

Building an online university that actually moves revenue.



An online university should do more than collect registrations.

It should change how people understand a problem, give them confidence in a solution, and create a clear path from learning to action.

During my time at an animal health therapeutics company, I built an education program around that principle. We were not trying to produce another webinar series. We were building an owned audience in a clinical market where trust determines adoption.

The product was a modality.

The real work was helping veterinary professionals understand when it mattered, how to use it, what to expect, and where it fit within the care they already provided.

Education drove those decisions. Advertising supported them.

That distinction matters.

Why does education outperform advertising in a credentialed market?

Education outperforms advertising when the audience is trained to question vendor claims and evaluate evidence for itself.

Veterinarians, technicians, rehabilitation practitioners, and other clinical buyers are not passive consumers of marketing. They are trained to assess information. They want to understand the mechanism, the application, the limitations, and the experience of people they respect.

A company describing its own product begins with a credibility discount.

A veterinarian describing what they observed in practice begins somewhere else entirely.

That is not a trick. It only works when the education is genuinely useful and the claims are responsibly presented. This audience detects a sales pitch quickly. If the session feels like a product demonstration wearing a lecture's clothes, they do not return.

The most effective structure was simple:

- The expert taught.
- The company organized.
- The audience decided.

We stayed out of the center of the frame.

The expert's experience created the credibility. The program created the consistency. The product benefited because it was being understood in a meaningful context rather than interrupted into someone's day.

A doctor explaining what changed in a practice is worth more than a company repeating what it wants the market to believe.

That was the operating premise.

What makes an online university different from a webinar series?

An online university has a curriculum, a point of view, and a reason for people to come back.

A webinar series has a calendar.

When I built the program, we started with the questions the audience was already asking. Not the questions the company wanted to answer. The questions coming from practitioners, technicians, distributors, and prospective users.

Those questions helped us organize the curriculum into levels:

1. **Foundational education:** What is the modality? Where does it fit? What should a practitioner understand before using it?
2. **Practical application:** How does it work in a real clinical setting? What decisions affect the experience?
3. **Advanced practice:** What patterns emerge with repeated use? Where are the limitations? How does an experienced practitioner adapt?

Each session had a job.

One introduced a concept. The next made it practical. A later session addressed complexity or nuance. The calendar gave people a reason to continue learning rather than treating each event as a standalone campaign.

Predictability mattered, too.

A consistent monthly rhythm was more valuable than occasional large events. People could plan around it. The internal team could produce it. The audience knew when to return.

We also made decisions about what not to include.

Anything that was primarily a product demo was cut. Anything that existed only to repeat a claim was cut. Anything that could not teach the audience something useful, whether or not they bought from us, did not belong in the curriculum.

The standard was straightforward:

Would this session still be valuable if the attendee never became a customer?

If the answer was no, it needed to be rebuilt.



How do you choose the right expert?

Choose the expert the audience would seek out without the company's involvement.

That usually means a veterinarian, specialist, rehabilitation practitioner, or researcher with direct experience and a clear ability to teach.

Credentials matter. So does communication. A respected expert who cannot make the topic practical will not carry the program. A compelling speaker without clinical authority will not carry the trust.

The briefing process was important.

We explained the audience, the purpose of the session, the level of knowledge in the room, and the questions we wanted to help answer. We did not hand the expert a script and ask them to repeat company language.

We asked them to teach from experience.

They could describe what worked. They could describe what did not. They could explain uncertainty. They could identify limitations and mixed results.

Those were often the most valuable moments in the program.

A perfect endorsement sounds purchased. An honest account sounds useful.

Credibility compounds over time. One carefully scripted statement can spend it all at once.

The company's role was to make the expert successful without making the expert sound like the company.

That required restraint.

How can every education session generate both learning and pipeline?

Every session should earn twice: once through education, and again through the insight it creates for the business.

The first return is obvious. Someone learns something useful.

The second comes from understanding who attended, what they cared about, and what they were ready to explore next.

We tracked:

- Registration source
- Professional role
- Practice or organization type
- Attendance
- Questions asked
- Content viewed afterward
- Follow-up activity
- Requests for additional information
- Conversations with sales

The questions were particularly valuable.

Someone asking about implementation has a different level of intent from someone asking what the modality is. Someone asking about outcomes, training, or practice integration is giving the team useful context for the next conversation.

The sales team should not receive a list of names and a generic instruction to follow up.

They should receive context.

What did the person attend? What did they ask? Which problem were they trying to solve? What material did they return to?

That changes the opening conversation. It is no longer cold outreach. It begins from a shared frame.

The education has done some of the work already.

Most companies forget this part. They run the session, send a thank-you email, and let the audience disperse.

That is not a funnel. It is an event.

Why does recurring education create a stronger owned audience?

Recurring education creates familiarity, and familiarity shortens the next decision.

A person may not be ready to adopt a product after one session. They may need to hear the concept explained by another expert. They may need to see how it applies in a different clinical situation. They may need time to discuss it with a colleague.

A useful program gives them a reason to return.

Each return creates another exposure to the product without forcing the product into the conversation. That is the difference between persistent education and repetitive promotion.

The habits that protected retention were practical:

- A consistent publishing schedule
- Recordings available after live sessions
- A searchable archive
- Continuing-education credit where available
- Questions answered in public sessions
- Follow-up resources matched to the topic
- A mailing list used to educate, not hard-sell

The audience should feel that each message has earned its place in their inbox.

If every email becomes a sales push, the list loses trust. If every session remains useful, the audience becomes an asset the company does not have to buy again every month.

Social reach can fluctuate. Paid acquisition can become expensive. Competitors can imitate a campaign.

They cannot quickly replicate a trusted education community built over time.

How should you measure an online university?

Measure the program as a revenue system, not an attendance system.

Attendance is useful. It is not the point.

The reporting layer I would establish includes:

- **Registration-to-attendance rate**, Whether the topic and invitation created enough commitment
- **Attendee-to-inquiry rate**, Whether the session led people to seek more information
- **Inquiry-to-opportunity rate**, Whether interest became a qualified commercial conversation
- **Sourced revenue**: Revenue that began with the program
- **Influenced revenue**: Revenue where the program contributed to the decision
- **Repeat attendance rate**, Whether the audience is building a habit
- **Revenue per attendee over time**, Whether the value of the audience is increasing

The report should connect the education platform to the customer relationship management system. It should show the source, the engagement, the handoff, and the outcome.

A simple monthly view is enough to begin:

1. What did we publish?
2. Who attended?
3. What did they ask?
4. Which leads became opportunities?
5. Which opportunities became revenue?
6. What should we teach next?

The numbers should clarify decisions. They should not decorate a dashboard.

What does it take to keep the program running?

A durable program needs one accountable owner.

Not a committee. Not a loose collection of interested people.

That owner coordinates the editorial calendar, expert relationships, production schedule, registration experience, follow-up, reporting, and sales alignment.

The operating model also needs:

- A monthly or twice-monthly cadence
- One foundational session in production while another is being promoted
- A reliable recording and editing process
- A shared question bank from marketing, sales, and customer conversations
- A clear expert briefing document
- A follow-up sequence for each session
- A quarterly review of topics, attendance, pipeline, and revenue

The initial enthusiasm will fade. That is normal.

The program survives when the work becomes operational rather than inspirational.

You do not need a constant stream of large events. You need a dependable rhythm, a useful curriculum, and enough discipline to keep the audience's trust.



What should the company's role be?

The company should make the education possible without making itself the subject.

That means finding the right experts. Building the curriculum. Capturing the questions. Routing the leads. Equipping sales. Reviewing the numbers. Improving the next session.

It means knowing when to speak and when to step aside.

When the audience trusts the teacher, understands the application, and returns for the next lesson, the product earns a better position in the decision.

Not because it interrupted the conversation.

Because it belonged in it.

An online university is not a content project. It is a commercial system built on credibility.

The education is the marketing.

The product should never need to interrupt.