Delivering highly effective eLearning courses

talent lms

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Introduction

Is the success of eLearning a time-borne hype?
Is it staying for good? Or is it one of those buzz words
that wear off with use?

If the use of internet and mobile devices is gaining
momentum then eLearning is in for a stormy ride! Sure
enough, online courses for mundane tasks to complex,
are sprouting everywhere. Instruction developers and
designers are now joining forces with eLearning spe-
cialists to keep up to pace with hungry learners. The
proliferation of eLearning courses explains their success!
Organizations, in every niche, are quickly closing the
need, by training their human resource developers to
provide real-time and concurrent learning experiences
through the company intranet. Traditional training is
rapidly being shelved for blending with eLearning!

For Whom is this book?

Importance of eLearning in today's world

It is no secret that eLearning has taken the world by a storm. A storm that has boosted morale of learners and has instructors coming back for more. With the latest in communications technology tools, educational technology leaders have developed learning solutions to match paces: the avid digital learner and consumer. The result? Learning experiences at your fingertips (literally), instead

of "your doorstep", as it was when distance education first broke into the learning scene. Indeed, eLearning has given distance education a new name and a new identity. Learners now relate eLearning with their social media platform. They get instant notifications and updates and can think about an assignment days before they work on it! In today's self-validating world of text messages and instant statuses, learners are eager to share their knowledge and criticism with a never-seen-before honesty. In fact, learners demand platforms that proliferate their opinions across the cyber world. Informal communities of learning are being developed across world-wide servers, morphing automatically into formal communities of practice in an eLearning environment.

➜ eLearning is inevitable.

➜ eLearning is a product of demand. It is a convenience that cannot be denied even by the technology averse learners!

➜ It is prevalent in schools, universities and corporates, regardless of the technology literacy of the learner. It is the most efficient vehicle to send and receive knowledge.

Traditional training vs eLearning

Traditional learning is wearing off at a slow but steady pace. Each year, introduction of devices and eLearning platforms into the education sector increases, in order to meet the demands of the digital youth. Businesses too, recognizing the advantages of a technology proficient intern, increasingly pressurize universities to create techno-grads, who can hit the industrial ground runing. Indeed, the best way to learn how to use technology is to teach with technology! eLearning in universities and schools has been replacing traditional teachers to enforce the "cross-curricular technology implementation". Traditional methods in today's classrooms are more "blended" in true sense – they are mixed with eLearning.

Apart from satisfying the learner's convenience and learning style, eLearning has also filled the increasing cost of a traditional classroom course.

Learners no longer prefer limitations of space, time or pace when learning. Most adult learners enjoy the value of learning and strive to accomplish their learning goals. Maintaining one's learning and personal growth regardless of life's disruptions is synonymous with life-long learning.

Who is responsible?

When it comes to corporate training, no person can reinforce life-long learning more than the training manager. The training manager is intimately associated with the goals of the organization. This individual understands the performance gaps and how learning can fill those gaps. A training manager can be a communication relay between the organization, the instruction and eLearning developers. These people have the power to influence a positive attitude towards training. Team managers can work closely with the training managers to create organization specific training. They can also promote the training to each employee with better results.

ASTD's "eLearning: If we Build it, Will They Come?" study (2001) reveals the direct relationship between higher training completion rates and manager support. Managers in organizations can support eLearning in more ways than one:

→ Explaining the rationale behind completing the training
→ Linking the course objectives with business objectives and future career growths
→ Promoting eLearning as equal to classroom learning
→ Enabling employees to transfer learning to their immediate work context
→ Encouraging peer-peer support in training

This eBook is geared towards organizations which want to encourage employees to receive regular updates. These updates could be standard procedures or they could be organization-specific "way-to-do-things-around-here" guides. Education and training update is the sure-fire way to creativity and innovation.

Who should read this book

It's about time to train yourself about how to train! This e book is for organization learning managers and knowledge developers who manage trainings. We provide tools and tips that shorten your learning curve towards an eLearning course design, development and implementation.

In addition, the following professionals will significantly benefit by reading this e book:

Learning & development managers
These individuals are key "knowledge brokers". They specialize in managing knowledge in the organization. eLearning will prove to be their strongest ally in maintaining and developing their organization's knowledge.

Training directors
Very keen on having employees attend trainings, because they know the performance gaps of the organization too well! eLearning will be their best tool to improve employees and manage change in the organization.

HR partners
Responsible for generating an intelligent organization, the HR managers will enjoy better ROIs in terms of employee skill upgrades and happier customers.

Team managers
When the personnel is growing, they look for faster learning solutions with even quicker turn around! eLearning will enable them to educate their teams at a faster pace and bond together, while learning to perform better.

Instructional designers
Armed with a toolbox of authoring and editing software, instructional designers can brag about their expertise in cutting edge technology. With a constantly evolving medium like eLearning, instructional designers are the first ones to try and recommend an eLearning product.

Subject Matter Experts
When working with instructional designers, subject matter experts take learning at a deeper level, where internalizing concepts are as automatic as reading.

Questions that will be answered in this eBook

eLearning is not an easy learning medium to create. However, it is not strictly reserved for the technical adepts! In fact, training managers and other interested individuals in an organization can easily create an eLearning environment with great efficiency and finesse. Simply follow the strategies and proven methods shared in this eBook.

Here are some common questions answered by this eBook:

How to introduce effective eLearning courses?

Are you one of the "hard to please learners"? Then you will make an excellent learning or training material developer for your organization. You already know what the learner wants! Flashback: how was your last eLearning experience? Boring? Dull? Monotonous? You must know why. Once you write down why the experience was not so pleasant, you will be ready to create effective training materials. In this eBook, you will find a wealth of resources to create learner-centered materials that are guaranteed to attract and retain them.

How to approach eLearning if we never did it before?

Have you used any social media? Have you uploaded documents in email? Have you written any articles? If you answered yes to any of these questions,ou are ready to succeed in your eLearning project. Basic

computer literacy is more than enough to get you started! Simply follow the how-to's in this e book.

How to build the eLearning environment?

Just like a physical learning environment, an eLearning environment needs to have collaborating mentors and learners. In your organization, you can select mentors to establish a perspective sharing dialogue between employees. We will tackle issues like finding experts and senior management to help create a strong eLearning medium for your company in the upcoming chapters.

How to make sure that people will actually learn something

This book solves the mystery behind engaging learning experiences: What do learners expect from an eLearning experience? How do we make sure that they have changed their attitude towards an issue? How do we evidence the presence of new skills? Learn how to create compelling e-courses that provide better ROI and employee turnover.

Learn how to create compelling e courses that provide better ROI and employee turnover.

Plan
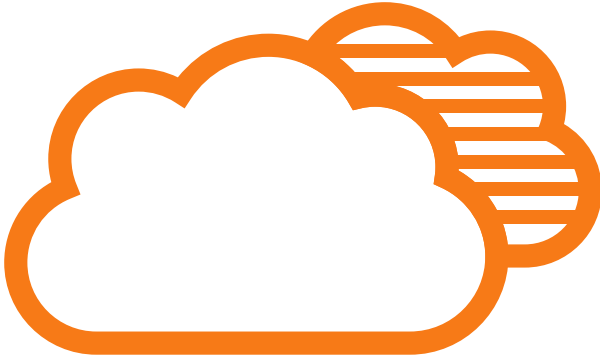
Expectation management

"The most important principle for designing lively eLearning is to see eLearning design not as information design but as designing an experience."

Cathy Moore

Planning requires the involvement of key stakeholders in an organization. Meeting with them individually and as a group will uncover several touch points that may not be too hard to implement in an eLearning course, but will make a world of difference in managing their expectations!

Why is it important?

Managing expectations involves listening to individual and organization needs for training. Ask yourself these questions:

▶ **How will eLearning enable us to improve the current learning and performance situation?**

▶ **Who is expecting what, from this eLearning project?**

Including expectations in an eLearning plan is crucial for a smooth design and development procedure. Architects create blueprints, programmers write pseudo-code, and instruction designers (ID) create an instruction design plan. This step enables IDs to gather and collect as much information about the learner, the content and the goals of the learning materials/expectations from the course. Planning also involves adding layers to the instructional design. After completing data collection on learners and content, instructional strategy is determined. This helps ID's decide whether the training would

be instructor led training (ILT) or standalone learning material. ID's also collect and analyze data to decide what multimedia to be used. Then comes the interactivity layer. How will mastery be achieved? What opportunities to provide to enhance mastery, synthesis and application of concepts? What assessments to include? How to measure the success and learner-centeredness of the course?

All the above mentioned activities are developed through expectation management. In this eBook, we reveal how to plan for each.

Stakeholders

Why plan and manage expectations for an eLearning course? You may ask.
Here is why:

→ To satisfy the various stakeholders interested in your eLearning project.

→ To design an experience that makes them receptive to your material.

→ To improve training attendance in your organization.

But above all, to enable your stakeholders meet their learning goals and development needs. Organizations have defined learning gaps they need to fill. Training managers have a detailed analysis of these gaps. Being able to fill these gaps with eLearning will lead to an en-

hanced expectation management from the online course. Successful organizations who meet or exceed their key performance indicators or KPI's actually have an established online training platform. They depend on the eLearning courses in this platform to continue to create better business prospects for them. In short, effective eLearning is at the core or the driving force behind successful organizations. The effectiveness of these courses are corporate culture dependent. These courses evolve and improve in accordance with the needs and demands of a particular organization.

Who determines these needs? Stakeholders like trainers, IT personnel, managers, customers and senior professionals. An effective eLearning course is all about planning with these key stakeholders.

What learners expect?

Placing learners at the top of the planning phase creates learner-centered courses. What do learners desire in an eLearning course? When planning to design an experience, we cannot oversee affective features of an eLearning environment. What colors, graphics, interactivity, sounds, videos and teaching tone will you use? Will your learner be transferred to "another planet"? Will they feel mesmerized by the elements on the screen? Will they feel excited or thrilled at a game style activity? Will the colors stimulate them? Or will your learners feel gloomy and "stuck"? Remember your unpleasant eLearning ex-

perience? Plan to create everything but that! Ask around. Find out what the "bored" learners disliked about their experience. Make a list. Plan.

What management expects?

Managers expect a 100% transfer to work context. They evaluate the training materials using evidence of utilizing it in the field of work. Managers and senior employees can track changes in efficiency and requirements fulfillment after an eLearning course has been completed. If these supervising individuals are satisfied, the training is indeed successful. Feedback on formal evaluation forms from these supervisors will add to improve the plans for subsequent trainings. A successful expectation management plan includes extensive evaluation and reflections from both learners and managers.

Goals

What are some of the possible goals for an eLearning course? Satisfying the management? Improved learner retention and course completion rates? Enhancing trainer facilitation experiences?

Yes and more goals for an organization include:
→ Improving market share through better performance (example: customer service or efficiency).

- → Managing organizational knowledge passed on by senior management.
- → Developing a community of practice or a social network for sharing knowledge.
- → Improving existing training materials.
- → Aligning performance and learning objectives.

Involving the trainers in the planning process will further refine the eLearning experience. These individuals are the communicators of the online course. They need to learn how to make the most of all interactive and informative features of a training program. Technical details and upgrades have to be discussed with them.
Trainers also provide insights – the "lessons learned" feedback based on their past course facilitation experiences. Which type of course or workshop was enjoyed the most? What was its format? Was it blended or asynchronous? What courses had highest dropout rates in the past? Which ones had highest completion rates? Can you establish a trend or a pattern of preferences?
Plan your next course accordingly. Trainers and training managers make a great team for the expectation management process.

Is eLearning your best choice?

By default, adult learners are intrinsically motivated to pursue knowledge that has immediate application. Mastery and successful performance in the work environment encourage adult learners to continue learning. This cycle of achievement and knowledge pursuit can continue enthusiastically if you, as a training provider/developer bear in mind the needs of a life-long learner, during the planning phase. The importance of learning achievements in an eLearning environment has long been established. Traditional learning requires extensive costs, time and effort in terms of development, deploy-

ment and consumption of the learning materials.

By contrast, eLearning materials are like reusable objects. They can be replicated and amended to fulfill demands easier than traditional learning materials. Fierce competition between companies and the fight to win the market is pressing employees for time and managers for budget. eLearning fulfils these requirements successfully. The popularity of telecommuting jobs depicts the benefits of an online medium. eLearning is similar.

It provides the flexibility to learn, apply, perform and innovate at the pace of the learner. It places more control over learning and its transfer as compared to traditional learning. Autonomy and independence are two main expectations of an adult learner – better sufficed by an eLearning course. In this eBook, we describe how online courses, if developed effectively, lead to their "fame" and preference as a learning choice.

What are your options?

First things first, why would you choose online learning over traditional learning?

eLearning provides a (potentially) "wider" learning environment as compared to traditional learning.
Did you ever have the urge to record a LIVE lecture using your smartphone for later use? eLearning materials are available whenever you need them. Think about the deeply seated knowledge that you have not shared with your peers. Research indicates that this tacit knowledge is best expressed through textual media. The eLearning environment provides a text-based knowledge interchange platform that aids in tacit knowledge exchange.
Traditional learning is great for speakers, but often leaves out the introverts who may have valuable information to share. In the absence of an audience, from the privacy of their own homes, introverts can share more feedback and comments than they would in a traditional environment. Also, a traditional environment cannot cater to learning styles and preferences (kinesthetic, visual and auditory learning styles) as much as an online learning environment can. However, learning styles is a hotly debated topic and a great discussion took place both on a recent blog post of ours on eFront and on some LinkedIn groups. For more information feel free to visit our blogpost on eFront here A blended learning environment uses both traditional and eLearning formats. Blended trainings have an online aspect that is to be completed at the location of the learner. The traditional aspect enables the group to discuss their online learning content and experiences.

Determining the format of your delivery will enable you to design and allocate resources accordingly.

Why else is eLearning better than traditional learning?

→ Long distance is no longer a problem, connect from your mobile or stationary device to your corporate learning management system and experience your course.

→ Start and stop at any time. Pick up from where you stopped last time.

→ Can be used for many clients or employees, at the same time. Scaling up is as simple as providing access to eLearning materials. Compare this to classroom sizes. Support for learners is often better, than a couple of facilitators managing a 50 + classroom size. Online mentors who may be corporate seniors, can offer guidance in achieving learning goals.

→ Subject matter experts can mentor an online course as compared to general facilitators in a traditional learning environment.

→ Re-using and refurbishing materials is easier. There are millions of "learning objects" available in online learning repositories (for free or subsidized cost) to be integrated in an eLearning course.

→ Traditional environment is relatively unpredict-able, just like life events. Will the technology in the classroom work? Do we have a Plan B? What if key speakers don't show up?

→ Standardization control for learning materials is easier to track. Simply create versions of your learning materials.

→ Real time access for learners in a synchronous setting. LIVE podcasts and classroom whiteboards make eL-earning even more popular. Shy learners have proven to be extroverts in an online learning environment!

→ Evaluation and improvement is more effective and unbiased in an online learning format.

We bring up the question again: Is eLearning your best choice? In a corporate setting, where change is essential and knowledge is superfluous, eLearning is a proven strategy to improve employees.

There are several trends that have fueled the adoption of eLearning in the corporate sector:

→ A demand for skilled work-force coupled with skill shortage among employees.

→ The higher differences in salaries between high school and college graduates.

→ The swifter pace of technological advancement and its adoption coupled with shorter product life-cycle.

→ Globalization.

→ Changing perceptions of eLearning from being a recurring cost to being an investment.

Who will benefit from eLearning?

If you are in sales and geographically distanced from your headquarters, a LIVE podcast will explain the latest product in a real-time manner. Or, if you are an equipment operator, you can learn about the latest upgrade through simulation courses.

Customer service interactive scenarios are also popular eLearning courses. Business strategy initiatives like ERP (Enterprise Resource Management) and CRM (Customer Relationship Management) are implemented using eLearning training platforms to proliferate their use for business efficiency.

If you compare your business to your competitors, training using customized training materials will give you a superior edge and confidence. Also, if there are certain ways your company does things, you should teach those to your staff using eLearning tools.
As a training manager and aspiring eLearning developer, ask yourself this question: What can make you reach for a book or a course? A natural sense of suspense and mystery, as to what happens next.

What will keep your learners asking for more? Learner-responsive learning material and learner-preferred format (synchronous, asynchronous etc.). Organize materials according to the learners' capability and learning styles. For example, senior members of your organization need opportunities to "skip" materials to "advanced" section. They have separate learning needs from the younger groups. Plan learning according to the ages and stages of the learner.

What tools will you need?

Have you ever wondered what instructional designers (ID) use to create appealing courses? What is their secret? What have they been using? Do they have access to any freebies? Or do they maintain memberships from cloud service or software selling companies that specialize in developing authoring tools. We know through experience that majority of the courses can be built using cloud – based learning management systems that provide course development tools. But before we get into the building technology tools, let's look into the "course blueprint" creating tools.

LMS

You may have a compelling course ready for viewing but without a Learning Management System, you won't be able to share with your colleagues. In fact, investing in a LMS is a priority for every learning organization. Common LMS include Black Board, Moodle, Adobe Suite. Research through your organization's learning needs:

→ Does your company focus on Research and Development and publish regular newsletters? Does your
→ company acquire new machinery and other sophisticated equipment for operations?
→ Do you work in a field that mandates constant updates in performance?

If yes, then an LMS will serve two core purposes for your knowledge management needs:

→ Organization-wide communication.
→ Course deployment with official learning tracking.

What is important?

have material in pdf, ppt or doc form, you should be able to upload your files without any compatibly issues. If you need to add videos, audios or images, you should be able to add without any issues. Your multimedia should display seamlessly with your content. If you need to add interactivity, buttons, actions, animations and branched scenarios, you should be able to do so with ease and finesse. Cloud-based LMS like Talent LMS provides these and many more capabilities for novice users. The user interface and dashboard is easy to navigate and maintain. The support system reaches out when

you need a technical help. There is also a community of subject-matter experts who add to your instruction design process. Is the concept of LMS new to you? A LMS is simply a platform of online courses and other resources that enables easy access and utilization for the user. It has activity tracking features that report performance and enable effective and timely communication between learners and facilitators. An LMS is the vehicle to transport your learning materials to multiple learners.

What to choose?
Cloud vs. deployed:
Consider purchasing a completely cloud-based option for your training environment. Talent LMS has great features that will enable you to get started without getting bogged down in details. A cloud-based LMS has several advantages over a deployed LMS. With limited educational technology skills, and lack of instructional designer in your organization, a cloud-based learning management system will go a long way in keeping your team engaged. Talent LMS has excellent server speed as well as short response time from both technical and mentoring support. Talent LMS will free you from programming and integration complications as compared to a deployed LMS. Deployed LMS require regular version update and an on-site support for break downs and other issues. They also prove to be expensive in the long run. With a lower monthly payment and a freemium start-up advantage, Talent LMS has all your learning and technical interoperability needs covered. Cutting-edge technology from the semantic web enhances collaboration between learners.

Free vs. commercial:
Free tools available as trial versions or with basic features. Commercial LMS that are supported and developed by a growing community of software developers.

Remember!

Before selecting an LMS, consider the following characteristics:

� If the LMS you choose supports eLearning formats you use:
  � Synchronous:
    Learners enrolled in a synchronous course usually begin and end the course at the same time and attend pre-determined sessions. These courses also administer scheduled online exams. Common features include shared whiteboards in virtual classroom.
  � Asynchronous:
    In this format, learners begin and complete their courses at different times and at their own pace. Message boards and group discussion boards are common features. These courses are available online, in CD's or DVD's.
  � Blended/Hybrid Learning:
    This format is essentially a strong mix of three pedagogical strategies: LIVE classroom activities lead by a facilitator, online learning materials developed by course instructor and independent study time augmented by LIVE activities and online lectures.

SCORM Compliance: Scalable Content Object Reference Model, this feature allows your courses to be plugged into many learning management systems. Being SCORM compliant, enables you to access a wider learning audience as well as tracking their performance regardless of the location of your course.

APIs: Application Programmable Interface, another interoperability feature of an LMS that allows users to access their materials regardless of their browser.

External or internal training: Some LMS can be merged easily into your website (ex. eFront). Others direct your learner away from your website to an external server where your LMS is located (like our cloud-based **Talent LMS**)

Mobile learning: An LMS that supports mobile learning has HTML5 programming. This creates a mobile-friendly learner interface and accessibility.

Tests support: Supporting and reporting tests is a critical feature of an LMS. Almost all LMS are equipped with this functionality.

E-Learning Course Authoring Tools

The best part about developing courses is the variety of tools and options available to create them. Simple tools like a graphics editing software (GIMP or Adobe Illustrator) can make a world of difference in modifying the graphics to be integrated in the course. Audio editors like Audacity offer the capability to record voice overs for a demonstration. They are simple to use and add a layer of interactivity. Similarly, video editing tools like Camtasia are popular. They enable a software simulation capture via screen recording. Again, easily integrated in your learning content. Another effective feature to add to your courses is the human-cutout figures. Register in sites like these to avail the free cut-out download options and use them to add a layer of realism in your courses. After determining the content organization of your e-learning course, you are ready to develop the content using a course authoring tool. There are several available in the market as a free, community supported tool, as a commercial license software or as a SaaS (software as a service). How do you choose from an overwhelming list like this? For a first time e-learning developer, use the following points to narrow down your choices:

→ Is it compatible with your existing LMS? Share the final file type rendered by the authoring tool with the support at your LMS. Make sure the course can be uploaded and maintained easily using your current LMS.

→ Determine how easy it is to use. The best course authoring tools are available as free trials AND a free demo that teaches how to use them. Play with a few and see what features they have to accomplish your needs. You can have authoring tools that will convert your power points into e-learning content. Also, some authorware can convert current pdf files into interactive content. Do you need branching scenarios with immersive, real-world backgrounds and decision-based interactivity? Try HTML5 and Flash generating course authorware.

→ The list above shares SCORM and other compliance features. Check for those in your narrowed down courseware.

→ If mobile learning is your main output, make sure the tool you select is device independent. Mobile learning interface have a different layout and feel. Don't let excellent instruction design get bogged down by incompatible authoring tool.

→ Some authoring tools are best used when you use the developer's hosting environment. Investigate early on if the tool you like can allow you to export your files to your own LMS. This is also a good time to compare LMS features with your existing learning environment requirements.

→ Some courseware are social from the onset. They provide features to add in the course that encourages the establishment of an online learning community.

- → If your LMS lacks course tracking and other analytics reporting tools, there are courseware available to do that job for you.
- → Your learners should be able to access your course regardless of their browser, operating system and platform. Make sure your narrowed down choices supplement for these variations.
- → Analyze your audience to determine their learning preference. Do they prefer extensive graphics? Are they content on pod cast and YouTube videos? What about game like features? While all bells and whistles are great to have, determine your learner and organization needs to omit extra costs in purchasing expensive authoring tools.
- → Make sure your selected tool allows you to create a variety of assessment items. Common assessment types include True or False and Multiple Choice Questions. These are not sufficient if you need to develop "skill-based" training as opposed to "knowledge-based" training. Options like Drag and Drop, Match the Following, Fill in the Blanks and Label the Diagram enable learners to decide and arrive to a conclusion before providing the correct answer. You will be able to justify the cost of such a tool to your organization better if you present it as "performance-enhancing" authoring tool.
- → Create a report containing the checklist of all features in your authoring tool for your management to make sure it matched with your current needs.

Some Good Examples of Course Authoring Tools

While competition in selling course development tool is a tie between several "best" tools, there are a select few that have made it at the top of the list and continue to remain at the top! We will discuss a few to help you get started. Remember, the best tool for an organization cannot hold the same value for yours. Determine your learning needs to arrive to your own best choices.Is it compatible with your existing LMS? Share the final file type rendered by the authoring tool with the support at your LMS. Make sure the course can be uploaded and maintained easily using your current LMS.

→ Adobe Captivate
→ Articulate
→ Flash Course Development Tool Kit
→ ContentGenerator.net
→ Composica
→ Exe Learning

While features and functionalities of these tools may differ, but they offer pretty much similar options in course development and deployment. Basically, if you have worked with one tool, it is easier to work with others, because you begin to understand the logic and work flow of the program. Also, most programs are WISIWIG – what you see is what you get – which implies that they have user-friendly interfaces. The learning curve associated with most is relatively lower, as there are minimum programming skills required.

What's more, the above-mentioned course authoring tools (and many others) come with a strong network of supporters, developers and users. If there is an issue that needs to be resolved, you can easily reach out to the support community and expect a solution within twenty-four hours. The other factor that helps determine the right choice is the monthly price. We suggest you try the tool for some time before purchasing a yearly membership, which is much cheaper in the long-run. Some tools also come with options that reflect different prices. The highest price comes with more functionalities. The trial version usually has all the functionalities. The trial period for some authorware lasts between two weeks to one month. It is a good time to note down all features that you will use frequently and purchase the membership accordingly. Simply look into your learning needs before finalizing an authoring tool.

Good luck!

What expertise will you need?

Creating an online course is not an easy task. There are several challenges that need to be tackled, before beginning the training course development process.
First things first: Learner Analysis.
Who are your learners, what is their learning preference, their prior expertise and current expectations? What type of LMS does your company have? What formats for course materials (pdf, doc, jpg, mp4 etc.) are accepted by this LMS? Does it have a maximum video size limitation?

What course development tools do you have and what more do you need to purchase? Do training managers require interactivity? Will this be a blended course with some Instructor Lead Time (ILT)? Analyze your requirements and determine your course development needs. Course development and deployment in an eLearning platform might seem daunting. That's why we have put together these basic instruction design skills, that will enable you to develop your first training course relatively easily.

► Researching

Putting together the right content and determining its length requires teamwork. For any plan that involves creative output, a detailed road map is needed. As a novice course developer, we highly recommend an ID design diagram, in which you decide the logic and content of your course. Use those paper stickies! Write down the content of each slide in the sticky and stick it on the wall. Create more to show the bird's eye view of your course. This is a great planning tip that is both practical and guides towards better practices. The best aspect in this type of "hands-on" course design is that you can change the flow of the course easily. You can involve your team in adding lessons or learning objectives. Remember, involving the team in this early phase will create a culture of responsibility-to-learn. What's more, your team will eagerly anticipate the course!

Audio / video editing

Create audio clips and video messages in your courses. We are not talking about just the YouTube videos. While they are a great idea, and offer a great reference source, developing your own course related video leads to superior training material. Audio and video clips add the "human touch" missing in the eLearning environment. With a plethora of audio and video editing tools, you will definitely find what you are looking for.

Copywriting

Instructional designers are also creative storytellers who craft areas within the story to embed learning objects and opportunities. Writing the course content requires professional writing standards. If you can write compelling emails, you can definitely write your training content.

Problem solving

Learning objectives in a course are actually problems that need to be solved using instruction. As a training designer, you will need to create instructional strategies to solve the learning goal delivery problem. Is storytelling better? Can you add interactivity to your lesson? What real-life examples can you use as analogies?

Project management

Managing the training design and development process is crucial for meeting the budget and time limitations. You may lack some of the skills mentioned, for which you will need to outsource those specific tasks. A project management tool will enable smoother execution of tasks.

Power Point/ Presentations

Power Point is a "universal" instructional design platform. It's also a great place to start working with content. Explore the many interactive features such as buttons and animations in power point and use them to enhance your training materials.

Photo editing

Online instruction developers are also dedicated multimedia developers. They are proficient in the use of image editing software, text editing software and web-based presentation software.There are several freebies available that will empower your instruction design tool box. Play with a few tools to create diagrams and custom images for your course.

Coding

Professional instructional designers are also well-versed in user interactivity feature development, through applications and HTML programming. This language is one of the easiest to use and with a relatively short learning curve. Try writing the "hello world" program in HTML using help from YouTube videos. HTML5 is similar too, but it enables mobile

interactivity in your courses.

Excel

A simple spreadsheet can be used to maintain learner names and performance ratings. Other surveys like pre and post course questionnaires can also be developed using excel. The results can be computed efficiently to improve the course and delivery methods in the future.

Know your audience

Why is it important?

The fundamental step towards meaningful learning material development is to identify the learners. Analyze your audience. What motivates them? What capabilities do they have? What do they lack? Can they co-tutor in a learning session? What eLearning format will be best for your audience: synchronous, asynchronous or blended learning? Are your learners senior-level managers? Are they end-users? A basic blunder most novice instructional designers commit is insulting the intelligence of

the learner. Exercise caution with senior managers. The instructional designer should double as the course facilitator. Design learning materials that enable them to investigate a problem and arrive to multi-perception solutions. The goal here is to facilitate and not preach. If blended or synchronous format is not possible, create highly interactive and branched scenarios for the asynchronous format. The conclusion of the course should be an opportunity for the instruction developer to improve learning materials based on discussions during the course.

There are a couple of essential questions regarding the audience you need to ask yourself before creating a course:

► What is their current role and background?

→ When creating courses for experts in your organization, look for the senior level individuals for developing case studies and heuristics-based courses.

→ When developing simulations and hands-on procedures for specific applications, determine who performs best and how to capture their work-process in training.

Most companies spend significant dollars to hire external instructional designers who work for a short-term basis leaving behind learning materials that need regular updates and implementation. For a more responsive learning program within your organization, consider training an individual in basic andragogy and instruction design. This individual

will be able to create effective learning materials that are agile and timely for your organization. The reason behind this activity? You will create learning materials that are agile and responsive to your company's culture. The more you know your audience, the better you can design your learning materials.

What are their expectations?

→ What do senior managers and operation managers expect from this training?

Make sure their expectations are placed on the top of your design process. Meeting senior management expectations will provide more freedom in terms of budget and resources to create better training programs. Make sure you have the organization learning needs included in the course learning objectives. After the course is completed, measure the results through performance surveys handed out to operations management. Instruction design is an iterative process. Identify the improvements needed for future versions of your training materials.

What type of learning do they prefer?

→ End-user training is not as simple as it sounds. Some materials may be static and could be offered in the asynchronous format.

These materials are usually reusable and can be found online. Just do a quick Google research, remember to ask for permission to use the material (if copyrighted) and always cite your sources. For training users on how to use company products, consider creating highly interactive, storyline-based learning

materials. Real life scenarios that allow learners to relate, empathize and transform their attitudes are desirable in this case. End-user training can be basic or advanced, depending on the capability of the user. Attractive 3D "course-mascots" offer motivation and longer engagement in learning environments. Such features are difficult to create and embed, but they prove to improve product sales and customer satisfaction.

What are their skills?

→ Identify the current skills of your learners. Then determine the desired skills from their managers. This is an excellent method to create materials that are organization-centered. The skill gap determination will enable you to create training materials that are not only more relevant to your organization, but also more time and cost efficient. This also reduces reLearning concepts that lead to boredom and training drop-outs.

What is their location?

→ Are the learners available for a blended session? Are they remote and can only experience the course online? For an efficient course design, create materials for both online and hybrid learning environments. Make sure the content development team you have chosen can also double as course facilitators in both learning environments.

What is their infrastructure?

➜ Determine the kind of learning management system available for course deployment.

This will prepare you to use the approved formats of course and multi-media materials for uploading and viewing.

How will they apply the knowledge learned at your course?

Use concrete verbs to design learning objectives. For example, use the A, B, C format for learning objective design:

➜ A stands for Antecedent
➜ B stands for Behavior
➜ C stands for Criterion

Using this format we might say: (A) After reading Chapter 8 in the text, the student will be able to (B) summarize in writing the principle of supply and demand, giving an example not presented in the book, (C) with at least 90% accuracy.

The Antecedent then is the learning activity, the Behavior is the skill or knowledge being demonstrated, and the Criterion is the degree of acceptable performance. This format will help you decide what knowledge will be applied in the work context and what skills will be used to apply it.

What is the most effective teaching strategy that can be used.

→ You can also learn more about adult learning theories and instruction design. We have a few organization tools that will help you gather the right information about your learner, the content and the technology.

Storylines are one of the proven methods of retaining learners at the operations level of your organization. Creating real life characters that the learner can identify with instantly bonds the learner with the material. Adding a layer of interactivity through dialogue and personalizing the experience by asking the learner to enter their name and referring them with it, is also popular with end-users. A game-like layout further creates an exciting ambiance for the course. Consider dividing the course in levels. Your LMS can show the progress of the learner in the form of a progress bar. Upon clearing a level, the learner earns some points. Accumulation of a certain number of points, by participating in activities and completing quizzes earns them more points. The highest points that also award recognition and other privileges to the learner can be achieved by requesting the learner to write a detailed reflections statement highlighting their attitude change and skills advancement due to the course. Any helpful comments will also help improve the course.

Fasten your seat belts! In the upcoming sections, we will elaborate all elements of eLearning and instruction design. By the time you complete this eBook, you will be inspired to create and offer the course that has been brewing in your mind.

Did we warn you that this experience will spur a cycle of intense creativity brewing in your mind?

Build

How to collect raw content?

Here's an excerpt from Michael Allen's "Guide to eLearning" book: *"Functional prototypes have an enormous advantage over storyboards. With functional prototypes, everyone can get a sense of the interactive nature of the application, its timing, the conditional nature of feedback and its dependency on learner input. With functional prototypes, everyone's attention turns to the most critical aspect of the design, the interactivity, as opposed to simply reviewing content presentation and talking about whether all content points have been presented."*

Ok, I need to start working. What do I do?

You have this amazing in-demand eLearning topic that needs to be converted into a course. You know that the content is available on the Internet, but you still need an expert to verify the authenticity of the content. How will you approach this task? Part of being an eLearning developer is nurturing the reader inside you. While you are not expected to be a Subject Matter Expert (SME), you are definitely required to have a broad knowledge of several concepts in business and organization management. Begin by reading content in print and Internet media. Think of the scope of your course. Is it for experts or novice? Create your course learning objectives accordingly. Group similar content under relevant headings. Now stop right there! Think of the experts in your organization. Invite them via email to review your gathered material. Build your future materials on expert advice and direction. Experts within your organization are best suited for this task because they can analyze the learning gaps and day-to-day discrepancies.

Content knowledge is as accessible as your expert colleague within your organization. There are certain groups of people who can help you:

➤ Subject Matter Experts
Consult an SME (if you don't happen to be one) and sift out "nice-to-know" material from "must-know". Create learning objectives aligned with the goals

of the course. What is the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA) your learner should achieve? As a rule of thumb, create six to eight learning objectives with the SME. Ask them the main idea of the course and the main topics that need to be covered. Also discuss how the course will satisfy the organization's learning objectives. Ultimately, the senior management will assess the effectiveness of your course. If it impacts the job performance of the learners, you will win laurels and budget for future courses!

Team Leaders

Team Leaders know the specific performance deficiencies that are common to all team members. They also know what material needs to be disseminated to improve efficiency. Team leaders can also be excellent assessment item developers. This input will also aid in re-defining course learning objectives. They can also double as course facilitators. This will create a powerful learning and performance environment with your course as the center point of all activities and discussions.

Collect material and course content from the following sources:

Manuals and technical documentation

The human resource department can provide you with all technical manuals. The size of a usual manual can seem daunting, but if you break it down it systematically, you can narrow down the required material.

Use your notes collected from Team Leaders and SME's to collect the required content.
Technical manuals also offer excellent diagrams that can be scanned and used in the course. An excellent method of drilling and practicing the technical diagrams is to ask the learner to label the diagram. Diagrams offer engaging opportunities and an in-depth learning of important material. Consider creating a job aid using technical manuals. Job aids are quick, at-a-glance guides that enable quick referencing opportunities.

Presentations

Past presentations can be re-built, by integrating the latest information obtained from experts within the organization. Instead of "re-inventing" the wheel, you can re-use materials for your new course. Rapidly develop new courses by improving old ones.

Case studies

Business case studies are real-life examples that demonstrate how learning can be applied in the work context. Case studies can also be used to analyze behaviors and actions to identify which ones proved to be fatal or profitable. "Lessons learned" section is a powerful content resource that can create meaningful learning experiences.

Visuals

Organizations have internally developed visuals and diagrams that explain their business processes and goals. Using these visuals actually customizes your

learning materials for your organization. Synthesize the visual and identify the learning theories behind it. Involve the visual creators to explain the rationale behind each element of the visual. This is another compelling learning material.

Web pages

Organization Intranet and external resources provide a wealth of verified knowledge that can be added to your course. Information on websites is often current and updated, enabling you to create real-time course materials.

Storyboard

You will need to assess all learning materials and create a storyboard. If a storyboard is too tedious for you, create an eLearning demo using simple tools, like Power Point. Having second thoughts?
You can save the company budget by following these points when converting massive information into eLearning courses:

→ Prevent information overload: Use the rule of seven (Clement 1985) to prevent information overload. This implies to supplying no more than seven pieces of information at a given time.
→ Chunk instructional content into small groups: What content can be provided as a "reference" or "good-to-know"? Add only "need-to-know" materials in the course.
→ Provide learning in multiple formats: What content can be presented as audio, video or text?

→ Include games in learning environment: What concepts can be taught as a game?
→ Graphic organizers: Provide a navigation map for the course.
→ Contextual learning:
  → Simulate reality
  → Create virtual learning teams
    → To enable development of critical thinking skills
    → To co-create knowledge
    → Reflection on theory vs practice
    → Transformative learning: transferring learning from experience to learning context to performance context.

How to cope with a huge amount of material?

If you have a large volume of text, for example, a book that needs to be converted into a course, how can you make it an enjoyable and interactive experience? How do you not create a fancy flipbook out of printed text? Before you let the familiar overwhelming feeling sink in – take a deep breath and know. Know that this task is relatively easier than regular training, built from scratch. The research has already been done for you! You have the content and it truly is the king! So, begin by dividing the book into three to four general sections. Group similar material under the relevant section heading. Consider dividing the course into linear sections accordingly. Now that you have tamed the volume (to a good extent) how

do you convert the sections into courses?

If videos are the main aspect of your course, you will need a "skin" for your videos. Consider developing a text-based medium in which you describe the upcoming video. Break large videos into increments, labelling each with a meaningful title. People feel "lost" in long videos. Shorter labelled versions allow us to know what to expect from a video. We can also continue easily later on. Consider integrating videos with interesting vignettes of information that can be applied. Adults love to learn information that they can apply immediately.

You could also create real life scenarios depicted through images, asking learners what could have been done to avoid the situation. This strategy involves them in the learning process.

A cartoon version of you will provide a fun layer. Try using an illustrated version of yourself with speech callouts. Read the next section on how to add storylines in your courses to make them entertaining and engaging.

How to escape the boredom?

Why learning is so hard?

Why do most people perceive learning as the most boring activity? Or, worst yet, a difficult and a challenging task that is procrastinated? Despite placing best practice rules and strategies in an online course, trainers and mentors still find a lot to desire. The most critical period of engaging and "winning over" learners is the initial few days of attendance. How will you capture your new learners' attention? How will you sell future courses to them?

Stein & Calvin (2009) present three concerns of the novice online learner: technical limitations, grammatical errors in typing and separation/isolation feelings. The inexperienced online learners need multiple support channels to encourage their participation and retention in the course. Unlike a traditional classroom, where college freshmen undergo the "sink or swim" experience that makes them scramble for balance and competence, online learners do not have the same tactic.
They need ample guidance to overcome the fear of the unknown, the lack of trust and their self-esteem being in question. The first few days in an online course are critical to adapting to the online space of the new learner. Instructors and moderators can engage peers to support each other in many ways.

Consequences of being bored

Boredom is a major hurdle in learning. It leads to disengagement, loss of rapport and miscommunication. Watkins (2005) in his book "75 eLearning activities: making online learning interactive" mentions productive ideas that lead to stronger online ties and the building of a community of practice. For starters, in order to connect learners from varying backgrounds, the mentor needs to analyze the introductions they receive from each learner. Group similar learners under appropriate descriptions. For example, some learners may be working in schools, while others may be in a corporate training environment. The mentor can create "discussion groups" that learners can identify with and join regularly. Talking about

concerns at work and gaps in knowledge can connect learners intimately. Mentors can take advantage of this connection by assigning them to work on group projects together. This alleviates mistrust and self-consciousness. To overcome technical barriers, mentors can create yet another technical expert group.

Here, avid technology users can volunteer to guide other learners for a few points in the course.

Mentors can encourage all learners to produce an "ice-breaker" video in which learners talk about themselves, their aims for the course and how they expect to apply their new knowledge at work.

An online learning environment does not have to be as scary as novice learners perceive it to be!

There are several ways of escaping boredom:

→ Emotions

If there is anything that shows in an online learning environment, it is emotions. If there is one element that compels a learner to stay on task or to complete a task, it is emotions. eLearning developers and instructional designers know this secret. The use of games in a learning environment, the gamification badges of success, the improvements on quality of feedback, the use of colors and images – all contribute to affect the feelings of a learner. Think about the words passion, aspiration, determination, anxiety, regret, discouragement, confidence and even aversion – all describe an emotional state of an individual Mentors can detect and label emotions to particular posts and threads in general discussions and chat

rooms. They can keep the environment positive by sensing troublesome as well as productive signals. The aim here is to modify all emotions into positive thoughts and actions. This can be done with the aid of positive words that include words of praise, words of wisdom, words on progress and words that set higher expectations from each learner (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012).

Particularly words that address directly the learner.

Diversified content

The screen designed for eLearning will determine the degree of engagement and task retention achieved by the eLearning course. Screen design should be emotionally captivating and intellectually entertaining. We outline the best practices for screen design from the Department of Learning:

→ Place graphics to the left and text to the right of the screen (portrait) or place graphics so they appear at the top and the text at the bottom (landscape) of the screen.

→ Present information in a top down, left to right instructional format.

→ Provide learners with the necessary information in the fewest possible steps and in the shortest time possible.

→ Avoid "timed" effects. If one or more events are to happen on a screen, the learner should initiate the event when prompted to do so by the courseware.

- → Address one concept, procedure, or item of instruction per screen. Screens should also maintain a consistent writing style chosen for the target audience.
- → Use color consistently in text and graphics.
- → Choose colors in a web-based training course to represent a clear and consistent meaning. Two distinct colors should not be used for the same purpose. Use color consistently for cueing learners to additional information.
- → Colors must be compliant with Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- → Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, or ethnicity when using visual elements, text, and audio.
- → Use existing sources of content or media when available. Ensure appropriate copyright permissions have been obtained.

→ Storytelling

We all love a good story! Is it possible to narrate a story in an eLearning course? Sure, just make it relevant to your work context. In simple terms, create a scenario with characters that deal with a workplace conflict. Create a "hero" who solves this conflict for the characters. Include the conflict in the scenario in the form of a vignette complete with photos of real people. Enable your learners to relate intimately with the scenario. Allow opportunity for reflection and room for attitude change. As a manager for training, you can reinforce transfer of learning positively, by acknowledging and recognizing the employee. It's

not as tough as it sounds. Remember your last D.C comic? Were you an Archie comic fan? Use speech and thought bubbles as well as narrator boxes in your eLearning courses to make them compelling. You can also create a character "in distress" who is helped by the learner, by answering questions correctly.

Gamification

Gamification has come a long way in establishing learner engagement. Badges and icons with positive and empowering messages/images motivate learners to collect points to achieve them. Gamification is a successful affective learning strategy (by the way, [TalentLMS](#) has this feature built-in for you). Furthermore, this strategy creates an online presence, a social connectivity atmosphere in which positive thoughts and constructive ideas are exchanged – all for more badges and points. Also, the research company Gartner predicts that "by 2015, a gamified service for consumer goods marketing and customer retention will become as important as Facebook, eBay, or Amazon, and more than 70% of Global 2000 organizations will have at least one gamified application."

Interactions

Interaction features in eLearning courses lead to engaging and deeper learning. Interactivity can be provided in the form of navigation buttons and question & answer sessions between the course avatar and the learner. An advanced form of interac-

tivity is called "adaptive learning". Here, the course adapts to the capability of the learner. Interactivity creates a sense of responsibility in the learner. This holds especially true for instances where learners supply their names, that are used to address them throughout the course. Interactivity can also be applied in situations where informal "drill and practice" opportunities are needed to reinforce the learning goals in the course. This creates efficient learning sessions. Interactivity is a great boredom bashing tool!

Learning theories

Two theories are our favorite when teaching online. Constructivist and behaviorist learning theories. Think of your teaching materials complimenting the knowledge schema in your learners. In order to accomplish higher level thinking, try to build new lessons on the previous ones. Prior to offering the new lesson, create a "pop quiz" in a game like manner that literally pops on the screen: "TRIVIA: This sentence can be completed with which one of the following phrases...". This trigger question, as we like to call it, stimulates cognitive resonance, construction of new meaning and retrieval of older perceptions of the same concept. It primes the learner to receive the upcoming information. By answering trigger questions, learners feel confident and curious for what's next.

Another consideration for constructive thinking is knowing the lifestyle or favorite activities of the learner. Work

context and future aspirations also provide ideas for the medium/scenario through which you can present new material. This notion actually flows into the behaviorist learning theory.

Learners are motivated to stay on the activities that they prefer. Games for recreation and immediate transfer to work context are top desired learning environments. Presenting lessons in a game-like manner motivates learners to complete the task.

Interactivity features (especially in a storyline) that explain the concept and encourage immediate recall through casual questions, are also a favorite in online learning environments.

Use a combination of these strategies to spice up your training courses and keep boredom at bay!

What an eLearning course should be comprised of?

How to approach course development?

Course development process is iterative in nature. It is never complete. Constant updates from senior management, operations managers and learners improve the course in periodic increments. As a training eLearning course developer, it is advisable to conduct meetings with all stakeholders of the course to understand their

needs and requirements. Estimate development time and choose the experts needed to create a professional course.

Create a course development map to ensure you don't miss any aspect of the course design.

Seems confusing?

Simply follow these steps and determine what you need for your course:

Detailed Content Outline (DCO)

Have you heard about a Detailed Content Outline (DCO)? It is the first communication document created in collaboration with Subject Matter Experts (SME). It enables converting huge amount of texts into "bite-size" chunks – aligned with the course goal. This detailed document aids IDs in determining the scope of the course. Depending on the content of the course, a DCO can take about 5 days to create. The notes generated in the initial meeting you had with all stakeholders are ideal for creating the DCO. The purpose of the detailed outline is to provide eLearning IDs all of the content information, broken down into Modules, Lessons, and Topics to design a course. Distribute the DCO amongst all stakeholders. Ask for their suggestions. Refine the DCO and resend. Be patient. This is the fundamental step in ensuring everyone gets what they want from the course AND your efforts move in the right direction.

The Course Design Plan

The Course Design Plan includes the following elements:

→ Introduction (project overview, target audience, and purpose): The DCO is the ideal document to refer for all elements of the Course Design Plan. Cover all you know about your learners. Their capability, their preference and their current performance level. Write down in single sentences, the goal of the course and the learning objectives. The most important part of this introduction is to identify the performance gap. Organize your content using this format:

→ Course Structure (description, course outline, course flow chart, estimated number of screens, and course-learner contact time): Use these topics to organize your course. Make sure you are clear on the content for each section. This is an important place to begin course development. Your SME's will contribute in this part of the course design. Use different colors to mark the outline.

The learning taxonomy is best illustrated as follows:

→ Course
→ Module (grouping of lessons)
→ Lessons (Terminal Learning Objectives)

→ Topics (Enabling Learning Objectives)

Course Design Strategy

This is the overall approach to course, scenarios, and plan for supplemental materials. This includes the design strategy for each module, lesson (Terminal Learning Objectives), topic (Enabling Learning Objectives), descriptions, instructional strategies, assessment strategies, references, and content outline. Terminal Learning Objectives determine "take away knowledge". The Enabling Learning Objectives describe the "Take away skills". What tools will you use to administer and deliver the course? Contact your company's IT department to determine existing resources to utilize as delivery and administrative tools for your course.
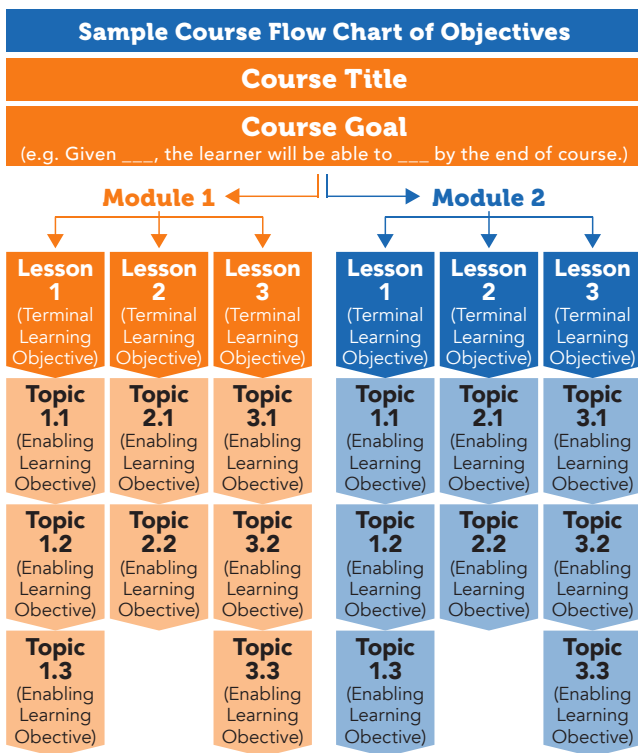
Understanding Learning Objectives

Learning objectives (LO) define the KSA (knowledge, skills and attitudes) your learners will achieve after completing the course. There are two types of learning objective. Terminal Learning Objectives (TLOs) are the objectives for LESSONS and are a statement of the course developer's expectations of the Learner's perfmance at the end of a specific module. The Terminal Learning Objective is written from the perspective of what the Learner will do and consists of three parts: Condition, Task, and Standard. Enabling Learning Objectives (ELOs) are the objectives of the TOPICS and are concise statements of the course developer's expectations of the Learner's perfor-

mance and are steps in accomplishing the Terminal Learning Objective. Enabling Learning Objectives are written from the perspective of the Learner and state the tasks to be accomplished for each main objective, the Terminal Learning Objective.

The flowchart below shows how the objectives sequence:

Sample Course Flow Chart of Objectives
Course Title
Course Goal   (e.g. Given ___, the learner will be able to ___ by the end of course.)

Module 1 ← → **Module 2**

Lesson 1 (Terminal Learning Objective)	Lesson 2 (Terminal Learning Objective)	Lesson 3 (Terminal Learning Objective)	Lesson 1 (Terminal Learning Objective)	Lesson 2 (Terminal Learning Objective)	Lesson 3 (Terminal Learning Objective)
Topic 1.1 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 2.1 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 3.1 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 1.1 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 2.1 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 3.1 (Enabling Learning Obective)
Topic 1.2 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 2.2 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 3.2 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 1.2 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 2.2 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 3.2 (Enabling Learning Obective)
Topic 1.3 (Enabling Learning Obective)		Topic 3.3 (Enabling Learning Obective)	Topic 1.3 (Enabling Learning Obective)		Topic 3.3 (Enabling Learning Obective)

Module Introduction

The Module Introduction could consist of two screens:

→ The first screen provides a brief overview of the module and a brief description of what the learner will learn and the second screen lists the module objectives. A great idea to start a module is to use a story or a real life vignette to provide an overview of the problems to be solved in the module.

→ The second screen is the Module Menu – The Module Menu provides a list of options including the Module Lesson, Module Summary, and Comprehensive Knowledge Check. Providing course navigation allows learners to stay "grounded" in the module. They are able to monitor their progress better.

Lessons

Lessons contain topics that correspond to the learning objectives. Each lesson teaches two or more related objectives. Lessons build on each other so that learners are more informed with subsequent lessons. They are the areas of a course where actual learning takes place through several strategies. Start by introducing the objective. Next give examples of its application. Lastly, ask learners to informally apply their learning through drill and practice questions. These practicing exercises can be anything from labelling a technical diagram to answering scenario based questions. Add a formal quiz immediately after the lesson to ensure learning has taken place.

Module Summary

The module conclusion provides a summary of the module and a transition to the following module. Revise all objectives one more time. This module ties your lessons neatly. It is a final opportunity for the learner to revise everything they have studied. Provide a list of key terms introduced in the module. Provide access or links to supplementary material. Provide opportunity to the learner to navigate back to the start of the module or move on to the next one. Describe the upcoming module by relating current information with the future one.

How to assess what people learned

Evaluating the course - what does it mean?

Evaluation is essential for periodic updates in the course. Evaluating a course applies to the verification of its effectiveness towards achieving performance indicators for the course, or the learning achievements successfully accomplished through the course. Evaluation is performed

in two main ways: Through post-course surveys and through evaluation criteria. Your senior management and training managers are the ideal stakeholders who can define the course evaluation criteria. Consider the evaluation score as an important evidence of effectiveness of your course. The post survey scores will also determine the areas that need improvement and areas that need to be maintained in your course.

Why evaluation is important

Evaluation is a refined method of assessing the deeper course structure. Features like images, diagrams, interactivity, audio, video and other plugin players all need to be evaluated for relevance and clarity. Lessons need to be evaluated for conciseness and accuracy. Sources need to be evaluated for validity and reliability. Quizzes need to be evaluated for alignment with lesson objectives. Course practices and assessment (Knowledge Check) strategies depend on the learners and learning material.

These need to be evaluated to determine:
- **Type of learning**
   (e.g., knowledge, skill, and attitude)
- **Level of learning**
   (e.g., fact, rule, procedure, or discrimination learning)

Tools for evaluation

Pre and post surveys are developed by training developers and training managers to measure each level accu-

rately and report for further course improvement
Keep surveys anonymous to retrieve unbiased opinions
and suggestions. Use your learning management system's metric tools to administer and calculate responses
in the surveys. Have learners fill the survey online and
submit it upon entry and exit of the course. Learning
objectives need evaluation too. Objectives present
content to teach knowledge, skills and attitudes. Assessments are written to test the acquisition of knowledge,
skills and attitudes. The Assessment (Knowledge Check
questions) is written next, based on the objectives determined in the course.

The following strategies are used to evaluate different features of a course:

- → **Ask** what (knowledge, skills and attitude changes) you
  want the learner to acquire and demonstrate after
  participation in the course. Use the evaluation criteria
  for this feature to create compelling assessment items.
- → **Describe** the expected learner's performance or
  outcomes in measurable terms using action verbs. Use
  the evaluation scores to determine what needs to be
  edited to improve transfer of learning to context.
- → **Specify** conditions under which the performance will
  take place.
- → **Describe** the minimum acceptable standard of performance (in terms of quality, quantity, completeness, or
  accuracy). This criteria is important to categorize the
  learning material into improvement groups.

Kirkpatric model for evaluation

The Kirkpatrick model of training evaluation was developed by Donald Kirkpatrick, Professor Emeritus of the University of Wisconsin in North America and a past president of the American Society for Training and Development.

It consists of four levels:

- ▶ **Reaction**
- ▶ **Learning**
- ▶ **Behavior**
- ▶ **Results**

Lets's visit each level in detail.

▶ Level 1: Reaction

This level measures how your learners reacted to the training. Obviously, you want them to feel that the training was a valuable experience, and you want them to feel good about the instructor, the topic, the material, its presentation, and the venue. It's important to measure reaction, because it helps you understand how well the training was received by your audience. It also helps you improve the training for future trainees, including identifying important areas or topics that are missing from the training.

▶ Level 2: Learning

At level 2, you measure what your employees have learned. How much has their knowledge increased as a result of the training? When you planned the

training session, you hopefully started with a list of specific learning objectives. These should be the starting point for your measurement. Keep in mind that you can measure learning in different ways depending on these objectives, and depending on whether you're interested in changes regarding knowledge, skills, or attitude. It's important to measure this, because knowing what your learners are learning and what they aren't, will help you improve future training.

Level 3: Behavior

At this level, you evaluate how far your learners have changed their behavior, based on the training they received. Specifically, this looks at how learners apply the information. It's important to realize that behavior can only change if conditions are favorable. For instance, imagine you've skipped measurement at the first two Kirkpatrick levels and, when looking at your group's behavior, you determine that no behavior change has taken place. Therefore, you assume that your learners haven't learned anything and that the training was ineffective. However, just because behavior hasn't changed, it doesn't mean that learners haven't learned anything. Perhaps their boss won't let them apply new knowledge. Or, maybe they've learned everything you taught, but they have no desire to apply the knowledge themselves.

Level 4: Results

At this level, you analyze the final results of your training. This includes outcomes that you or your organization have determined to be good for business, good for the employees, or good for the bottom line. Bear in mind that this model isn't practical in all situations, and that measuring the effectiveness of training with this model can be time consuming and use a lot of resources.

How to balance between size, cost and time?

Why balance is important?

eLearning course types are determined by the level of skill-based interactivity and quality of multi-media used to build them. The higher the real-world simulations and immersive environment used to create the eLearning material, the longer it takes to be built and the higher the cost. The simpler the course design, the less time

it needs and the less its development costs. The more complex the course design, the higher the cost. Generally, eLearning courses range from the simplest Level I, to Levels II, III and IV. Level II has some interactivity, for example embedding videos and audios in the course. Level III requires satisfactory user responses in order to proceed to the next slide. Level IV is an advanced simulation course, generally designed by software engineers.

The following information will help you estimate the training costs and time required

▶ **Estimating eLearning costs**

Here are a couple of ideas on what can be the costs of various eLearning tasks:

→ Produce a professional video - $1,000 to $3,000 per-finished-minutes (PFM) depending upon concept, location, talent, special effects, etc.

→ With today's small cameras and video recorders, such as the FLIP, videos can be produced at a much cheaper cost (about $200.00). While they may not look as professional as the expensive ones, they can often do quite a satisfactory job.

→ Produce professional slides - $15 to $50 per slide.

→ Get photos from stockexchange (free), iStock ($1-$27 depending on size), flickr (CLICK on the Creative Commons-licensed content button to search for free photos).

→ Produce professional audio tape - $25 to $150 per minute.

→ Make your own digital recording - Audacity (Mac & PC, free), Wiretap (Mac), Total Recorder (PC).

→ Learner guide - four to eight hours development time to produce 1/2 to 2 pages depending on technical specifications.

Estimating developer costs:

→ Instructional Designer - $28.00 hour (based on salary of $60,000 per year)

→ eLearning designer - $37.00 hour (based on salary of $78,000 per year)

→ Organizational Specialist - $38.46 (based on salary of $80,000 per year)

→ Outside Consultant - $90.00 hour

Development times to create one-hour of eLearning

→ Simple Asynchronous (static HTML pages with text & graphics): 117 hours

→ Simple Synchronous (static HTML pages with text & graphics): 86 hours

→ Average Asynchronous (above plus FLASH, JavaScript, animated GIF's. etc): 191 hours

→ Average Synchronous (above plus Flash, JavaScript, animated GIF's. etc): 147 hours

→ Complex Asynchronous (above plus audio, video, interactive simulations): 276 hours

→ Complex Synchronous
(above plus audio, video, interactive simulations):
222 hours

Time

Using a great course development tool affects the time taken to complete the course.
TalentLMS has amazing built-in tools to calculate the performance of your course. Analytics on various activities can show a rising rate of user engagement over a given period of time.
If you see any negative performance, revise your materials according to the areas that are going downwards. If not, take snapshots of skyrocketing engagement to use for marketing your course internally.
Never underestimate the power of positive visuals!
Ask employees how they have been applying their learning to their work context. Request for testimonials to be added in the course trailer.
Develop courses according to industry standards.
Does a certain course prepare learners for certifications? Announce that. Include tangible and specific skills that can be acquired and applied after completing a course.
If possible, include an image of a happy employee!
Another great idea is to include success in the form of numbers. How many customers were happy in a month? How many projects were acquired? What about the number of skillsets? What targets were achieved?

Market

How to market your courses internally?

Why should I bother with marketing?

Marketing is the only vehicle to get your course out of your office to the learner's workspace! Marketing is as easy as sending an email and as tough as organizing an orientation seminar on the course. The challenge, common to both marketing strategies, is attracting the learners and stakeholders and convincing them that you

have a great value in store for them.

How would you accomplish that? Considering your meagre exposure to marketing, let alone your first attempt at developing an eLearning course, how can you push this course across all barriers? Think over the learning goals of your eLearning course. Write them down. Think over the organization's learning needs. Jot them down next to the learning goals. What you have there is a potential, in-the-raw marketing campaign. Combine them together to demonstrate value in terms of ROI and job performance. Don't forget the Public Relations team. Rein them in for more productive marketing ideas.

Now you know where to begin!

Remember about your audience

When you designed your marketing campaign, who did you have in mind? What was your aim?

Obviously, the answer to the latter is to convince learners that your eLearning course will change their life. However, without knowing your audience/learners you won't be able to accomplish much. Talk to operational managers and team leads to learn more about your learners – the employees. Is there a learning preference? For example, can they read and write at college level, or do they depend on visual cues to perform? Factors like these will make or break your course design. Establish learning goals that are measurable (getting at least 80% correct in quizzes). Another fantastic method that has been doing wonders for us since elementary school, is

public recognition. No matter who your audience is, what their background, deep down we are all humans, hungry for praise and recognition.

Use these proven strategies to promote your course to your audience. Create a method to showcase the first enrollment and the first course completed. Award certificates they can brag about. Promise more projects for certified/trained employees. Provide a visually enticing professional development growth chart to your team. Deliver your promises.

If there is anything worse than being inconsistent – it's not practicing a recognition method at all!

How to run a successful promotion campaign

Get help from communication department

Public Relations department in your organization is the key node of communication between you and the public. Get them involved in the initial stages of marketing. Use their expertise in tweaking the course cover and preview clips. Ask them to give you contacts of individuals in companies or freelancers who are successfully marketing their courses. Ask about how others are doing. While this is not your standard gossip topic – finding out how other organizations churn out impressive trainees should be common sense. Needless to say, a happy employee is a willing learner. You can also ask teams to commit to a minimum number of trainings per quarter. Fol-

low up and gamify the course-commitment activities. Gamification is not new to businesses at all. Find out how you can gamify your company's LMS or intranet to engage learners into lifelong learning practices. Your ultimate goal is to create a learning organization: An organization that updates regularly its practices and innovates.

Live presentations, announcements

Organize a course promotion event within your company. Arrange for live presentations by VIP speakers within your organization. If possible, arrange for an external guest speaker as well, with your Public Relations department. Be creative in providing incentives to employees for attendance and participation. This event cannot be some boring meeting your employees "have to attend". It has to be something they "want to attend". A great way to add motivation is to create course introduction images with real snapshots of employees. You read that right. Ask employees to pose for a photo-shoot for the course. Use these photos as your course cover. Want to take this up another level? Simply ask camera-loving individuals to pose for people cut-outs in your course. A bit of touch-up with a photo editor software and you can enhance these images and lose the background. What did we just accomplish here? We boosted participants' morale and excitement. We even aroused curiosity and the suspense around the course that will be "coming soon". Now you can sit back and enjoy watching employees star in their own show

(course). Getting everyone involved goes a long way into coaxing the hesitant and unenthusiastic learners into enrolling!

Promotional content

Create emails with marketing banners and testimonials as discussed in the ROI section to promote marketing. Circulate images of successful employees who are happy with training. A great way to present your promises towards successful performance, is through special eLearning newsletters. These need to be short and more pictorial. We all know what too much documentation does to us. Words that don't spur an action are a turn-off. Consider illustrating hard facts with illustrations and graphs. Show the prospective percentage of improvement before and after the course. Add testimonials from employees who have already taken the course. Some of these newsletters can be technical, where they will explain the course content, in order to increase the credibility of the course. They can also discuss specific improvements in bullet points, to demonstrate the value of the course. Use the course learning objectives to develop these value-driven bullet points. Get the email list from the Human Resources department to circulate the newsletter periodically. Be consistent with this circulation. Share the latest developments and ask for feedback on what other courses your employees would like to see in the future.

Influence the influencers

When it comes to marketing courses within the

company, no one can move things better than the president! That's right! Do you want one man to move a mountain? Then get hold of the president of the organization (and a few more executives!). Request for some quality video-time. Shoot their video when they sing praises of the new course purchased/developed by the company. Have them provide the organization the gritty details behind their personal success. A real life story never fails to move the human in us! Moreover, it's inspiring to hear a success story. When key stakeholders talk – employees will listen! When they share their views on regular learning and how it helped them get to where they are (even Bill Gates was a regular learner – so what if he was a college dropout!) – employees will follow suit. If the chiefs-in-line will brandish the main features of the new training materials, by describing how it will help the learner grow, you can expect a rising enrollment chart.

If presidents have the power to influence top managers, the operational managers have an equal power to influence the lower level staff to enroll and complete your eLearning courses. Bear in mind that some tweaking will be necessary to adapt your eLearning course to lower level staff. Factors such as their educational background and technology management expertise will determine the delivery format of your eLearning course. Would they learn better in a blended/hybrid course? Do they desire an asynchronous session? Can they communicate online or do they need to talk to an actual course facilitator? You can receive answers to all these

questions by involving operations managers. These persons will enable you to add key changes in your course, that will help your lower level staff to comprehend and apply the content effectively. Arranging for a course opening event is also advisable with operations managers. They will further provide invaluable tools to rein in maximum enrollees and attendees to your eLearning course. In the long run, your course attendance will translate into a "popular course" that will be further endorsed by the president and VIPS of your organization!

Track the progress

Tapping into the analytics tools of your learning management system and harnessing the business intelligence criteria for measuring learner performance, you can easily track and make available the progress to your learners. Make sure you enable tracking of important LMS features, like course completion percentage, grades per assignment, instructor comments etc. Also, create a regular feedback mechanism that is automated and timely. Reporting progress that is a week old is not going to do much for your learner. Deduce graphical representation for all your data and notify the learner through email. Reminders like "your next assignment is due on "this date", "congratulations, you passed the quiz with "this score", and "assignment revision requested" etc, keep learners informed of what is expected of them.

How to reward users?

Great motivator

We mentioned in the previous sections, the impact of public recognition as a positive reinforcement of the learner's behavior. If you are seriously thinking of taking rewards up one level – consider analyzing your learners. If you recall Gardner's various multiple intelligences – you will recognize how unique our thought processes are. Rewarding a linguistic learner (who enjoys reading and gathering information) with tickets to a baseball game will be unfair to both the winner and another learner who is kinesthetic (enjoys moving around and physical activities).

Motivating with gamification elements

And how can we forget the infamous gamification strategy? Interested in creating a Community of Practice? A Community of Inquiry? Simply inject gamification options in the course. A threshold of points translates into a particular badge. The learner gets bragging rights for being "the smartest learner" or the "ace of the maze" etc. Give them privileges to choose avatars. Borrow examples from games. You will be surprised how badge-hungry your learners will turn out to be!

If you have knitted brows then you need a primer on gamification. Consider this "crash info" from Wikipedia: Though the term "gamification" was coined in 2002 by Nick Pelling, a British-born computer programmer and inventor, it did not gain popularity until 2010. Even prior to the term coming into use, other fields borrowing elements from video games was common; for example, some work in scientific visualization borrowed elements from video games. A Forbes blogger also retroactively labelled, Charles Coonradt, who in 1973 founded the consultancy The Game of Work and in 1984 wrote a book by the same name, as the "Grandfather of Gamification". The term "gamification" first gained widespread usage in 2010, in a more specific sense, referring to incorporation of social/reward aspects of games into software. The technique captured the attention of venture capitalists, one of whom said he considered gamification the most promising area in gaming.

Another observed that half of all companies seeking funding for consumer software applications mentioned game design in their presentations.

Gamification is the use of game thinking and game mechanics in non-game contexts to engage users in solving problems. It has been studied and applied in several domains, with some of the main purposes being to:

→ engage (improve user engagement, physical exercise, return on investment, flow, data quality,
→ timeliness)
→ teach (in classrooms, the public or at work) entertain (enjoyment, fun, loyalty)
→ measure (for recruiting and employee evaluation)
→ improve the perceived ease of use of information
→ systems.

A review of research on gamification shows that a majority of studies on gamification find positive effects from gamification. Gamification techniques strive to leverage people's natural desires for socializing, learning, mastery, competition, achievement, status, self-expression, altruism, or closure. Early gamification strategies use rewards for players who accomplish the desired tasks or competition to engage players. Types of rewards include points, achievement badges or levels, the filling of a progress bar, or providing the user with virtual currency. Making the rewards for accomplishing tasks visible

to other players, or providing leaderboards, are ways of encouraging players to compete. Due to potentially problematic consequences of competition, which can result in unethical behavior, low cooperation and low collaboration, or disadvantaging certain player demographics such as women, current gamification designs try to refrain from using this element. Another approach to gamification is to make existing tasks feel more like games. Some techniques used in this approach include adding meaningful choice, onboarding with a tutorial, increasing challenge, and adding narrative.

Motivating with real-life incentives

Real-life incentives go an even longer way than online ones. Company-wide recognition, both online and offline, offers psychological motivation to complete the training. Arrange a pre-course meeting with prospective trainees to develop commitment and support from each other. Request from "celebrity employees" to be facilitators. In this pre-course meeting, introduce the featured employee/facilitator and talk about how he/she has achieved his/her current status. It is not surprising to reveal to your trainees, that the main route to their prestige and success is life-long learning. Inspiring individuals like these, will definitely kick-start your training program and provide a higher course-completion rate. Also, featured employees offer invaluable input to course improvement as well as communication support for the trainees. In their presence, a "pledge" to complete the course is automatically generated.

Trainees feel a greater responsibility to perform well and complete the course. Arrange for a mid-course meeting to ensure everyone is on the right track. This is also a great time to collect feedback on their course taking experience.

Remember, an e-course development is an iterative process. Any feedback from surveys is worth its weight in gold. A post-course meeting will be a great event to collect testimonials, both in video and quotations to bring more trainees to your courses! Finally, put up employee profile, picture and e-portfolio on the company intranet as a "featured" employee has proven to be a successful motivating strategy. Don't miss that one out!

Congratulations! You have impressed your learners. Your next course is already being anticipated.

Get some help!

Regardless of your encouraging and coaxing method, if you really want an intellectual organization, you will find a million methods to achieve it. Remember, you are not alone in this noble task. Be in touch with the Human Resources department as well as senior managers. They are your best source for ideas on motivating the unique culture in your organization. Meeting regularly enables exchange of ideas that are applicable in the current

learning and working environment.

As a training developer, your main task will be to liaison these knowledge sources in one room for a superior course planning, delivery and maintenance.

Communicate
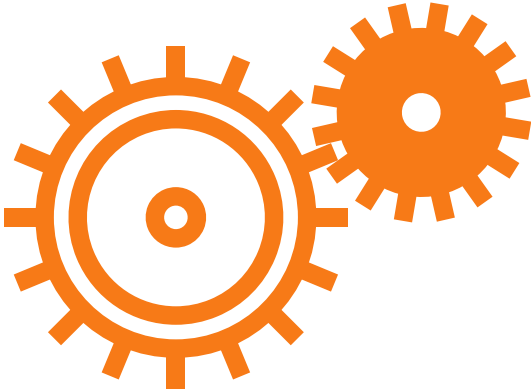
How to automate notifications?

Important communication

If there is one element that has the power to predict an eLearning course's success, it is communication. The reason? eLearning demands a social collaboration environment to guarantee its success. Regardless of the environment, learning is a social event. Solitary learners know this fact too well.

Without feedback, opinions, arguments and discussions, learning is incomplete and sometimes even obsolete! Communication through multiple channels and formats ensure eLearning is as social as any learning environment. As digital consumers, we have added several communication platforms to our lifestyle. With apps for almost all social media, we revel in the notification signal.

If you want your learners to engage regularly with your course, then we strongly suggest providing a mobile application version of your LMS. This app will notify your learners when a new message or announcement needs to be checked out. Make sure there is always something new to read: a blog, an expert advice, message from the president and so on. Broadcasting achievements through notifications is also a great way to keep everyone engaged and in the loop. Announcements for new courses also keep things interesting. Automated communication encourages desirable behaviors.

Automate it

We all know the familiar ping of a notification. Notifications can be enabled in many ways to ensure the correct message is conveyed at the desired time. There are many types of notifications available in a learning management system. Talk to the experts in the Information Technology Department, who selected, procured and installed the LMS for your organization. Getting to know the features and functionality of your organization's learning portal will give you a superior advantage

in administering your e-courses. Simply request for your organization's learning management system orientation session. Take notes of all the bells and whistles of the learning portal.

Ask yourself what features you need for your course? Is it updates on course changes? Is it the grade distribution? What about the latest trends in training strategies? How will you share this information? What if you have more than a hundred learners. How would you send out multiple notifications to multiple users? Automated notifications is the best thing that happened to course administrators since the idea of mass-emails! Learn about the various types of notifications from the IT personnel and utilize them to engage and retain learners in your ongoing and upcoming e-courses.

Imagine sending one message to all learners at a click of a button. Also imagine, being able to write customized notes for special situations and sending them to the categorized groups of learners.

These and the following types of notifications are great to use, in order to maintain your learners in your e-course.

What types can be automated?

→ Words of encouragement
Being proactive in communicating your expectations to learners is the key to capturing and retaining their attention. Programmed messages that encourage the learner to continue working the way they are, boosts their confidence. You can change these messages each time you send them so that they don't look identical.

Reminders

Reminders of assignment deadlines and upcoming quizzes aid in easier schedule planning for the learner. Use "add notification to calendar" feature, if available, to sync timelines with your learners' schedule. The schedule planner will further notify the learners when the date is close. Guide the learners with short "job-aids" that demonstrate how to use the LMS schedule planner/calendar.

Performance reports

Busy learners will appreciate feedback on their progress in the form of attractive graphs. Statistics that show norm-referenced results or the mean scores of peers also enable learners to modify their performance. Assure learners that their privacy will be kept at all times. Send out messages for grades and certificates ready for viewing and claiming respectively. tained at all times.

Inform about help

Enable chat message exchange between the learner and the moderator. Inform all logged in learners that a moderator is online for assistance. Following up after a concern is addressed will motivate learners emotionally. That's another great way to alleviate the lack of trust syndrome in an online environment.
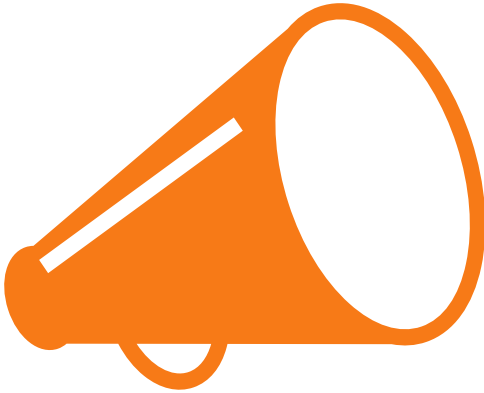
Meetings information

Lastly, notify your learners of any upcoming course related meetings with the facilitators. You can also

request for confirmation if they will attend or not. Similarly, other learning related events or conferences can also be announced for anyone who is interested to attend. Such notifications build credibility for your e-course.

How to stay proactive while communicating?

Victor Jeurissen, global practice leader for IBM Management Development Solutions, defines eLearning as: the use of innovative technologies and learning models to transform the way individuals and organizations acquire new skills and access knowledge (Moeng, 2004). He further defines learning as a collaboration of information, interaction, and information interchange.

In an online environment, an experience without communication is akin to searching for something in the dark. In this section we explain communication strategies that will enable deeper engagement and higher order think-

ing skills in online learners.

Why is it important?

Have you ever walked in the dark? Literally, in pitch black darkness? With a feeling that you are definitely walking in circles – getting nowhere?
Well, first-time eLearners feel exactly like this. If you really empathize with the "fear of the unknown" feeling, be proactive in communicating with your eLearners.
Put yourself in their shoes and think of your expectations and questions as a first time eLearner.
What information should be easily accessible? What technical skills need retouching? Any software plugins? Above all, what are the different formats of communication in this eLearning environment and how to navigate to them?

There are a couple of examples on how to facilitate communication, regarding your online courses. .

Forums
Forums are undeniably the most popular form of communication. Involve an expert employee, whose work speaks for them, and you have an engaging discussion on multiple threads at a time! It really depends how you, as a training manager, will moderate the messages. Moderating comments is also an art in itself. You need to be able to sense aggression

and defensiveness in words. Your goal is to shift the conversation towards a more productive, positive and creative direction. The best part about textual interchange is the use of passive language that is usually hidden in active speech. As individuals, we share more in a text form than we do verbally. A personal perspective sharing makes forums (and any text based communication) a really superior form of communication, as compared to a live classroom.

Instant messaging

Instant messaging is one of the oldest methods of communicating online. Announce the chat times you are available for any "course related" assistance! Chatting in real time is more effective in eliminating confusion and frustration in learners. Chatting with an expert is also very rewarding. Involve a chat session with a VIP in your organization. Watch how eager learners and achievers will flock in that session to get a piece of the expert's mind. The fact that experts elsewhere in the eLearning environment, charge substantial amounts of money, makes this session even more satisfying. Announce the availability of experts for their respective courses. Learners enjoy interacting with experts and gaining access to meaningful information. Instant messages are also a great way to engage peers with each other. A mandatory, once a week session will enable learners to collaborate with each other. They can share their concerns and offer suggestions, creating a more trustworthy learning environment. A factor relatively hard to establish later, if not done early on.

Personal messages

Personal messages are like notifications. We discussed notifications and their type in the previous section. Personal messages are easy to send out if there is a limited number of learners. Indeed, the quality of learning is enhanced with learner specific feedback. One of the best strategies to automate customized messages to the learner is to create a database for comments that is integrated with the course, hosted by your learning management system. Use this database to store learners' profile, their performance, their concerns, their strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, post at least two comments a week. These comments can reflect a change (no matter how small) in their performance. The day you update these comments in this database, use their mobile contacts to send the comment out in the form of notification. When learners receive specific and timely comments on their performance, they are more likely to improve. However, at a larger scale, this method loses feasibility. Personalized messages are time consuming for a larger learner group. Mass notification would be the only effective way to be proactive in communicating with eLearners.

System announcements

Any learning management system must have a system announcement feature. These announcements are sent out as either notifications or emails. System announcements can vary from technical downtime information to upcoming events in the LMS calendar.

They can be used to provide a heads-up on upcoming e-course related events. Reminders linked to the system calendar can be sent out to learners to ensure their participation. System announcements can also invite more learners to an online orientation or seminar by key speakers. Another great idea to post on system announcements is the post-course survey results including learner testimonials. Polls that ask user preference in learning, interactivity requirements and communication preferences can also be integrated in system announcements. Finally, use this format of communication to announce your latest course. Talk about its features periodically. Announce the enrollment dates and deadlines related to the course. Include any messages from CEOs and VIPs that endorse your upcoming course. Consider system announcement as a very serious and "final" method of conveying news and messages that should be received by everyone using the learning portal.

Make sure you have those features in your LMS

The previous section provided an example where course defects are detected using reporting and tracking tools of the LMS. Improvements made in increments are actually the final aspect of instruction design. Not surprisingly, this phase is never completed. New comments and issues arise based on work context changes that need to be addressed in the course.

This reminds us the importance of this eBook. If you want to be involved in upgrading your company's courses and trainings, work closely with an ID (and follow the tips in this eBook) to perform in-house training improvement tasks. We guarantee an impressed boss and a raise! When we stressed the importance of communication between all users of an LMS, we also meant to use data collection strategies. These strategies fall under the "Evaluation" phase of the course design process. Best practices in instruction design, advise us to create a pre and a post course survey. A pre-course survey enables ID's to understand the learner in better detail. These surveys aid in performing efficient course improvements during the iteration process. Pre-course surveys will also allow instructors to understand the capability, needs and expectations of learners enrolled in the course. Similarly, the post-course survey will demonstrate the quality of the learning experience. Any suggestions and ideas should be considered seriously when revising the course content. Iterations through evaluating the course truly raise the quality and relevance of the learning materials.

Apart from evaluating your course performance, integrating all features discussed above in your eLearning environment will ensure socio-constructive learning and more satisfied learners.

Use these tips to take your course up another level!

Assess
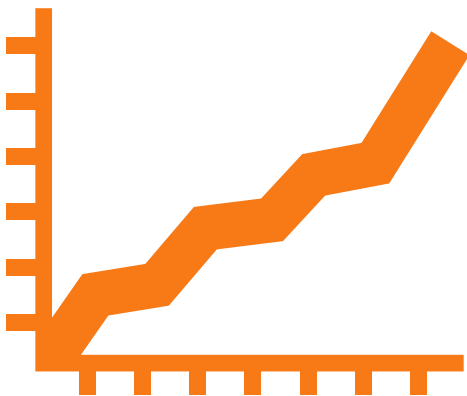
What metrics to track?

Metrics measure performance in a way that is meaningful and informative to both the learner and the instructor. As a training developer, what metric tools do you need? What type of metrics are available in an LMS anyway? LMS administrators, course instructors, and learners need meaningful analysis of activities.

These include:

- → the course completion rates
- → the course registration number

- ➝ the revenue generated per course in a given quarter
- ➝ and even the quality of responses provided by the instructor in a course

Intelligent metrics are needed for intelligent systems. If you are a TalentLMS user you don't have to look for external metric measuring tools! The most "in-demand" metric is just at your fingertips. Direct feedback that can be collected via survey for the course or the instructor is built into the system. TalentLMS includes surveys that can be used to collect feedback meaningful for learners as well as teachers - and tools to analyze the results to gain valuable insights. Plans to measure the relatively tricky element, the ROI are also underway.

This is a time-sensitive metric. It builds on data collected at periodic intervals. For example, survey results and simple polls collected by training managers on questions like "How would you rate the training program's performance improving capability" and other specific questions with three responses "Excellent", "Okay" or "Poor".

Answers from polls can easily be analyzed (over time) and displayed as a "ROI Rating for this Course".

Job impact rating is also desirable and again, time sensitive. Data for Job Impact Rating can only be collected from managers and senior managers.

In this section we discuss what kind of metrics we need from an LMS to make the ROI of our training material worthwhile.

An LMS can include tools that measure the following about a training course:

➤ **Overall rating of the training course:**
Overall rating is a one word answer: "Excellent" "Good" or "Fair". Such ratings improve learner enrollment and provide opportunity to instructional designers to improve their courses.

➤ **Post-event survey results:**
These are basically for instructional designers and trainers. They can be specific questions related to the course, enabling designers to improve the content after each event delivery.

➤ **Instructor ratings:**
Very essential for the instructor to fine tune their course mentoring. Also important for marketing the instructor as the mentor of a course.

➤ **Learning Effectiveness:**
This is a bit abstract but can be dealt with specific questions like requesting for emotional or affective responses. The confidence, excitement, anxiety, empowerment and curiosity or boredom learners feel, describe the effectiveness of the learning materials.

➤ **Return on Investment:**
as discussed above

Overall satisfaction:
This is popular and again needs a single word answer. Using non-conventional answers like "awesome" "phenomenal" "brain wrecker" etc. add to the appeal of this metric.

On the whole, the ability of a metric measuring system integrated in an LMS can be enhanced by adding operational and performance tools that transfer a degree of learning to work context and the ability to demonstrate the value of learning content, to senior members of the organization. LMS are power social networking tools. Their essence lies in the capability to create a community of practice (COP).If developed and implemented effectively, LMS can serve as a talent attracting pool. Certain data measurement tools have to be in place to develop, attract and retain talent within the learning community. Measuring unstructured data and providing valuable notifications to mentors working behind the scenes, is also desirable.

This is done through qualitative analysis – a step that frees up processing time by humans for more creative tasks, therefore reducing administration tasks and increasing data use. LMS metrics can also measure performance and align it with business objectives to describe specific outcomes at a given time. The possibilities are endless, given the volume of data sifting through servers. Analytic tools programmed in your LMS can create a world of difference in how learning and teaching takes place within the organization. The influx of more visitors leads to an upward spiral of marketing.

More traffic yields more awareness of the organization and its activities, ultimately leading to more business and success than a competitor.

Setting up concrete marketing goals using analytics figures will keep you informed on how well your eLearning course is being received by your audience.

Metrics are measurable tools that keep your training development and management tasks in sync with each other.

They also encourage improved learning and performance achievements, by providing specific and timely information.
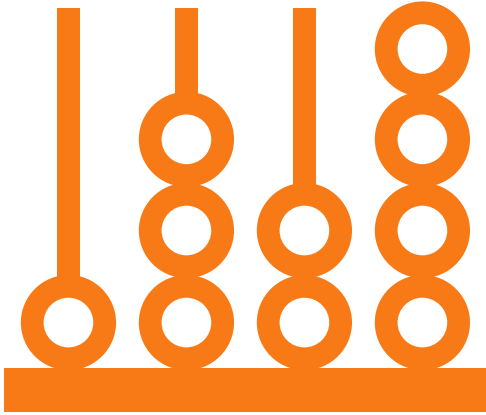
How to calculate the ROI of your eLearning courses?

Gary Wilber, CEO of Drug Emporium, Inc. said, *"The expense isn't what it costs to train employees. It's what it costs not to train them. You realize that as you grow."* This statement aptly explains ROI, Return on Investment. When developing an eLearning course from scratch to its periodic maintenance phase, an organization has to allocate a certain budget. Depending on the nature of the eLearning training, the cost varies from a few hun-

red to a few thousand dollars per course. ROI is demanded by senior managers who sanction this budget. This is measured in both tangible as well as intangible terms. Tangible terms are the profits and revenue generated through the improved performance of the learners in the work environment. Intangible terms are the improved communication and execution of business protocols by these learners. Senior managers need reports with such details to appreciate the efforts behind an eLearning course.

Justifying an ROI is important in order to continue developing eLearning courses for your organization's learning management system. ROI when demonstrated properly leads to a definite intellectual learning organization.

Why is it important?

Organizations determine clear profit margins before investing in a venture or a project. Investing in organizational learning through eLearning training development is a significant investment. ROI for eLearning is measured in short-term as well as long-term basis. The true effects of learning are seen over the years, when knowledge is internalized, realized and shared down the corporate chain. A successful ROI calculated by the company enables the senior managers to improve business strategy through innovative measures. Any new development, research, patent, copyright or business practice needs an eLearning course to be disseminated through eLearning. The benefits derived from this knowledge

generation can be seen in the form of currently implemented business strategies. According to an article in eLearning industry: "In conclusion, it is important to understand that all eLearning programs must be measured in terms of ROI. Not only should eLearning specialists should take into consideration the investments such as personnel, technology, content, and hidden costs, but they should also look at benefits associated with eLearning such as flexibility and reduction of travel costs. By accurately calculating the cost of a training program, eLearning professionals will be able to easily justify the investment in the program and decide if eLearning is ultimately a viable solution."

What to take under consideration while calculating the costs?

Personnel

Personnel costs calculation deals with calculating the internal and external costs associated with e-learning development. Personnel costs are unpredictable. As the project proceeds, you may hire programmers and graphics artists to complete some scenarios or pages. You may also need copyright permissions of some resources.

eLearning Technology

With a plethora of innovative tools, organizations need to select learning solutions that are broadly classified as, Application tools, Virtual Classrooms, Learning Management Systems and Remote Learning Infrastructure. Apart from purchasing new infra

structure and tools, existing systems may need to be refurbished to support the new one, for example, replacing existing laptops/tablet devices and networking/collaboration devices. If the organization has an upgraded communications and collaboration system and network in place, new applications would only need custom coding for a seamless integration.

eLearning Content

Converting pdfs and ebooks into eLearning content is relatively easier and less time consuming than building content including multimedia (audio, video, images, diagrams). For every layer of scenario-building and interactivity, you are looking into more development time. Also, if off-the-shelf eLearning programs do not integrate with your existing learning management system, modifications and coding might be required, which will lead to more effort and time.

Hidden costs

When deciding to cross-over from conventional learning to eLearning, be prepared for hidden costs like personnel disruptions, resource reallocations, existing project deferrals, (short term) team realignments.

What to take under consideration while calculating the benefits?

Travel savings

Let's start with the most aggravating travel experi-

ence: driving in snow/sleet or rain to get to the organization's training site. Now this is not a very motivating thought. If anything, driving in inclement weather is a prime precursor to procrastination! Imagine the relief when your trainees learn that the course is mostly online with a few on-site meetings. Did we mention the escalating gas prices? And what about the home-career balance ratio? Your eLearning course is guaranteed to alleviate travel expenses, as well as the associated emotional turmoil.

Trainer costs savings

Have you ever been in a situation in which you were attending a lecture, perhaps in college and were so distracted that you had a small voice recorder record your instructor's lesson? Were you struggling to catch on lost sleep? Were you working on another assignment? Such is life. And with current times, this phenomenon is more common. As a trainer, you have the opportunity to save time and effort of facilitators who would need to work in shifts to repeat sessions at different times. Weather related cancellations, trainee drop outs, or other unavoidable reasons can also waste time and effort as well as money invested in administering a course in a live environment.

Logistics and facilities

Live trainings can be fun but they are expensive too. Consider adding the "fun" element in the on-site meeting sessions of your eLearning course. Not only will you save your organization power and data

resources, you will also be able to engage learners in a more meaningful and constructive way. Other exhaustible stationary used to demonstrate learning materials in a live environment can be replaced by interactivity and multimedia in an online learning environment. Audio, video and graphics utilized in a live environment can be used effectively in an online training environment. What's more, your learners can repeat the session as many times as they want, just like you could play your instructors voice when you were ready to listen!

When it comes to investing in training, some employees and managers still demand justification.
There may be some resistance and hesitation to purchase new training, especially if the previous one failed to impact employee performance or behavior.

This attitude highlights the lack of a training strategy. Developing and establishing a training strategy for your organization will create fewer setbacks and roadblocks for you. When you have a training strategy in place, selecting or building the desired course is a breeze. However, calculating the ROI (return on investment) requires a bit more planning.
When deciding to buy off-the-shelf training or building custom training, use these pointers to justify your ROI:

→ If leaning on off-the-shelf training material, ask yourself: we are in the same business as our competitor. If we use generic training materials we may lose our edge.

→ If you have a certain way of doing things, consider

custom building training materials.

➜ You can also purchase off-the-shelf training and add your examples and case studies.

Building your own training usually saves money.

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How to iterate successfully?

The previous section provided an example where course defects are detected using the reporting and tracking tools of the LMS. Improvements made in increments are actually the final aspect of instructional design. As we said earlier, not surprisingly, the phase is never completed. There are several other evaluation procedures. Quality management documents are freely available on the Internet.

These are checklists for instructional designers and clients to ensure quality standards for learning have been adhered to.

Another popular standard is USA Section 508 standards. These govern policies that require instructional designers to create disability and impairment friendly learning materials. Specific trainings have their own evaluation procedures. Once a course is complete, it is subjected to its evaluation criteria and revised to satisfy all guidelines. Michael Allen, the eLearning expert suggests the following ten iterations to perform before launching your eLearning course:

Before you pitch the course to your audience, walk through with your subject matter expert and instructional designer to ensure all elements of the course are neatly tied together.

These are some of the touch points to look for:

→ Correct all grammatical errors and typos. Before meeting with the client, make sure you clear any word clutter, any repetitions, any spelling mistakes and so on. Ask your team members to check if you cannot find any!

→ Check for any broken links within the course and external to the course. Double check the contact details. Revise and review the links to make sure they lead to addresses you want your learners to go to.

→ Ensure all content is present and you haven't missed out on anything. When clients review the final product, they (and sometimes you and your team)

will realize some parts need re-writing and new parts need to replace deleted ones. Be prepared for such changes. This is the most important aspect of course iteration. Watch out for logical flow of the content. Make sure the content matches the course objectives. Another area to check for is matching course objectives with assessment items. Be prepared to figure out errors with clients that you didnt think were errors!

→ Check for content accuracy
Policy and compliance trainings are sensitive. Before launching make sure you contact the client to ensure nothing has changed and the accuracy of the course content won't be affected. A rule of thumb for all forms of writing is to thoroughly check your sources. If in doubt, leave it out! Do not let incorrect information affect your credibility!

→ What are the implementation plans? What steps will be taken after you deliver the course?
One of the pitfalls for instructional designers and e-learning developers is discovering much later (or worse yet, when the course is complete) that the LMS or the IT infrastructure hosted for the client does not support the output file of your course. Before you try to convert your output file into another format (and ruin some features of your course) check with the client on the details of the LMS. Also check for hardware facility available that will support the multimedia in your course.

→ Walkthrough the navigation: make sure it is simple and easy to follow.
Advancing smoothly through the course is one of the important features to retain the learner. Check for navigation several times before the final launch.

→ Are the instructions correct?
Provide clear instructions in the form of tool tips that aid in following alternative navigation paths in your course. This holds especially true for scenario-based interactive slides that require decision-making choices or other activities like drag and drop, matching etc.

→ Stick to conventional course template and style.
Create simple and easy to use user-interface. Think: WISIWYG (what you see is what you get). Have a few learners comment on your navigation and course template style. Your learners may highlight problematic areas better than you.

→ Observe learners evaluate your course.
Observing the learner work their way through your course provides valuable information as compared to sending them out surveys. Watch their body language and facial expressions. Ask them their comfort level in navigating through the course. Take notes and repeat with at least one more learner.

→ Does the course meet the learning objectives?
The best way to check for this step (of course involve the SME), is to check the scores of your test-driving learners. Are they achieving new knowledge and skills? While a post-course survey will help at this stage, talking to your learners directly will shed new light on your weaker areas.

Ready to create your course?

Get a free account and start building