Creating an Effective eLearning Solution

Elearning has been gaining more and more buzz over the last few years. A study by *Chief Learning Officer* magazine revealed that seventy-five percent of responding organizations used elearning. According to *Training Industry*, online learning has become a $56 billion industry, with learning professionals claiming it is the second most effective training method they use.

When done effectively, organizations find it can reduce time away from the office and decrease the cost of training by eliminating the need for travel. Studies show elearning can also reduce instruction time, save energy, and increase the learners' retention of the content.

Not surprisingly, an increasing number of organizations are turning to elearning for these reasons. Online learning offers the convenience of reaching learners where they are regardless of where they work and provides a consistent, convenient way to deliver content across all parts of the organization.

The challenge, however, can be designing content and tools that engage learners and keep them focused and on track during the learning journey. When designing engaging and effective learning experiences, there are challenges to consider. In a classroom experience, the trainer has control over the pace of the delivery and shaking up the content, so learner engagement remains high. Additionally, with a classroom training experience, learners become part of a cohort group that can encourage and support embedding the learning into everyday projects, tasks, and interactions with others.

Online learning can

- be 50% less costly than classroom training
- ensure your learners have a consistent experience
- cut instruction time by up to 60%
- allow your learners ease of access to content anytime, anywhere
- boost retention of content by 25–60%
- consume 90% less energy than traditional courses

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While elearning has its advantages, in an online experience, the learner is on his or her own, can get easily bored or distracted, and can disengage from the learning experience. When designing an online experience, your goal should be to connect the learner at a deep level to the information they're learning. In an online learning environment, this means you have to present information more clearly, nurture your learners more often, and create a human connection despite the virtual learning environment.

Why Online Learning Is Important in an On-demand World

Maximizing Training Dollars

Elearning can save organizations money in a variety of ways. First, the learner might access the content on their own time, which means their time at work is focused on work. Second, without the need for a trainer, travel, or renting a training location, that money can be allocated for other uses. Third, the materials for online training can often be cheaper than those designed for classroom delivery.

Creating Critical Mass

Online learning can allow an unlimited number of participants to enroll, whereas traditional classroom training can support only a finite number of learners. The more your people can access the content they need, the faster they'll be able to ramp up their skills. Imagine how much your organization would benefit if everyone had the same opportunity at the same time.

In addition, while it might not make sense financially to host a classroom session for a handful of people, those constraints disappear in an online learning environment. Online learning can be consumed anytime and anywhere, which allows employees to work uninterrupted, access learning when and where it suits them, and do so at their own pace since they're not slowed by other learners in a classroom setting who may not grasp the content as quickly.

Boosting Learning Retention

Retention of learning in on online setting can be dramatically higher than retention rates of classroom learning—anywhere from fifteen to fifty percent. First, since the student learns at his or her own pace, they consume as much content as fits their needs at the moment. Second, elearning is more easily revisited than classroom learning because the learner can access the content in the same format and sequence as before. Third, they can revisit the content as often as they'd like without feeling the peer embarrassment of asking questions in the classroom. In a classroom experience, the content isn't typically recorded; even if it is, reviewing the content is different from the original experience.

What today's workers value when learning

- Flexibility
- Self-paced schedule
- On-demand access
- Microlearning
- Interaction
- Just-in-time learning

Fourth, elearning experiences generally contain more interactive tools than classroom learning does. Quizzes, videos, and other tools allow for learner engagement even if it's the second or third time through the content.

Improve Engagement

Elearning has been proven to increase the learners' engagement as well as overall employee engagement. Elearning is available to learners who might otherwise not have access to as many learning experiences. Additionally, since online programs are less disruptive to normal workflow, participation and engagement will more likely occur. When employees feel their organization is investing in their future success, they are more likely to be loyal to the organization.

What to Look for in an Online Learning Program

Connectivity

Before you look for content, you need to be certain that your elearning delivery system is bolstered by a robust network of connectivity. Learners must be able to access their LMS and learning content from any location whether they are at work, at home, or traveling. Without a reliable, seamless, ongoing learning experience that's easily accessible, your learners will get frustrated and abandon the tools.

Access Anytime, Anywhere, on Any Platform

Connectivity is crucial in a learner's journey. Accessibility regardless of location and time is needed because learning can and should occur anywhere and on a variety of devices from desktops to laptops to tablets to smartphones. So, it's important that the content you're either curating or purchasing be vetted on a variety of devices. You also need to consider how and where your learners will download the materials and ensure the process works seamlessly. The modalities with which we can learn have exploded in the digital age, with notable improvements and opportunities in the past five years alone.

Because smartphones, tablets, and other devices such as smartwatches will continue to play an increasingly relevant role in elearning on the job, it is incumbent on the progressive L&D professional to develop a learning strategy that incorporates mobile elements.

Microlearning

Microlearning—providing content to the learner in bite-sized learning modules—is gaining attention and momentum as a strategy to boost retention of the learning. Short videos on YouTube, Facebook, or other social media channels are great examples of microlearning. Microlearning is perfect when you want to learn something or refresh your knowledge on a specific task like

charging a car battery. But now, course designers are using the same modality to deliver more comprehensive content by breaking it up into smaller pieces of knowledge. Delivering online learning must strike a balance between giving too little and too much information. In online learning sessions, you run the risk of learners disengaging far more than in a classroom setting where it would be obvious, so the concept of microlearning is even more important.

Engage the Learner

When looking for a great online learning experience, it's important to keep learner engagement at the forefront. A rule of thumb is to change up the experience every seven seconds. Shift the learning modality from games to quizzes to video clips of real people delivering content. Anything that keeps your learners involved in the learning process builds engagement. Put into place tools like social polling, leader boards that track and compare progress, and online discussion forums for use after the learning journey. Another post-learning activity to consider is virtual regroups in which learners converge via Skype or some type of conference call to compare successes, coach each other, answer each other's questions about the content, and share their successes or failures at using the content. Tools for increasing learner involvement include social polling activities, leader boards, discussion forums, virtual classroom sessions, and live online coaching sessions. Another way to engage your learners is to poll them about their needs prior to curating or purchasing content and then target those real-world needs throughout the learning experience.

Make It a Game

Many learners have played computer games like Candy Crush and most are drawn to the feeling of winning, besting their last score, or—better yet—beating their friends. The same concepts apply to online learning where the best experiences offer a sense of accomplishment via trophies and badges awarded for improving one's performance, mastering a specific concept, or moving to a new level in the learning journey.

In any training experience, you want your learners to be engaged, to change behaviors, to improve performance, and to connect more deeply with your organization. Following these guidelines can help you and your organization deliver memorable learning experiences that take performance to the next level.

Sources: Training Industry, Schoox, Elearning Industry, Bersin and Associates, Forbes, Chief Learning Officer, Elucidat