

Learning Trends Provide Better Business Results in 2015 (Mar 15)

By: Ron Zamir, Mar 17, 2015

As learning and development people, we are always looking to stay on top of the industry. We brainstorm, share articles, talk over ideas and collaborate to find the best techniques to meet our clients' goals. But as learning providers, our job is also to help educate our clients about which new ideas are fleeting trends and which are the future of learning. Every company has limited training dollars, and we believe strategically implementing these techniques in 2015 will make the best use of budget and have a real impact on the bottom line. It's important, as Training Industry says, to measure the impact of training and show its full value to your organization.

This year is a year of maturing training trends that can be implemented across the board and provide a noticeable upgrade to how we engage, motivate and impact our employees. We and our clients have found success using the following five trends and 2015 should be the year other market segments begin to implement them as well.

1. Rich media

If you've ever heard talk about different learning styles and how some people are visual or auditory learners, Allen's CLO Michael Noble is quick to set the record straight. He says "learning types" are a myth. We are all visual and auditory learners. Everyone learns better when they are able to associate visuals with other media like text and sound. Good design finds ways to incorporate different media, and decreasing costs of rich media make expanded use of video, animation and interactive graphics a no brainer.

By bringing rich media into your blended learning, you're going to have better outcomes. Video and animated graphics are easy to place within well-designed templates. We can significantly shorten seat time by using rich storytelling techniques to provide context, while using exploratory activities for content that needs to be practiced and retained. The success of rich media sites like YouTube, Khan Academy and Lynda.com has made the use of video and guided instruction an acceptable, and even expected, medium. When employees connect more with the material, you will get better fulfillment of the training goals – whether that's more effective sales conversations, fewer on-the-job accidents or faster speed to competency.

2. Personalization

Making training results personalized to each employee has been elusive in our industry. Exercises in adaptive learning are still in their infancy and tend to create bland information that does little to create engagement or relevance. Yet the need for scalable personalization is crucial for consumer execution, as well as for training that's optional or needs viral distribution.

For several years, sites like Amazon.com have provided a personalized experience around content. Using basic portal technology combined with learner-initiated, user-created profiles, we are able to serve up content in a highly personalized way. Giving learners a personalized experience has boosted engagement and helped learning go viral in organizations like HP and others. Adding portal personalization capability does not negate your LMS, but augments the capability of your content from within the course structure.

Integrating basic portal technology into content has many unexpected dividends. In addition to helping employees see how they're doing, the portal also lets you track what learners are focusing on, what information they want and what they need. By giving you control over which metrics to view, you can track multiple targets and know when employees are ready to implement what they learn.

3. Bite-sized, non-linear education

One of the most frequent requests we get from clients is shorter, more accessible learning. With employees busy with other duties and often on the go, giving learners bite-sized programs is vital. Still we need to be careful, since putting many five-minute segments in sequence may be as tedious or difficult as a few one-hour engagements. This is why deconstructing a linear e-learning curriculum has become such an important trend.

For example, we can teach five specific concepts in five minutes (5-in-5) in multiple formats that can be accessed individually or combined in multiple sequences based on your training need. Many of these techniques are used in the marketing world and are being adapted for training purposes. This trend boosts your bottom line by retaining high efficiency with short content development times while still meeting training goals.

4. Integration of mobile into existing programs

While classroom instructor-led training (ILT) is still the most popular type of training across the industry, more and more of us access information through mobile devices. Mobile and other types of e-learning are growing quickly, especially when used as a supplement to the classroom. For the past several years we have been talking about mobile learning, but have been surprised by the resistance to adopt this medium. We believe this barrier has been broken, as an increasing number of our clients now ask for mobile and more than 80 percent want at least tablet functionality.

Both as a best practice and a common practice, we see companies using mobile devices to augment existing training. Unlike the e-learning that sought to replace classroom-based training as a cost saver, mobile learning becomes a resource for traditional training. It can be used before and after the classroom to update and provide content (flipping the classroom), and provide an interactive device for polling, gamification or other tools in the class itself.

We believe this trend will only strengthen as mobile devices become ubiquitous in the workplace. Adopting mobile technology into your employee and customer education processes can save costs and provide a better blend of education to meet a broader audience.

5. Gamification

This last trend almost didn't make it because compared to the others gamification is used more as a platform. And too often people still view it as a fad, because games and gamification can create too much sizzle and not enough substance. However, when deployed well, gamification is still an important trend, providing a way to engage with content as well as provide a mechanism for repeated practice or exploration of important concepts in a competitive way.

Our clients are successfully implementing gamification as capstone or concluding activities that enable the learner to practice and clarify understanding of complex and critical processes. For consumer or non-mandatory education, the effect of gamification is amplified. We see this as a continuing trend that can bring big results, but must be adopted with caution to avoid using it incorrectly.

All of these trends share common attributes. Each contributes to the revitalization of ways to communicate and educate our internal and external populations. All of these trends have been adopted successfully in the marketing world and blend into the changing ways we seek information. Lastly, and most importantly, they each can contribute to a shorter, more engaging, accessible and effective learning experience.