Workplace E-learning That Sticks

Bite-size learning for the modern workforce

By Stephen Meyer

Workplace e-learning is on a roll. A study by the American Society for Training and Development found that e-learning currently accounts for over 37% of all workplace training hours. Even the U.S. Department of Labor has bought in, writing that "Technology-Based Learning holds the promise of substantially transforming the way learning takes place because of its numerous advantages..."

There's an unfortunate secret about e-learning, however, especially when it comes to soft-skills training: Almost no one watches it. Historically, studies have shown that two-thirds of users never even log in. Utilization of these training tools is shockingly low.

There's a solution to this problem – one that can engage learners and help managers and training professionals achieve concrete progress in their talent development goals: rapid learning.

Rapid learning, or bite-size learning, is soft-skills e-learning for the modern Web-enabled, search-engine obsessed, YouTube addicted workforce. Like it or not, that's who we're trying to train. So when designing training, we must start with the most basic question: Who is our audience? The answer: Today's learners are busy, human and modern.

Busy

Time is the biggest obstacle to a successful training program. Today's professionals are routinely pulled in several directions at once. When their "to-do" list starts to overwhelm them, professional development gets pushed right to the bottom. With rapid learning, online modules are designed to be under 10 minutes, providing quick, effective bursts of learning. Even the busiest learners can find time to engage in a module that promises to be quick and focuses on developing a single valuable skill. Rapid learning is learning designed specifically to engage time-pressed, multitasking learners.

Human

Rapid learning is e-learning that is digestible for the human brain. In addition to limits on their time, learners also have cognitive limits. The human brain can only process a limited amount of information before it experiences cognitive overload. When learners engage in 60-minute e-learning modules, they're overwhelmed. They can't effectively process all the information. So they never learn most of it and forget a good portion of the rest.

When learning is broken down into single-concept packets, learners are able to absorb and remember the content. They don't experience the cognitive overload that prevents knowledge retention.

Modern

Modern learners want to learn differently. Research suggests that technology – specifically the internet and search engines – creates durable changes in how the brain processes information. We access information in seconds. We watch videos on YouTube for two or three minutes before losing interest. Instead of long, linear and logical learning experiences, our brains crave information in short, disjointed bursts, mirroring our experiences online. We also want content on-demand. Rapid learning is designed to meet the modern brain on its own terms. Quick and engaging, the modules are effective for trainees who want their learning on-demand and on the go.

Despite its history of low utilization and low engagement, e-learning is evolving into formats tailored to modern learners. The concept of rapid learning content – short, focused, single-concept modules - tackles these challenges head on. It engages learners and makes training stick.

When instituting your next professional development solution, ask yourself the following questions:

• Does your training program account for the realities of your time-pressed learners and managers?

• Is training conducted in single-concept, bite-size pieces to avoid cognitive load?

• Is your program designed for modern learners?

If not, your training program could end up like the e-learning of the past – underutilized. **TEL**

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