eLearning Trends

What consumers are seeking; plus video and mobile data

By Craig Weiss

A round-up of the past two months regarding e-learning, LMSs, authoring tools and more.

What's Hot in the LMS World

Besides the usual of mobile and video (more on that in a sec), the biggest requests these days are for xAPI, custom domain control and LRS.

I'm a total believer and supporter of the first two, but I still have privacy and security concerns when it comes to a LRS and specifically the data record.

LRS

Many people are unaware of one of the true intentions of an LRS.

One of those items (another is interoperability) was (and still is) the ability for the learner to take their data record will all their activity streams and so forth, from the LMS vendor, when the person leaves and place it in another LMS (assuming their new company has one AND has a LRS too).

If their new company does not have an LMS or an LMS with a LRS, then that data record has to go somewhere to wait. That is part of my concern – as to where.

Will a company or educational institution allow their learner/student to take their data record with them?

There are LMS vendors who believe they have found the right solution to these concerns.

What is it you might ask? Destroy/delete the data record when the learner leaves the company. That is fine and dandy, but it clearly eradicates one of the premises of an LRS, you know taking that data record.

The vendors I talk to who delete the data record when the learner (employee) leave or the customer is no longer a customer for the course/content – client provider; will point to the security concerns as one of the key, dare I say it, (dare, dare), main reasons for doing so.

I haven't figured out if these vendors who have an LRS are even aware of the data record angle when the LRS came into play.

Rather than having a solution for the data record – say something with hosting or some location – fee based upon departure (assuming the learner/student and lack of LMS with LRS), a broad stroke of wiping the data record upon departure is the best way to handle it.

To be clear there are vendors who have an LRS who are not doing the "wipe the data record", but I readily admit that when I spoke to a few who didn't, they didn't have a solution on how to handle it.

I'm confident that there will be folks on the comments section who will say this or that regarding privacy and security and that is acceptable, nevertheless it is a concern to me.

Should I as a vendor add it?

I think an LRS is a great idea and offers a lot of possibilities and opportunities.

If I was an LMS vendor I would definitely add it. And I believe that by the end of 2016, you will see more vendors who have it. In fact, I think you will see more vendors who include an LRS than those who have on/off synch with a native app for mobile.

xAPI

Add it. While you do not need an LRS to have xAPI, and xAPI is still a work in progress, it will get better over time. Vendors who already have it in place with an LRS, are telling me they are seeing real benefits in doing so. To gain some additional insight on xAPI, check out my Aaron Silvers interview with Aaron Silvers, who IMO is the guru of it all.

Custom Domain Control

This isn't for everybody, especially those folks who are fine with having their name, then the LMS vendor on the same url (i.e. widgetworld.widgetLMS.com). This is for the folks who are have a custom domain and want the power to take – well control – to do some stuff.

The question is how to go about it.

The vast majority of vendors use a hosting provider to host their LMS, with quite a few using Rackspace or Amazon S3.

Without having the client worry (those who do not use or care about custom domain control) because another customer is accessing the specific server site, (and trust me, it will happen – even though there is no reason for the alarm), the only solution will be placing within the LMS, and in the settings specifically, the ability to do custom domain control.

Of course, when you include CDC, then you are saying that the person who will handle it must be technical or at least understand how it works and what needs to be done.

Which infers IT/IS handling it, even though the administrator, uh should be the only person having access on the back-end and deciding who gets additional access along with the limitations that must

be included. No one, should ever have lots of fingers in the pie, in this case, the LMS.

As a result the options will be IMO:

Having the administrator hand over total control to an IS/IT person when things need to be taken care of as it relates to the custom domain control (a really bad idea)

Setting up an additional feature specifically for custom domain control and the administrator has the ability to assign access to the person handling it – and only that person and only that capability (the best way to do it)

But here are two items to consider, okay three.

• Getting IT/IS involved in a training, L&D solution, where if anything goes wrong, training or L&D will be seen as the culprits and not IT/IS

• Assuming IT/IS is just sitting around awaiting for your beckoned call to take care of it: OR assuming that there is someone in IT/IS who knows how to do what is needed – just because you work in IT/IS doesn't mean you know how to do everything technical.

Just something to ponder.

Would I want it? Yes and no. It comes down to having control.

I don't think it matters what size is your company (employee wise), whether you are B2B/B2C or an educational institution. It's all about wanting control and needing it. Some folks must have it. I get it. I'm a total type A personality and a tech head, but honestly, I rarely go into the server site I have my domains on, and make changes – the only time I do it? When I am pointing the domain to another server.

Video Data – Munch**, Munch, Munch, Burp**

I'm a big video fan when it comes to e-learning, especially related to video courses, but have always been concerned about bandwidth and video size. Just last week, the Wall Street Journal had a wonderful article on live video, specifically how much of it gobbles up data on your mobile device.

Five minutes of daily use would consume in a month

Using Periscope app, 800mb of data is used (BTW, Periscope was the lowest in their article)

YouTube – 2GB

"Watching just five minutes of Periscope broadcasts on a smartphone was equivalent to nearly two hours of Web surfing or sending and receiving 300 emails" (Wall Street Journal, 9-24-15). The article went on to say that the projected average monthly smartphone data used in North America will be 3.2GB. (Wall Street Journal, 9-24-15)

Why Care

I am one of the folks who believes that video will play a huge role in the coming years, as well as mobile. While tablet purchases are down, smartphones reportedly have flat-lined and phablets are stable (albeit some state they are on the upswing), the one device that seems to be moving up are 2to1 tablet/laptop devices.

The point though of the whole thing is where do mobile devices go, where are they heading and anyone who has purchased a mobile device of recent, knows that video capturing is hot (just look at the upcoming iPhone 6S).

What else is hot? Increased data plans and oh yeah, high costs for higher data.

Anyone who has viewed videos or streamed videos via any device, is well aware of that data is a chowhound. This is especially true with videos streaming from the standpoint of LMS and some SaaS authoring tools who either have a separate video server for streaming or contain it within.

There are vendors who charge extra for video streaming, just as there are vendors who state the client gets XGB per month or per year.

We all know that when you stick video in a course, use it separately as a video itself or turn it into a video course that it can really eat up a lot of data and bandwidth for that matter.

That is why it is never recommended to shove a lot of video in a course, nor is it recommended to go beyond five minutes (along with another reason tied to video bytes and research showing people will not watch beyond five minutes on average).

The article I believe says something important to using video period. Yes the article refers to "live video", but let's make no mistake that watching HD video is saving lots of video data, it's not. Again as a proponent of video courses, the key to me is the design of the video, the smaller chunks focusing on one topic and the amount – time wise, length wise.

We know that more folks are using mobile devices to surf the web and thus one can easily surmise the same of accessing an LMS. However, many in the industry forget about that thing called data.

This is why I have always been peeved at vendors who do not offer on/off synch native app capabilities for mobile devices. The majority of tablets sold today, just as they were last year, are those with Wi-Fi. The telecom vendors will tell you that when Wi-Fi is available you should use it for any mobile device including smartphones – and here is the kicker – with video.

But many LMS vendors ignore the facts.   The irony to all this is that those same folks who are ignoring the data impact to a learner's wallet, are likely facing the same dilemma and maybe even the data munching as well.

Bottom Line

For my mobile needs, I have 60GB of data per month. And yes, I pay close to $300 a month for that privilege (plus minutes, blah blah). I am a rarity, since many of my friends are at the 20GB per month. Now, based on the WSJ article, how much of your data is gone by watching video?

I can only surmise that data plans will go up – cost wise, and let's not forget that there are folks who turn off the speed spigot, when a consumer is using a lot of data (live/streaming video). How do we as an industry help our customers? One way is to include on/off synch apps. For consumers, go video learning bytes no more than five minutes. I know your topic is important, but let's face technology reality here.

As for other solutions, the jury has not yet come back. I am confident that technology will solve it or at least help reduce it, but it is not there yet. And even when it comes, I have to ask myself how many LMS vendors will swoop in and use it.

Not many. **TEL**

This article first appeared on eLearning Info 24x7 Blog.

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