branches and 12,200 employees, so we are not limited by scale and are excited to offer a truly blended product to a broader market,” Dorris explains. Moreover, having the courseware online 24 hours a day in several languages brings training to those who might not otherwise have the opportunity.

Going live

United Academy and the first four core products are scheduled to launch in the third quarter of 2014. At that time, an expanded team of trainers will be on board to guide individuals and groups through the training, and a dedicated staff will be in place to support a one-stop online system for purchasing, scheduling, and tracking completion. United Academy will launch with more than 50 classroom, online, and blended training offerings. As the program grows, new training topics will be added to create a comprehensive catalog of safety-related training products.

United Rentals recognized that a great program takes time and resources and seems to have made the sizeable investment in both to do just that. “United Rentals is fully committed to building a strong safety culture across the industry through the United Academy, and has made a significant investment to produce a world-class program,” Dorris says. “We are excited about the upcoming launch, and are confident that the United Academy will become a recognized leader in providing the resources individuals want and need to work confidently and safely.” ■