

# ARMY TRAINING NETWORK:

## One Source for Army Solutions

By Cassandra Yardeni

**C**amouflaged Soldiers on the front lines make up the face of the Army, but behind them are the thousands of trainers who dedicate their time and resources to educate and ready the troops, working together to lead Army Strong. Until recently, trainers relied on manuals, like FM 7-0, Training for Full Spectrum Operations, last updated December 2008, and FM 7-1, Battle-Focused Training, last updated September 2003, as primary sources for procedures and training solutions. What they couldn't find in the manuals, they had to seek online or solicit from fellow NCOs. However, a recent undertaking by Army officials has combined these resources with the interactivity and accessibility of the Internet, resulting in a one-stop online destination for trainers, training management and Soldiers alike.

### Roots of ATN

Launched in April 2009, the Army Training Network is a Web site that blends together doctrine, how-to procedures, training products, training solutions and collaboration tools for the training community — all accessible from one digital platform.

“The genesis [of ATN] dates back to 2006, when we were told to re-write FM 7-0,” said Jimmy Davis, team leader for FM 7-0 and the Army Training Network at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. “We made the decision to make it online to keep up with the changes in the Army. Eventually it grew to the idea of providing additional content for how-tos and products for the trainers to have somewhere to go for solutions.”

“It pulls together in a single place many of the great training resources available on the Web. It is the only [source] Soldiers can go to get that updated training knowledge [on one platform],” said William Brosnan, deputy team leader of FM 7-0 and the ATN team.

After years of development, the team unveiled the ATN Web site, at <https://atn.army.mil>, which is available only to those with Army Knowledge Online access or a Common Access Card. Conceived out of the need to accommodate the ever-evolving Army, a primary goal of the ATN staff is to update the site daily to reflect trainers' feedback, innovative solutions and a constant stream of new information.

ATN is managed by a group of Army contractors and civilians, who, during the site's infancy, were tasked with solving two principal challenges. “The first was to write content that updated and revised FM 7-1 from the 2003 version,” Brosnan explained. “The second and

concurrent challenge was to find a way to build a Web site that was intuitive and easy to navigate.”

The primary purpose of the new Army Capstone Concept, unveiled in December 2009, is to “lead force development and employment by establishing a common framework to think about future Army operations; place modernization decisions in a broader context of future armed conflict; establish a conceptual foundation for subordinate concepts; guide experimentation in Army operations and capabilities; and guide capability development,” according to U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command officials. ATN supports this initiative to “Stay Army Strong” because training will be the foundation of the Army's future success as it continues to prepare for unknown challenges.

“Although the Army must continue to develop technology to meet future challenges, we must continue to emphasize the integration of technology into capable formations commanded by innovative leaders who are comfortable operating under conditions of ambiguity,” states the 2009 Army Capstone Concept. “To maximize the potential of technological developments, we must conscientiously evolve and adapt capabilities.”

Through synergy between both Army leaders and the ATN team, the ATN has developed into “A Web-based resource that is as agile and adaptable as our Army ties directly into keeping it strong now and in the future,” Brosnan said.

### The right look

Creating the same functionality and seamless navigation that are key components to any successful Web site, the ATN team worked to develop a product that is easy-to-use as it is useful, Davis said.

The theme and colors of the ATN are consistent with those of other Army Web sites. It also features several drop-down menus and a search bar for streamlined navigation. In addition, the home page identifies “What's Hot” on the site, with a list of the 15 most viewed products, pages and most popular downloads. Training videos are looped on the homepage and the most recent posts on the Training Bulletin Board are also featured. Because many users visit the site on a daily

basis, the “What’s Hot” list is constantly updated, Davis said.

“For me, the best feature is ‘What’s Hot,’ because it shows you the newest stuff that’s being posted out there and I don’t have to search for it,” said civilian contractor James Woods, a Virtual Battle Space II instructor and ATN user based out of Fort Carson, Colo.

### Features and faculties

ATN offers a number of unit-developed and -vetted training management products to download, view and utilize – from “driver’s training to cultural awareness,” according to Brosnan. Products are divided into categories that include training management, training enablers, collective training and leader development. Training briefs and calendars, deployment training and requirements, the military decision-making process, training standard operation procedures, self-development handbooks and collective training exercises are among the many products from which to choose. ATN users are encouraged to rate the products they’ve used and to submit their own. Site content is largely dependent on feedback from ATN users, according to Davis, and the ATN team constantly monitors suggestions and popularity statistics for ideas on what content to add. As operational security is a primary concern for the ATN team, products are pre-screened for potentially sensitive material, Brosnan said.

*“ATN is the only source Soldiers can go to get updated training knowledge on one platform.” – William Brosnan, ATN deputy team leader*

“If a unit leader has used the product successfully, we’ll post it and share it with the Army,” Brosnan said. “We don’t make the decision of whether the product is good or bad — only that it has been used in the field — successfully by the unit or Soldier submitting it.”

As with most of Army training, success often comes from lessons learned and shared. ATN makes diffusion and sharing of information particularly convenient through its training solutions database. According to the Web site, training solutions are “initiatives taken by units or individuals to offset training challenges, or situations that hinder training to proficiency.” The database serves as resource for units and Soldiers to discuss their training challenges and to communicate how they overcame them through resourcefulness and innovative leadership, according to the Army’s Plan/Prepare/Execute/Assess training model. Seven training solutions were available on the ATN as of February, pertaining to biometrics, focused languages, adaptive leadership and pre-deployment in a time-constrained environment.

According to Brosnan, the training solutions are built by Soldiers and leaders in the field. “We have conducted many interviews across the Army to understand the kinds of training challenges our units and Soldiers encounter and how they solved those issues,” he said. “We then format the solution with the help of the submitter and link it to helpful resources when possible.”

Soldier and trainer feedback is not only useful for the ATN team, but also for trainers to improve their lessons and keep their fingers on the pulse of the battlefield. Because Soldiers can log on and rate each product, trainers like Col. Francisco Espailat, project manager of the Combined Arms Tactical Trainers based

in Orlando, Fla., find the ATN “very promising technology.” “It’s really very powerful for us to get that specific feedback from the Soldiers. The site allows us to get direct, unfiltered feedback on whether the [products] are working for them,” said Espailat, who visits the site daily.

The ATN team has remodeled and renamed the FM 7-1 manual as the Training Management How-To section of the site. “ATN also contains links that allow users to seamlessly move between the doctrine of FM 7-0, the TMHT and other pertinent data, providing the user the ability to get to more information and knowledge,” the Web site says.

Additionally, there are links to the Digital Training Management System, as well as tutorials to help guide ATN users to their unit Mission Essential Task Lists, Task Groups and Collective Tasks. As DTMS builds and expands its features and capabilities, ATN will reflect those changes to keep users synchronized with the most current procedures.

The cornerstone of the ATN’s interactive experience lies within the ATN collaboration feature, where users can access the ATN blog and forum, “Ask a Trainer” section and a list of Army knowledge center links, TRADOC schools and centers and training publications and resources.

Under the “Ask a Trainer” section, users are encouraged to submit their questions about Army doctrine and training methods. Feedback can range from comments on contents to suggestions on the look and feel of the site. The ATN team strives to provide an “individual and specific” answer within three working days, Brosnan said. “We either answer the questions directly, or we find the person who [is qualified] to answer the question,” he explained.

### Close contact

Each month, ATN delivers a newsletter to ATN users via e-mail. The newsletter keeps readers informed about the most recent changes on the site, plans for the future and instructions on joining the ATN forum. The February newsletter announced the additions of interactive Training Guidance and Combined Arms Training Strategy products and also identified the five most popular product downloads for January.

In keeping with the ever-changing Army, the ATN expects current and future technologies to provide a better and more robust training product for years to come. The success of the site and of the Army’s trainers is heavily reliant upon users’ contributions; the ATN team stresses that the site is made to serve Soldiers first and foremost. “ATN is only as good as our leaders, training managers and Soldiers make it,” Brosnan said. “The possibilities are limitless.” 

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