

Best Practices for Maximizing ROI on Social and Digital Learning (May 14)

Practices that can be useful for other companies looking to maximize social learning include: theme of the month, community forums, global classrooms, program-based forums, and gamification.

Posted: May 22, 2014 by Hariraj Vijayakumar, Global Head, Cognizant Academy

Digital and social technologies continue to transform how we learn. Wikis, blogs, online forums, podcasts, and social tagging are a handful of the technologies driving a dramatic expansion of educational opportunities in the workplace. The adoption of social learning is accelerating as the Millennial workforce demonstrates a strong inclination toward it. Digital learning has been in various stages of evolution for a couple of decades now. However, in the last few years, technology has enriched digital learning with features that are equivalent to or more powerful than those of conventional classroom learning.

Practices in Social Learning

At Cognizant, we've gained valuable experience from the company's enterprise social networks. We continually explore how social media can be harnessed to maximize communication and learning, while underscoring the benefits of anytime, anywhere access to information and educational collaboration. We leverage social technologies and create interactive learning environments that engage the Millennials, who make up a majority of Cognizant's workforce. Some of our vibrant practices that can be useful for other companies looking to maximize social learning are:

- **Theme of the Month:** This is a collaborative learning initiative that leverages different social platforms (tweets, micro-blogs, Yammer, blogosphere, communities of practice, and videos) to host common topics every month. Campaign topics include specific issues and challenges in program management, communication, relationship management, and domain knowledge and process improvement. The content resulting from the discussion involving experts and end-users is harvested and reused in formal learning offerings. This mechanism serves the dual purpose of a typical social learning setup, as well as a channel that refreshes the formal learning content in relevant areas.
- **Community Forums:** They bring together practitioners across the organization to share insights on specific topics. The intent is to encourage the experts to add value to each discussion thread. For example, we've created a forum for software architects where scores of architects can interact and stay updated on current trends through lectures, expert speaking sessions, blogs, and social networking platforms.
- **Global Classrooms:** They involve live and moderated video discussions, and facilitate healthy debates around industry, technology, and people trends. Attendees join from various geographies and use video-based learning tools to engage in the debate.
- Besides these learning environments, social learning is also a powerful feature of holistic learning program designs. It is similar to the social features of popular MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) designs seen across the training industry. Learners have the opportunity to maximize peer learning and expand on their role to support the rest of the program cohort.
- **Program-Based Forums:** Learners, faculty, and facilitation teams have access to an integrated forum, including Wiki pages, internal tweets, and discussion threads, where learners can discuss the curriculum. In some cases, the learning program alumni play the role of mentors to the current learners.

Advanced Practices in Digital Learning

Digital learning practices—including e-learning, virtual classrooms, and video-based learning—have

become mainstream these days. Let us briefly touch upon the widely talked about gamification of learning.

Gamification of Learning

Gamification—be it about introducing “game-like” elements in learning content and course structure, or about creating game-based learning—captures the minds of today’s Millennial generation. The mechanics of gamification involve taking the principles that make games addictive and applying them in a learning context to improve retention and recollection of knowledge, and better application and practice of skills. When properly implemented, gamification has the potential to make learning interesting, increase uptake of learning content, and also catalyze a comprehensive record of learning that would not be possible using conventional measures in courses.

One example of game-based learning is a program on negotiation techniques. Cognizant built an interactive program that is three-dimensional and immersive to help participants obtain better understanding of negotiation concepts.

Gamification of the structural elements of a course is equally effective. An innovative learning sequence on the accounts payable function helped learners better understand business process optimization processes in that area through lectures, quizzes, and case studies in an interactive mode by simulating a game environment. Similarly, Cognizant also successfully deployed a game to drive home the concept of estimation techniques in application value management engagements.

Closing the Gap: Ensuring Social and Digital Training Leads to Better Performance

While it is exciting to bring to bear the most advanced practices in social and digital learning, the actual practices have to enhance learning effectiveness and the impact on underlying business goals. Therefore, it is useful to reiterate two management practices:

1. **Measure learning (No, this does not go away):** Cognizant Academy leverages a combination of smart analytics-based third-party software and internal systems to manage the learning measurement process and track the impact of learning on business. As the learning solution portfolio extended into the realms of social collaboration and games, so did the learning measurement. Measurement based on learner perception has become relatively easier and intuitive in social and game-based learning. Impact measurement, however, still requires serious consideration and design efforts specific to individual development programs.
2. **Think and design global (Yes, this remains complex):** We need to think globally about our workforce and put in place training elements that are effective across regions. While designing and incorporating social learning into programs, the preferences of a global audience are taken into consideration. We have had an opportunity to observe and learn user preferences in our own enterprise social networks ahead of designing the social features in our learning programs. On gamification, we observe, learn, and improve our solution design as and when more complex developmental objectives are tackled.

Incorporating current technology and advanced practices into training programs helps engage employees better with platforms using methods that truly resonate with their preferences. This ultimately enhances the skills necessary to boost productivity and job performance.

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