

The success of any company and its initiatives is only as good as its people. And, as an employer that strives to be innovative in all areas of the business, the onboarding process is the first step in demonstrating leadership to new employees.

Here at BrightEdge, we put a lot of planning into new hires. As with any growing Silicon Valley startup, the competition is high and the pace is fast. That's why our onboarding process ensures new staff are set up for success in a repeatable and scalable way.

The faster a new hire feels welcomed and prepared for the job, the faster this person will be able to contribute to the company's success. It makes good sense for companies; onboarding using the "sink-or-swim" method where staff struggles to figure out what's expected will eventually negatively impact return.

During the first year of our founding in 2007, BrightEdge management discovered that new employees were far more productive and successful when thoroughly trained in search engine optimization (SEO) as well as in our SaaS platform.

As we grew to become a leading enterprise content marketing and SEO platform, BrightEdge also honed a distinct corporate culture. The onboarding program we developed has proven key to creating a common corporate culture among people who come not only from different professions, but also from different countries around the world.

Our onboarding and training program is now a standard part of integrating new hires into the BrightEdge culture.

BrightEdge employs approximately 300 people globally.

This report summarizes the lessons we've learned from refining the BrightEdge training and onboarding program over the past several years. The goal is to help you build an informed, integrated, and highly motivated staff to put your firm on a fast growth trajectory.

What Is the BrightEdge Onboarding and Training Program?

Our onboarding and training program is an intensive one-week "class" designed to transmit essential company and SEO industry knowledge to new employees, while immersing them in BrightEdge's values and generating enthusiasm for our mission.

BrightEdge employees almost universally have a college education, and many have advanced degrees. New employees represent a variety of professions, including engineers, salespeople, accountants, and SEOs.



As BrightEdge has grown internationally, an increasing percentage of our new employees are from outside the U.S., and now represent a dozen countries, including UK, Japan, France, Australia, India, China and Singapore.

In addition to the one-week course, the program continues in the office to enhance the immersion in the BrightEdge culture. A BrightEdge HR staffer details the [Dos and Don'ts](#) in this blog post



How Does the BrightEdge Training Program Work?



In the past year alone, BrightEdge held 20 onboarding classes and trained about 150 new employees. We devote an entire week to onboarding and training new employees-to-be at BrightEdge global headquarters in San Mateo.

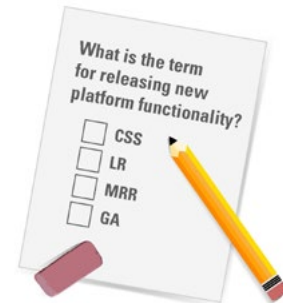
This week of training includes presentations and exercises relevant to our business. Aside from the instructor, speakers may include more than a dozen representatives from different BrightEdge departments.

A hallmark of the process is a series of 15 low-stakes quizzes given throughout the week that test student retention and reinforce key concepts. The quizzes are open-book, students grade their own performance, and scores are not recorded. At the end of the week, the students then take three certification tests to demonstrate their knowledge of our company and software platforms, as well as of the SEO industry as a whole.

A high percentage of the questions on the certification tests will have appeared on the quizzes the students took earlier in the week, although many questions will likely have been re-worded to gauge comprehension.

At BrightEdge, one full-time staff member is devoted to our onboarding and training program. Ideally, a person on this position at your place of business would be an expert in the subject matter, and also possess the classic qualities of a good teacher – including being able to patiently explain complex topics in a way that is easily understood.

The instructor should also be an evangelist for the company who instills enthusiasm among the new employees. And finally, in a company that is growing globally, this person must be able to work effectively with people from other cultures and explain concepts in a way that is understandable to people who may have grown up speaking Mandarin, Hindi or French (as your global needs dictate).



7 Dos and Don'ts of an Employee Onboarding Process

As mentioned previously, the onboarding doesn't stop at the weeklong training. New hires are embedded in the company further so they can hit the ground running. So what does it take to get your new hires on board and making an impact as soon as possible? Check out the following "dos and don'ts" of a killer onboarding process.

1. Don't Skimp on Time Invested for Onboarding

Here at BrightEdge, we have a 4- to 6-week onboarding process whereby new hires get to know the company inside and out, covering every important aspect of the business, so they can absorb years' worth of history, knowledge and culture. By the time our new hires are through, they really have a clear understanding of the BrightEdge vision.

2. Don't Make Onboarding Just an HR Function

In a startup environment, everyone rolls up his or her sleeves to get the job done. This doesn't stop during the onboarding process. At BrightEdge, we have an approach to onboarding that ensures new hires meet with key staff across departments and teams. Each team is responsible for a facet of the new hire's onboarding process relative to their team's mission.

3. Do Ensure New Hires "Get" the Strategic Vision of the Company

This includes understanding the company history – where it came from and how it evolved – to an understanding of where it is today, and where it will be in the future. We try to pair the new hire up with a founder or key executive who has been with the company for a significant amount of time for this portion, as those people are usually the closest to the company story and vision.

Taking this a step further, and depending on the team the new hire is on, getting this person up to speed with the big picture of the department or team goals is crucial, too.

For example, a new hire in marketing will need to know what the company's marketing goals and plans are from the top down so he or she will understand how their role will directly impact the goal.

4. Do Make Sure New Hires Know the Culture

One of the most challenging parts of entering into a new environment is understanding the subtleties of the culture, how people work, and who to turn to if a person needs something related to their project.

A new hire may have an idea of a functional area of a business, like HR for example, but how those functions are carried out is different at every company. At BrightEdge, for example, we're an [SEO and content company](#), and even when seasoned marketers join our team, they appreciate knowing the BrightEdge approach to SEO and content performance marketing.

For this piece, we like to pair the new hire up with the vice president of operations – someone who knows the inner workings of the day-to-day – to give the new hire the rundown on how to get things done, and what to watch for.

5. Don't Forget to Teach about Products and Services

A new hire can't expect to be a contributing member at full capacity unless he or she fully understands the products or services a company provides. And it's not about just learning as they go; new hires should get a thoughtful, thorough introduction into the business's bread and butter, and what goes into making it successful.

6. Do Familiarize the New Hire with the Website

One of the key areas that companies may forget to onboard a new hire in is the website. Today, the website at a company is the hub and culmination of many teams, departments and goals. And, because everyone surely has a stake in the website – the face of the brand online – a new hire will want to know the goals of the site, how their team interacts with it, and how to make important updates as needed.

Check out the BrightEdge website for new hire opportunities <http://www.brightedge.com/seo-careers>

7. Do Cross-Train for Teams That Impact One Another

Some teams just naturally have a symbiotic relationship within a company – take sales and marketing, for example. You can bet that staff from each one of those teams will inform and support one another's strategy. Here at BrightEdge, we like to "buddy up" new hires with crucial contacts at teams that would impact that new hire's role for cross-training and collaboration opportunities.

8 Steps to a Successful Training Program

Successful training and onboarding is a challenge, in addition to the 7 Dos and Don'ts above, the following 8 steps are also recommended.

1. Lock in Management Team Support

A thorough and effective onboarding process is expensive. At BrightEdge, our management team determined long ago that a good onboarding program was key to preparing new employees for success. That said, in a fast-growing organization there is always the temptation to take a new hire and throw her immediately into the fray without onboarding.

Your management team needs to really believe in the efficacy of the onboarding program to make it work. And if your managers are also part of the program, they will have to consistently plan around meetings, conference calls and emergencies to address every class of new employees for half an hour. That takes discipline and a firm commitment to the onboarding process.



2. Find the Right Instructor

Find someone who is knowledgeable about the subject matter and who enjoys teaching. At BrightEdge, the instructor also handles all the administrative details associated with the training program. Some subject matter experts would find this tedious, so you need to find someone who is very hands-on, or find a way to delegate the nitty-gritty administrative work to a support person.

Also, if your company is growing rapidly, the instructor's position is probably a full-time job. This is certainly true if your industry, company and product set changes rapidly, because the instructor will need to constantly update course content, including quizzes and certification tests.

3. Constantly Optimize the Curriculum

At BrightEdge, we give every class member an evaluation form soliciting suggestions for improving the class, and we pay close attention to the feedback we receive. (Our new employees have suggested a number of important innovations in the class.) As a higher percentage of our employees come from outside the U.S., we have also changed the course material so that it is more globally representative.

If yours is a fast-moving industry, the onboarding instructor needs to have an information source in each major department that he or she can turn to for updates on policies and procedures.

4. Find the Right Mix of Information and Evangelism

Our mix is probably in the neighborhood of 90 percent information and 10 percent evangelism for the brand. At BrightEdge we tend to be quite open about the evangelism. New employees expect to be evangelized and, we would argue, they should be if they are to become enthusiastic contributors to the company's mission. The onboarding process is not just about information transfer, it's also about inculcating your company's values in your newest employees and ensuring continuity between your company's past and its future.

5. Select a Designated Venue with a Solid Audio-Visual System

Space is usually at a premium in a fast-growing company, and we've found that not having a designated class venue adds enormously to the difficulty of planning a new class. It is far simpler and more efficient to consistently reserve the same room for the onboarding class. We also discovered that it can be quite expensive to rent a conference room with AV equipment off-site.

6. Develop Course Content

While ours has grown organically over time, and now includes about 600 PowerPoint slides and a 30-page Word document, a training class will require an investment of time and in-house expertise to develop the materials required to start. If your industry and product change rapidly, you should budget ample time between classes to update class content.

7. Select Speakers from within Your Company

From our experience, we find it's best to pick speakers who have insight into your company, its operations and your market. We have settled on 30 minutes as the standard time for company speakers to address the class.

Effective speakers may or may not be managers; often non-managers have valuable insight into how things actually work, and new employees appreciate the unfiltered perspective of someone who is on the frontlines. Most importantly, prospective speakers should want to participate. If the speakers want to be there, their enthusiasm will be infectious.

8. Develop a Reliable Testing Methodology

The no-stakes quizzes work well because students are asked to recall information shortly after being exposed to it for the first time. Students also grade their own quizzes and keep them to study at night. Originally all testing was done on paper, but we have now transferred two of the final three Certification tests to an online module we developed from Drupal templates.



Onboarding and Training Checklist

Now that you have the dos and don'ts of an onboarding program and the ways to effectively create a training course, here are a few additional items to add to your checklist.

Main Tools for Training:

- High-quality audio-visual equipment with support available on premises. Equipment breakdowns test the patience of even the most enthusiastic new employees, so invest in good equipment. And you want to have support close at hand when breakdowns do occur.
- A binder with preprinted class materials. We print class materials and assemble them into a loose-leaf binder, which is issued to each student. Although we've considered moving to a paperless environment, we find that many students like being able to write notes in their binder. Plan on budgeting at least \$50 per student for materials.
- A training account, as appropriate for tech companies, for the onboarding class. As a software firm, we want our employees to have a basic working familiarity with our product, and a training account can be a valuable teaching aid. Maintaining the training account and testing module mentioned below are probably going to be a low priority for the engineering department, so it is advisable to have someone in engineering or product management assigned as a liaison should problems arise with the training account.
- An online testing module. This is for instant scoring and reporting of test results.



Onboarding Pitfalls to Avoid

- Don't distract new employees with work during onboarding week. This is especially a problem if the employee started working before the week of onboarding. We structure a very intense onboarding process and have found that employees who are given extra work during that week tend not to perform as well on the certification tests as they would if they were allowed to concentrate 100 percent on the onboarding.
- Don't make course material too difficult. SEO can be a fairly complicated subject. We only teach the fundamentals of SEO because many of our new employees are encountering the topic for the first time. Although the course may occasionally be boring to students who are knowledgeable about SEO or who have an engineering background, those students will still learn critical information about our company, our values, our platform, and our audience.
- Don't forget to create a repeatable process for training materials. With even the best printing vendor, you have to check materials as soon as they arrive for mistakes, and always allow an extra day or two to reprint should mistakes occur.

Training and Onboarding Pays Dividends

Although taking the time to ramp up an employee does mean a short-term hit on productivity for those involved in the onboarding process, it's a win-win for all parties. The sooner new hires are ramped up, the sooner they'll be productive. And, this benefits new employees who want to prove that they can be a productive members of the team.

With so much to accomplish, and the race against time to build products and acquire customers, thoughtful onboarding ensures new hires aren't just figuring stuff out on their own.

If you design your onboarding program properly, you can increase employee productivity and boost your company's growth. Think of onboarding as an investment in your company's future – one that will pay many dividends in the years to come.

BrightEdge Marketing Elevation Series

BrightEdge is committed to the success of our customers and sharing insights across the wider digital community. As part of our continued investment in peer-to-peer collaboration we have created the following practical and insightful white papers to support wider community based marketing success. They are available for downloading from our resources center:

1. 7 Effective Ways to Elevate Your Email Marketing Program
2. How to Plan, Develop, Execute and Track an Integrated Marketing Campaign
3. Dashboards & Management Marketing Success
4. Enlightened Onboarding and Training Best Practices
5. SEO for Site Migration
6. Display Retargeting and Retargeting Creative

Learn more at <http://www.brightedge.com/resources/whitepapers>

If you would like to learn more about how large and small brands are using BrightEdge for integrated content marketing and SEO success, you can [contact us](#) or [request a demo](#).

About BrightEdge

BrightEdge is the essential content marketing platform for modern businesses. It transforms online content into tangible business results such as engagement, traffic, and revenue. BrightEdge's S3 platform is powered by a sophisticated big data analysis engine and is the only company capable of Web-wide, real-time measurement of content engagement across all digital channels, including search, social and mobile. BrightEdge has 1,000+ global customers and serves over 8500 brands include leaders like 3M, Microsoft, Netflix and Nike. The company is based in San Mateo, CA with offices in New York City, Chicago, Seattle, London, and Tokyo.



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