



Executive Interview



Where Training Costs Really Hide and Why API-First Platforms Win In the Age of AI

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About Administrative



Administrative is a cloud-based training management platform founded in 2012 and headquartered in Edinburgh, Scotland, with an additional office in Bozeman, Montana. The platform helps large, multinational enterprises manage the operational side of instructor led training, including scheduling, resource allocation, registrations and financial administration, integrating with the learning management systems organizations already use rather than replacing them. Customers rely on Administrative to coordinate complex, high-volume classroom training programs, with the company citing an average 80 percent reduction in manual administrative work after implementation. Administrative's customers include Siemens Healthineers, Royal Caribbean Group, Maersk and ForgeRock, and the company has been named a SmartChoice® Preferred Provider by Brandon Hall Group™.

About John Peebles



John Peebles is CEO of Administrative, a role he has held since founding the company in 2012. A developer by background, Peebles spent more than a decade building healthcare and education technology startups in the United States and Scotland before moving into executive leadership, including serving as chief information officer and vice president of operations at Sentry Data Systems, a Fort Lauderdale-based healthcare technology company he helped grow past \$30 million dollars in revenue within five years. He holds a degree in computer science from Taylor University and serves as a non-executive director at Turing Fest. Peebles is based in Edinburgh, Scotland and speaks internationally on technology leadership, workplace mental health and building startups.

About Michael Rochelle



This interview was moderated by **Michael Rochelle**. He is Chief Strategy Officer and Principal Analyst at Brandon Hall Group™. Michael has more than 40 years' experience in HR, IT, sales, marketing, business development and strategic and financial planning working with Fortune 500 and venture-backed start-up organizations.

The Hidden Cost Layer

Q Michael

You've often said the operational layer of training is where the real costs hide, especially with instructor led training. What does that actually look like day to day for a large training team?

A John

It's a problem that's closer to most of us than we realize, because we've all sat in classrooms and never thought about the cost behind them. Picture a facility running 20 to 30 classes at once. I was just with a customer in Glasgow that trains truck and forklift drivers and they run that many classes at any given moment.

Everyone needs the right equipment, the right instructor and the right students in the right place, down to details like whether the vegetarian meal arrived. When any of that breaks down, training grinds to a halt. What tends to happen is this work devolves into spreadsheets, one person per task, with constant back and forth by email and phone between learners and instructors. Can you do this training at this time? I'm sorry you're sick, we'll book you on the next available session. All of that lives in spreadsheets, emails, phone calls and people's heads and that's where the cost explodes.

The numbers we track say roughly 70 to 80 percent of all classroom training spend goes to admin work, in people and in time. Meanwhile, self paced training keeps moving toward AI assistants and out of the LMS, but you're not putting an AI in front of a room of people yet. The prep time, the teardown time and everything around the classroom experience is what drives that cost.

Where the Money Really Goes

Roughly 70 to 80 percent of classroom training spend goes to admin work — spreadsheets, emails and phone calls, not the training itself.

No Room for Certainty Gaps

Q Michael

If we go back two or three years and fast forward to where AI and automation are today, what can we do now that seemed out of reach back then?

A John

We narrow that question down to the high-value work that's mundane or error prone, with one caveat. We don't handle content authoring, our customers bring their own content, so we focus purely on the operational side.

The challenge over the last two or three years has been that as transformative as these models are, we can only automate what we can be certain is correct. If you need a specific person in a specific place at a specific time and all of it has to line up, you cannot afford errors, because that means people book flights to the wrong place at the wrong time.

Deterministic by Design

Because these models still hallucinate, Administrative's approach is to automate only what it can ground in fact; keeping a human in the loop the whole way.

Q Michael

Does comfort get in the way of automating? Do people stick

Behavior Change Is the Hard Part

with something familiar, like spreadsheets, because they're not comfortable moving to AI or automation?

A John

Completely. Behavior modification is hard for all of us. I try to build one or two new habits a year and usually fail at one or two of them. We never walk into a broken process. These organizations are doing a good job with training, it's just expensive, time consuming and often frustrating, so trying something completely outside the comfort zone feels scary if what you have isn't visibly broken.

A lot of us have felt the downside of AI in our personal lives too. I have a ChatGPT account that exists solely to generate Lego style pictures of my friends to make fun of them and it's fun, but it makes mistakes constantly, people end up with three arms. When something that worked yesterday doesn't work the same way today, that variance is genuinely concerning. So our strategy has been to start in areas that are provable and executable.

Easier To Critique Than Create

John trusts AI far more for writing code than for searching facts; a wrong line of code is obvious the moment he hits run.

I don't use AI much for searching or looking things up because my tolerance for inaccurate information is low, I'd rather search it myself. But I use AI heavily for writing code, because it hands me code, I hit run and I see the result immediately. It's much easier to critique than to create and that feedback loop is powerful. If you need to push everyone's registration out two days, or update a session date across 50 rows, that's cumbersome even in our platform.

We built the ability to run those bulk operations, present the plan back to the user and let them review before saying go execute it and then we log it. You should always be able to execute what the AI gives you. That idea is core to how we marry automation and AI together.

Right-Sizing the Hype

Q Michael

There's a lot of hype that AI actually thinks, when in reality it's good at large repeatable tasks, not true thinking. How do you right size AI without underselling it?

A John

It's difficult and we've probably gotten it wrong on both sides of that line at different points. Where I think we've done well is that from day one we made it a conscious strategy that every AI feature would be completely opt in and optional. You will never be forced to have it appear in your instance of Administrative. Even I feel it when suddenly my toaster has AI, so keeping it optional and letting customers bring their own model if they want, removes a lot of the existential dread over where data is going.

Summarize First, Trust Follows

Investing early in a deterministic summarization layer; surfacing what teams actually care about; built trust before customers were ready to experiment further.

Q Michael

Is training operations the ideal use case for AI return on investment, especially as organizations start setting AI ROI targets alongside their upskilling and reskilling investments?

Same Game as an Airline

A John

I think it's just another use case. There's a lot of posturing around whether a company or product is AI native and maybe that debate matters to some, but we don't really see it that way, because fundamentally we're solving the same problem an airline solves every day. You have a certain number of planes, they need to be full, crewed and maintained. We have classrooms that need the right instructors with the right qualifications, students who need to be in the right place and equipment that needs to show up. It's a big Tetris game and AI helps us play that game faster while staying within the rules, our platform will not let you book an instructor without the right qualification and that's what builds trust.

The structure and organization of training operations still matters enormously for solving this. We test this constantly. If we just say here are my students and here are the classes, can you build me a training plan, it doesn't work well at the scale our customers operate at.

More Training, Same Headcount

Most customers deliver at least 50 percent more training within the same resources and that number often climbs further in year two.

Q Michael

Training ROI has always been hard to prove. After adopting this kind of automation, what do you actually see happen for customers?

A John

The cost side is easier to instrument than the business impact of a training program. What we hone in on is whether, after six months, a year, 18 months or two years, a team is delivering more training with the same number of resources. Most customers see at least 50 percent more training in that window and it usually climbs from

The Frictional Coefficient

there, doubling or tripling in year two for some and a few just take off.

Years ago, I tried to get our marketing team excited about talking to prospects about the frictional coefficient of training delivery, borrowing the physics term and they told me that was terrible and they were right, but the concept still holds. We want that coefficient to hold steady or go down. If the money and headcount required to deliver training stay flat while volume and quality go up, that's a real win. AI is just an input into driving that number down.

Q Michael

Taking the buyer's point of view, how do you know you're making the right technology investment when things are changing so quickly and how do you tell a foundationally strong vendor apart from one chasing features that might disappear?

A John

Built to Never Feel Like a Prisoner

Having once waited a year for vendors to add an obvious feature, John built Administrative so customers would never have to feel that way.

I think there's actually a simple answer and it's become clearer to me over the last couple of years. It goes back to 2016, when we signed ForgeRock, now merged with Ping and one of the largest identity management companies in the world. ForgeRock had an aggressive, lean training team that wanted to innovate while growing from Series A to a public company in eight or nine years.

Before Administrative, I was CTO of a healthcare technology company in the early to mid 2000s, before software as a service was really established and I remember calling vendors to ask for an obvious feature and being told it would go on the backlog for a year. I felt like a prisoner and I never wanted our customers to feel that way.

API-First, Before It Was Cool

In 2016, we decided everything would be built to be accessible through the same API we use to build our own product. It cost us nearly a year of no new features while we rebuilt the legacy pieces, but as we've entered the AI era, that decision has become one of the most important differentiators a piece of software can have. No vendor is ever going to do 100 percent of what a customer wants, we aim for 80 to 85 percent on RFPs, which is higher than most platforms manage, but because of the API, customers can hook up their own agents and language models to do the rest safely, since the API validates everything.

We even white-labeled a tool called N8N, which we brand as Administrative Automator, so customers who don't want an engineering team on call can build drag-and-drop automations directly inside the platform. Those two strategies converged about a year and a half ago and it's taken pressure off our relationship with key customers, because now they have an escape hatch if they need one and we can double down on the things only we can do.

It's even started to bother me personally that my own bank in the US has no API for consumers. I'd like to log in, pull my own data and analyze it myself. Going forward, if I switch banks, that's a real factor, I want something with an API surface I can feed into an AI tool.

The Escape Hatch

Because every feature runs through the same API Administrative builds on, customers can plug in their own agents and models to fill the rest themselves.

Q Michael

Last question. What does the ideal tech stack look like for learning and development going forward and where is the big AI use case in that stack?

A John

This will probably run counter to a lot of what you hear out there and we've all got our own biases, so take it with a grain of salt. I have

If You Ran It Through Claude, You've Lost

almost no interest in applying AI to content creation or repurposing learning material from one format to another. We have a rule at Administrative now that if I can tell you ran something through Claude, you've lost, I won't read it and you have to redo it. I don't think that's high-value work.

From a Full Day to 15 Seconds

Report building and email templates sound small, but automating them turns a full day of manual work into 10 or 15 seconds; verifiable, with a human still checking every result.

Where I find real value is using AI to drive business processes that are time consuming or difficult and often require solving the same problem four or five different ways. Our AI assistant, still in beta, just shipped two updates our customers have responded to well. The first lets you tell it to build a report, since every data element in the platform is exposed but it takes real knowledge of how entities connect to build one manually. Now you can just ask for a report showing specific things and it builds a shell you then go validate, it's deterministic, that shell won't change once it's saved.

We did the same for our email templating engine, which runs on Jinja, an open-source engine web designers know well but most training and learning operations people don't. Now you can describe the email you want, like one that lists the instructors attached to a course and it builds and previews the template for you to check.

That turns a task that might take a full day into 10 or 15 seconds and it means teams can build far more targeted emails throughout a course, which improves learner perception and training outcomes. It's a more powerful way of working that's also verifiable, with a human in the loop and once that work is done, I don't have to worry about it again. Report building and email templates sound small, but they're hard to do well and they matter.



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