

Learning Portals

Why you should be an early adopter?

 By Tanveer Makhani

I still remember the day I was forced to get my first iPhone. Yes, forced. It was with great dread and doubt that I signed the dotted line and committed myself to the new era of computing. I didn't want to; I was happy with my phone that made calls and did nothing else. That's why my first iPhone was the 3GS, meaning I waited 3 whole years after the first iPhone before adopting. My friends and family didn't get it – they were used to me having the latest and greatest technology before anyone else. So, the phrase I ended up hearing almost every week was:

“What? You still don't have an iPhone!?”

I'll admit, I eventually broke down and got the iPhone because I was tired of hearing that question. I was starting to feel outdated, irrelevant, and even (gasp!) old. However, everyone knows that I'm not opposed to change. In fact, I thrive on it. So what was stopping me?

Well, when I finally did take home that shiny new phone, I realized very quickly what the problem was. For better or worse, I hadn't realized that the way people communicate had fundamentally changed. Not just with each other, but with the world at large. The iPhone was a tool designed to help you better navigate a new world of communication and a whole new lifestyle of data and knowledge. It was a new era of personal computing and, until I had the right tools, I didn't even know it.

Do you see where I'm going here? Whether you've realized it yet or not, *learning has changed*. The way in which people acquire learning, not only from each other, but from the world at large, is now fundamentally different. The knowledge-rich lifestyle we have come to enjoy has opened doors to training and professional development that never existed before. Individuals direct their own learning paths and can train on skills how and where they please. You got it – we are in a new era of learning. And, until you have the right tools, you may not even know it.

However, what are those tools? What do you need to have in place to help you navigate this new era of learning?

1. A Learning Strategy

It used to be the case that you didn't really need much of a learning strategy. You could build it and they would come. Why? Because learners didn't really have much of a choice. If they wanted to learn how to sell, for example, they'd wait for you to show them how. Not the case today. If I want to learn how to sell today, I can just Google “how to sell,” and there are virtually limitless resources out there that can serve up content for my immediate consumption. YouTube, Lynda.com, MOOCs... the list goes on and on. And learners are taking advantage of this. They are exercising their freedom of choice and are continuously learning, both on and off company time.

So the question then becomes, “What is your strategy for this new era, where people have choices?” If there are 10,000 hours of “how to sell” content out there for people to freely take, should you invest time and money to build and offer the same thing? Or, should your strategy be to help curate and record the learning your folks are doing out there, and then augment that foundational content with highly specific, contextual learning that relates to your particular business model? Well, the latter is surprisingly not hard to do – tools such as

badges, leaderboards, and learning records can help focus people on the right topics and concepts, while rewards and community can then help relate what was learned to your company's distinct practices.

2. A Learning Brand

If we know that people are shopping for learning just like they shop for cars, computers, or clothes, then the next logical question is, “How are we differentiating ourselves?” Having a strong and clear learning brand is critical, now more than ever. If you're in the business of training customers or partners, this statement should, hopefully, be obvious. After all, your learning brand is what will attract customers, establish buy-in, and help convert them into lifelong champions.

However, even if you're training employees, you have to think about branding seriously. You want your learning to feel authentic and meaningful, and to stand out against the numerous options out there in the marketplace. More specifically, you want to present the unique value learning can provide here, in your organization, vs. anywhere else. Your learning brand will help your learners see the merit of staying and growing with your company, because you're built to extend (not duplicate) the learning they are already doing on their own.

3. A Learning Portal

The time is now to move from a traditional learning management system (LMS) to a Learning Portal. Why? A Learning Portal extends your LMS beyond its traditional role of serving up content, tracking results, and reporting on completion. It adds context so that your learners realize value and relevance. It promotes ownership of one's learning journey and highlights the thrill of the pursuit. It provides community and collaboration to instill a sense of belonging. And, it incentivizes and rewards both inside and outside the organization.

In a nutshell, then, a Learning Portal is the vehicle you'll use to successfully implement and deliver your learning strategy and brand. How does it do all of this? Check out this article for details, and to see the difference between a Learning Portal and an LMS. Implementing a strong Learning Portal is essential, and is your gateway to the new era of learning.

So it's time to ask yourself: When was the last time you looked at your learning strategy? Do you have a strong learning brand? Can your LMS be a true learning portal? If you can't come up with positive answers to these questions, you may have not yet realized that learning has changed, or that the expectations of your learners have now grown.

After all, the last thing you want is for your employees, customers, or partners to come up to you and say something like, “What? You're still not using badges!?”

And you're not, and have no idea why. **TEL**



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