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## Bay Area online learning companies learn a lesson in surging demand

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Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, calls from schools, school districts and universities are ringing off the hook for a number of online learning companies.

Coursera and IXL Learning are quickly becoming fast learners in dealing with a surge in demand for their online learning tools and coursework following widespread closures of schools and universities as a result of COVID-19.

Demand began soaring last week after Coursera offered universities impacted by COVID-19 free access to its Coursera for Campus, a third-party course catalogue with curriculum provided by universities and industry partners. Under its COVID-19-related free offering, universities can access Coursera for Campus until July 31 and students through Sept. 30, providing they signed up before July 31.

"In the past eight days, we've had 9,000 institutions make inquiries about Coursera for Campus turnkey solutions, compared to 10 to 25 a week in the past," said Jeff Maggioncalda, CEO of Mountain View-based Coursera, which offers a range of courses for college students and business professionals seeking certifications.

Coursera for Campus also allows teachers and professors, schools and school districts, as well as universities to upload their own learning content for use by their designated users who can access the lessons for free. The number of free daily registrations has soared 300% to 400% over the daily worldwide average in the past week or so, Maggioncalda said.

Prior to COVID-19 emerging near the start of the year, 50% of the Coursera for Campus users were accessing the paid turnkey solutions and the other half the free private content. Since the acceleration of the deadly pandemic and resulting classroom closures, 98% of Coursera's business comes from users turning to its turnkey solutions, Maggioncalda said.

"Universities are scrambling with how do I keep up with teaching these students from home," Maggioncalda said in explaining the sudden shift from a 50-50 split. "They are using it like a textbook or courseware."

### Educational evolution

A number of university professors have moved their lectures online via video conferencing leading some online education evangelists to predict a larger shift toward an online learning model for the entire course curriculum as professors become more familiar and comfortable with this form of teaching.

"I expect that many professors who had a bias toward online learning will see how effective this is ... This will accelerate the existing trend toward online learning," Maggioncalda predicted.

Jennifer Gu, chief operating officer of San Mateo-based IXL Learning, agrees COVID-19 and the classroom shutdowns may be a catalyst in moving the education industry forward to a faster adoption of online learning.

"For me, the little silver lining from COVID-19 is the realization that online technology can be used and successfully integrated into traditional teaching," Gu said. "It will be a mindshift for some teachers and administrators."

### Online learning for kindergarten to 12th grade

After COVID-19 struck and roughly 75% of U.S. schools began announcing closures, IXL has seen a three-fold increase in new customer inquiries and existing customers asking for tech support in moving their IXL online learning from the traditional classroom setting into a home environment, Gu said.

IXL offers online curriculum for math, language arts, social studies, science and first-level Spanish for K-12 grades. It has customers in 50 states and over 109 countries.



COURTESY PHOTO  
Jeff Maggioncalda is the CEO of Coursera.

"We are super busy and working around the clock to pump out more resources for teachers," Gu said. "Multiple teams across the company, including product, engineering, marketing, professional development, and more are working together and working weekends and longer hours to create and distribute resources, such as useful guides, informative emails and more."

She also noted IXL's customers are also under substantial pressure to transition to online learning.

"Our existing customers are having to transition to home distance learning and are asking how to make it work in two days. This is an unprecedented need and little time for them to prepare," Gu said.

The area that is in the highest demand has been creating resources for teachers who need a model of how to facilitate and monitor learning from a far, Gu said, adding that her company is also busy providing guides on how to implement the software.

IXL is offering free trials of its service for 30 days and is willing to extend it for 90 days to cover the rest of the school year if classrooms will be closed until the summer. Although the company offers its service to families, the vast majority of its customers are schools and school districts.

"Teachers and administrators face the greatest challenges they have ever faced," Gu said. "With classrooms closed, how do you keep students learning for the next two to three months and fully engaged and how do you do it when it's not possible to be physically present? This has been a pain point and we have really ramped up our support."

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