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ADAPTING YOUR LEARNING DELIVERY FOR ONLINE

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OVERVIEW

Online learning is a domain that must be engaging, inclusive and put the learners' needs above all else.

Achieving this goal isn't simply a matter of putting an in-person course online, but adapting it for the online environment using tools such as micro-learning, videos and a mobile-first focus. The results can be dramatic – for example, micro-learning alone can result in 50% more engagement.

ONLINE PRINCIPLES

ADAPTIVE LEARNING

Adaptive learning means creating a personalised and adapted experience for each learner based on their prior knowledge, needs, or desires.

This provides the learner with the ability to complete learning modules on topics which are relevant to them, they need more training in, or are new to them.

For courses or platforms where learners are likely to complete multiple courses with correlating or complementary content, then providers can use past data to ensure learners aren't duplicating their learning journey.

A prior-knowledge assessment at the beginning of a course can gauge what the learner already knows about a topic, so the learner's appropriate modules can be selected and presented to them without the need for going through content that they are already competent in.

MOBILE FIRST

Mobile-first design is focused on facilitating learning from a mobile phone or tablet. The way learners interact on these types of devices differs greatly from how they interact with content on a laptop or desktop computer.

Mobile-first design can help deliver on-demand learning modules that learners can quickly access as and when required, depending on their workload, availability, and current needs.

MICRO-LEARNING

Micro-learning is the idea of keeping learning to smaller, digestible modules that take only a small amount of time to complete. Tying in well with adaptive learning and mobile-first design, it strips away educational noise and clutter to produce discrete modules which are easier to consume while on the go or as time allows.

Micro-learning is also more effective than long-form education; according to the Journal of Applied Psychology, learning in bite-sized pieces makes learning from the classroom to the desk 17% more efficient.

Not only is it more effective, but learners are more inclined to complete the learning if it is in smaller pieces. A report by Software Advice showed that half of their employees were more likely to use their company's learning tools if the courses were shorter.

HOW DATA CAN HELP

In the era of e-learning, data and analytics can help create a customised and tailored experience that supports high engagement.

The traditional use of feedback forms and surveys is still effective, but that data is only helpful if all learners are honest and provide constructive feedback. The Kirkpatrick model of evaluation offers a useful multi-level approach to measure participants' primary reaction; learning; behaviour and results; but beyond this, educational providers are missing a world of opportunity in the form of data reporting.

Data such as learner activity, completion rates, scores, and time taken can provide valuable insight into areas within your courses that can be improved for better results, completions, and learning.

For example, suppose learners are spending a large amount of time on a particular subject or section of a course and are more likely to fail questions on this topic in knowledge checks or assessments. In that case, you can focus improvement around ensuring that this topic is covered efficiently and effectively.

EVALUATING LEARNING WITH THE KIRKPATRICK MODEL

This model is valuable as it can be implemented before, throughout, and following training to seek where the value is and where there are gaps.

LEVEL 1: REACTION

Level 1 measures a participant's primary reaction.

LEVEL 2: LEARNING

Level 2 measures how much information was taken on board.

LEVEL 3: BEHAVIOUR

Level 3 looks at whether the learner is taking what they learned and utilising it at their workplace.

LEVEL 4: RESULTS

Level 4 measures and analyses the impact the learning has on the organisation.

INCREASING VISUAL ENGAGEMENT

Online learning needs to be visually engaging for today's learners. The use of colours, infographics, and videos can transform a boring click-and-read style learning module into an engaging and captivating experience. Our brain processes visuals 60,000 times faster than text and retains 80% of what we see versus just 20% of what we read.

With videos spreading across almost every type of online content, from social media to streaming television, they have become a familiar media format for the majority of learners. Videos are now considered one of the most valuable online education assets because the human mind is hardwired to engage with real conversation, tone of voice, and emotion.

Besides offering the ability to share facilitators' knowledge and expertise online, they also provide added flexibility for both learners and providers – they can be recorded in advance, edited, paused, rewinded and sped up as the need arises.

It is important to find the right video style, length and pace for your learners and the topic. Studies have shown that shorter videos are more engaging, with the learner staying engrossed in the video for a higher portion of the full video length on average.

Colour is essential to captivate a learner. While it is necessary to follow brand guidelines, we also need to consider the learner's attention span and enjoyment, for learners are the reason for creating learning products. A blended approach is a happy middle ground where brand guidelines are met, but other colours enhance the learner's overall learning journey. Placing the right colour in the correct setting influences a learner's thinking, engagement, and attention span.

USING COLOUR TO ENGAGE LEARNERS

Human beings use visuals to help us understand the world around us and tell us how to feel. Colours can provoke different emotional responses when used in e-learning.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING STYLES

Although learners should be at the heart of an e-learning experience, they are often overlooked. The resources provided by online learning tools like video, helps providers adapt processes to ensure inclusion for every type of learner — especially those with learning disabilities.

Improving accessibility means content will reach and find engagement with a larger number of learners. Communication technologies such as closed captions within videos or voice recordings of text-based resources allow learners with additional needs, such as dyslexic learners or those in the Deaf community, to engage, but may also be a valuable tool for those who need to access mobile content 'on the go'.

Providers can find guidance on how to adapt processes for inclusion by communicating with learners about their cultural and personal needs before presenting learning solutions. Putting the learner's experience first is a crucial part of e-learning, providing the means to future-proof products as we move into an environment where inclusiveness and accessibility are at the heart of education.

UNDERSTAND YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Consider the learners you are targeting and their different abilities, disabilities, and learning styles.

PHYSICAL INTERACTIVITY

Will the course be easily accessible through multiple device types or learner needs such as touch screen, keyboard, or mouse?

VISUAL/AURAL ACCESSIBILITY

Consider colour blindness and contrast readability and test your colour schemes and graphics against visual design standards. Alternative text for images and audio recordings of written content can cater for visual impairments.

VARIETY AND CHOICE

Even if you're not anticipating blind, deaf, or other disabled learners accessing your course, you should still include variety and choice of content delivery to increase inclusivity for all types of potential learners.

BALANCING BEST PRACTICE AND INNOVATION

The nature of the online environment means new technologies and tools are emerging constantly. Some of these, such as virtual and augmented reality (VR and AR), educational games and Artificial Intelligence (AI) have great potential for use in improving online learning delivery and engagement, but as with all learning approaches, they will suit some content or courses better than others.

A successful e-learning course balances an innovative approach with best practice. The two go hand in hand in a competitive market and are ever-changing. As we move through different trends and research periods, providers must use their judgement to identify the mix that will best support their learners' experience.

Keep graphics and visuals clean and simple. Anything too 'trendy' will only date the course.

Ensure that the delivery style and model suit the type of content and vice versa.

Don't limit yourself to strictly following best practice guidelines or to what has historically worked. Consider how you can improve and propel your learning experience.

Consider what device or platform is needed for learners to access your innovative solution and ensure it is achievable for the target audience.

Plan for an extensive peer-review and collaborative design process to ensure your solution is fit for purpose.

If possible, run a pilot program to work out any hiccups or road bumps early.

If you've used a new delivery method, platform, or technology, make sure you have planned for regular evaluations and maintenance to keep it working, relevant and up-to-date.

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ABOUT US

We are Skills Consulting Group, an international team of experts in learning & development, workplace wellbeing and education consulting based in New Zealand and working with clients around the world.

We live and breathe workplace capability. We work closely with industry. We help organisations upskill their workforce. We assist countries to drive their economic growth.

And right at the core of everything we do is people. Through the Skills Consulting Group's network of specialist services and brands, we will work with you to tailor solutions that meet the unique needs of your organisation and your people.

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