

Interview Report – CE Changes

1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to get feedback from Program Managers and Branch Managers about LPL Financial's Continuing Education program and potential changes. The interviews were conducted from 1/13/2010 – 1/15/2010. Nine subjects participated in a 15-minute phone interview.

Major findings:

- Today, nearly all managers and their advisors complete their CE requirements online. This is contrary to what we had assumed about the selected participants.
 - Regardless of how courses are delivered, the most important factor for managers is online access to up-to-date CE reporting. If the way to best achieve that goal is that all CE course must be taken online, all managers would welcome the change.
 - No one would prefer taking CE course at conferences if it means taking all seven required courses at a single conference.
 - A cost of \$100 for all courses is seen a reasonable and acceptable. Naturally, free is perceived as better.
-

Executive Summary

Table of Contents

Purpose of the study

Participants

Method

Findings and recommendations

Conclusion

Appendices

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to get feedback from Program Managers and Branch Managers about LPL Financial's Continuing Education program and potential changes. The proposed change is to move all coursework online, whereas today there are also conference and designation paths. Though offering flexibility to advisors, it is difficult for LPL's CE department to manage, and requires a lot of manual work in order to monitor advisor CE status and provide CE reporting to managers. The study aimed to find out how advisors get their CE completed today and how they might react if the proposed change was introduced.

It was also anticipated that the interviews would help refine a survey to be sent out to a much wider audience at a later time.

3. Participants

Participants were provided by Compliance Education and selected for those known to have taken CE course at conferences. Nine on the list were available during the allotted time and were interviewed for around 15 minutes. All were Program managers, OSJs or an officer responsible for CE compliance for their company.

4. Method

The participants were contacted and asked for time when they could meet for a 15-minute interview. An Outlook invite was then sent.

Nine questions were prepared, in survey format (see appendix), and read to the participants to answer. However, the participants were also told that they were free to interject comments, whenever they wished. The participant was told to answer the questions, not just for themselves, but also to their knowledge of their advisors preferences and choices.

The style was friendly and informal to put the participants at ease, so that they could feel free to express themselves.

The answers to each of question was then noted and comments, if any, recorded, in a Word document for each participant.

5. Findings and Recommendations

Question 1: How do advisors at your company typically complete their Continuing Education requirements?

Choices: Conferences, online courses, or designation.

Answers	Interpretation	Recommendations
Online	Although, it had been assumed that most advisors in the company took CE online, there were only a qualified few who take CE at conferences. Note: Bankers Bank does its own CE via internal meetings with LPL approval.	Online coursework is overwhelmingly the method used by these managers' advisors today.

Question 2: Among the following conference activities, please rank the importance of each activity for your advisors:

- A. Attending sessions that will help you grow your business
- B. Networking, attending social functions, and as a business get-away

C. Being able to complete your Firm Element and other continuing education requirements

Choices: not important, somewhat important, neutral, very important, extremely important

Answers	Interpretation	Recommendations
A. Improving Business 7 of 9 chose very or extremely important	This is a primary reason for attending conferences	
B. Networking and social activities 5 chose <i>very important</i> .	Depending on their role, networking is very important or not so important to a manager.	
C. CE course completion 6 chose very important 3 chose somewhat or not important	As offered today, being able to complete coursework around other conference activities is seen as a free bonus.	If requirements were changed such that coursework were to consume a majority of the time, only one would still want to do it. See question 5.

Question 3: Have you ever taken any kind of training or courses online?

Choices: Yes, no

Answers	Interpretation	Recommendations
All 9 responded, yes		Drop this question from the wider survey

Question 4: What are some of the reasons you would take a course on-line?

Choices: Takes less time; Can choose when I want to take it; Move at my own pace

Answers	Interpretation	Recommendations
8 selected every reason 1 chose only "Can choose when to take it."	These are the obvious reasons why online courses are popular.	Keep the question, but add a 4th choice, "saves money" in order to draw out whether the cost of conferences are perceived to be part of CE cost there.

Question 5: Which way would you prefer to complete your Firm Element requirements?

Choices: a. Do the coursework on-line (anticipated cost for all courses will be less than \$100). b. Complete all courses at a single conference, even though the seven required sessions would take up a majority of your conference time.

Answers	Interpretation	Recommendations
8 chose a. 1 chose b.	Given this kind of choice, most advisors would never want to give up all the other benefits of a conference. The single holdout thought online courses were just too boring.	If this is a choice that LPL's CE is considering, taking all CE online is the solution that would be acceptable by the managers.

Question 6: If you are supervising the compliance of all licensed individuals in your branch, please rate the value of the following.

- A. One standard method for CE requirement completion and reporting
- B. Multiple diverse methods for CE requirements completion and reporting

Choices: not important, somewhat important, neutral, very important, extremely important

Answers	Interpretation	Recommendations
<i>A. Standard Method</i> Mixed results	This question really contains two different questions: one about completion one about reporting. Those who rate this highly were addressing reports.	Breakout the two questions and reposition for the survey.
<i>B. Multiple Methods</i> Mixed results	This question really contains two different questions: one about completion one about reporting. Those who rate this highly were addressing completion.	Breakout the two questions and reposition for the survey.

Question 7: What reasons could you share for not utilizing LPL Financials on-line courses offering? Select all that apply.

Choices: Prefer live presentation of material; Cost; Difficult to schedule time; Not comfortable with on-line courses; Was not aware that LPL Financial offers CE courses online

Answers	Interpretation	Recommendations
4 selected <i>Cost;</i> 3 <i>Live presentation...</i> and 1 <i>difficult to schedule time</i>	Cost was not strongly weighted in any but one participant's tone. Most said yes, as "I guess I'd prefer it more if it were free". Some people have a learning style that works better with live presentation. Live presentation would be appreciated if available. But not a barrier if not available.	Cost is not a barrier to a productive advisor. The anticipated cost, even less so.

Question 8: Which of the following do you use to track current CE requirements?
CE Track Status tool on Resource Center; or Rep Report in BranchNet

Answers	Interpretation	Recommendations
9 used Rep Report 2 also used the CE Track Status Tool	A few of the participants had no knowledge of the CE Track Status tool. But those who knew of it said that it is not suitable for managers because it can only report on one rep at a time. This choice to comment on the Rep Report was not in the original survey, but was added after the first interview, when the participant mentioned it.	Lots of complaints about the rep tool not being up-to-date and being difficult to use. However, this was the most significant area of opportunity for moving courses online. There was wide agreement that “If the tool was easy to use and up-to-date, having for one source monitoring of rep CE status there would be more than worth giving up other options.”

Question 9: How often do you track your current CE requirements?

- a. Never
- b. Before LPL Financial conferences
- c. 1 to 2 times a year
- d. More than twice a year

Answers	Interpretation	Recommendations
4 chose 1-2 times/year 4 chose More than twice/year 1 chose never	Those who chose <i>more than twice/year</i> indicated that it at the end of the year, More often when deadline approaches: monthly and then weekly. The manager who chose never complained that she ran her own reports because she could no longer configure reports that she wanted on the Reg Report tool.	Again, single source, configurable, up-to-date reporting is the best way to “sale” a move to making online coursework the exclusive method..

Question 10: The actual question about incentives wasn’t productive. This field was used, instead, to write down any further thoughts participants had about Continuing Education.

6. Discussion

Everything went well. There was only one no-show at the scheduled time.

It is to be noted that the majority of participants were happy they were asked and volunteered to be available for input whenever requested.

Next steps are to “tweak” the survey for a wider audience. The interview feedback is what we needed to modify the survey questions to be more appropriate to the survey’s goals and for going out to a wider audience.

7. Appendices

- All nine surveys (see accompanying zip file CE Surveys.zip)