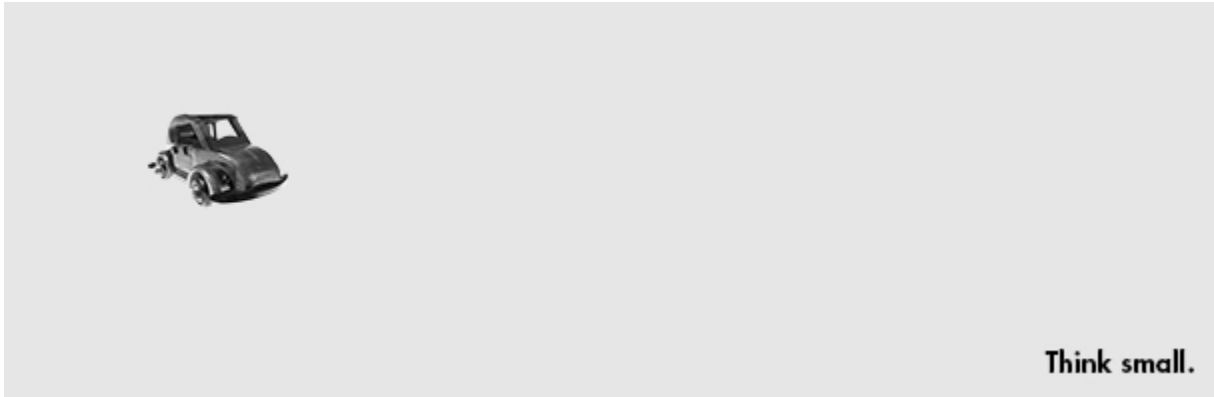


## The Future of Training - Think Small (Dec 14)



by Ben Muzzell

December 29, 2014

“Whether it’s the value-for-dollar investment, level of retention, timeliness for the need of the learner, or streamlined management process, micro-learning is quickly emerging as the smartest means of giving your team the information they need to do their jobs. Less really is more!”

Bigger isn’t always better—and as it turns out, the same can be said of training.

When you look at how most organizations are training their employees, you see great big formal initiatives complete with instructors, manuals, presentations, and hours-long sessions.

Part of the attraction of large formal training programs is that they’ve got a certain “thud” factor. They *feel* tangible and impressive. Organizations can point to their big stacks of resources and long schedules of upcoming sessions and say, “Here is our training program. Look how extensive it is! See how much we’re doing?”

And they’re not wrong—they’re doing a lot of things. It’s just that those things are outdated, cumbersome, and inefficient—and research is proving it.

### **What does the research say?**

As far back as the 1970’s, Johnstone and Percival reported that the average student had only 10 to 18 minutes of optimal focus before their ability to learn started ebbing—in other words, learners were tuning out early. (See References at the end of this article.)

That idea was confirmed again in 1985 by Burns, when researchers found (much to their surprise) that students had much better recall of what they learned before the 15-minute mark of a class, after which point most had already zoned out. (See References.)

But here’s the kicker: All that time and energy building lengthy sessions is having far less of an impact than most think. Digenti and Cross both concluded that workshop and classroom-based learning is failing businesses because it covers only about 10 to 20 percent of what someone actually needs to know to do their job. (See References.)

Those hours-long training sessions aren’t adding more actionable information—they’re just eating up time and budget while giving learners more than they can actually digest.

It's a clunky process: An instructor must prepare all of the material, book a room, take time out of their day, deliver the material, and grade the work done by attendees to assess whether or not they've retained what they needed to.

In reality, learning is actually happening all the time, and most of it happens away from the classroom.

As Digenti and Cross confirmed, we learn most of what we need to know from short and fast informal situations: exchanges with peers, spur of the moment research, active observation, or even trial and error. It's unplanned, unofficial, and ad hoc.

This learning is overlooked and discounted because there's a lot less "thud" factor. There's no sense of corporate control or investment, so businesses fail to account for its importance.

The problems become obvious: Conventional training programs actually become roadblocks to learning while the most effective learning moments are discounted.

### **That's where micro-learning comes in**

Micro-learning harnesses all of that informal learning and give it structure without succumbing to the failures of formal training sessions. The goal, according to de Vries and Brall, is to try to make this informal learning "more visible, extendable, reusable, and up to date" while offering "minimal disturbance to the daily work schedule." (See References.)

### **What is micro-learning?**

Essentially, micro-learning revolves around the creation of highly accessible and bite-sized (10 to 15 minutes or less) training modules that can be accessed from anywhere and are highly focused on individual concepts. Every micro-learning session aims to get the learner to reflect on what they've learned as it applies to what they're doing. Not only does this format better reflect the way that we learn, but it comes with other advantages.

### **The learner is in charge**

Conventional training attempts to educate a whole lot of learners all at once, but doing so treats them as though they are all the same. The unique background, education, and understanding of the learner is skipped over to the detriment of the training.

Micro-learning empowers the learner to consume the information they need, when they need it. They can learn at their own pace, access the information that's most pertinent, and brush up on the skills they feel they're lacking, all without having to consult someone else or wait for a session to come available.

### **Micro-learning is fast and easy to create**

Micro-learning thrives on the fact that small modules can be created quickly and easily. Technology has helped to streamline the creation process and keep it quick—and with the web as a collaborative medium, there's also the ability to democratize the process and give everyone the ability to create training that meets organizational quality standards. It's information sharing at its fastest and most efficient.

### **Micro-learning is available on demand**

For micro-learning to sidestep the troubles with conventional learning, it needs to be available anytime, anywhere. Bite-sized training is perfectly suited for just-in-time learning, where employees can quickly

and easily brush up on the topics they need to know whether out in the field or behind their desks. There's no longer a need for an instructor or a classroom; learning can happen everywhere.

### **Micro-learning is agile**

When sessions are small and information is compact, keeping things current becomes far easier. Coupled with the ability to quickly and easily create new training, micro-learning doesn't suffer the red tape and complicated processes involved in overhauling a more substantial training program.

When new training is needed, it can be created quickly, reviewed, and disseminated to everyone who might need it—whether it's an immediate bulletin or just a reference for the future.

### **Micro-learning is low cost, high impact**

While there will inevitably be a period of ramping up, creating the training and facilitating change-over when an organization embraces micro-learning, the long-term cost of training is drastically reduced with micro-learning.

The format eliminates the need for finite and expensive resources like instructors, physical training spaces, and hours spent in the classroom while making it far easier to keep information current. Your training program becomes more of a "living" thing, able to move quickly, adapt to changes, and address real problems in the moment they arise so that workers can stay productive.

### **Great things come in small packages**

Whether it's the value-for-dollar investment, level of retention, timeliness for the need of the learner, or streamlined management process, micro-learning is quickly emerging as the smartest means of giving your team the information they need to do their jobs. Less really is more!

### **References**

Burns, R. "Information Impact and Factors Affecting Recall." 1985. Found online 15 December 2014 at [eric.ed.gov/?id=ED258639](http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED258639).

Cross, J. *Informal Learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways that Inspire Innovation and Performance*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2007,

de Vries, P. and S. Brall. "Microtraining as a Support Mechanism for Informal Learning." eLearning Papers, November 2008 [www.elearningpapers.eu](http://www.elearningpapers.eu). Found online 15 December 2014 at <http://www.oei.es/tic/media17532.pdf>.

Digenti, D. *Make space for Informal Learning*. ASTD Learning Circuits, December 2000.

Johnstone, A. and F. Percival. "Attention Breaks in Lectures." 1976. Found online 15 December 2014 at [eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ136799](http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ136799)

*Learning Solutions Magazine*, ©2015 eLearning Guild