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Issue 105

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Interview

Claire Silvester

HR Director
Vector Aerospace

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DIY or outsourced?

HR can take a more hands-on approach to bringing online learning onboard, and here David Marshall, CEO of Marshall ACM weighs up the options; external supplier, DIY or a bit of both? Either way, adopting a more pragmatic approach will lead to better results all round.



You can, of course, outsource all online training and delivery to a major consultancy. However, a much more cost effective and realistic approach is for organisations to develop some of that training in-house, or at least have a better understanding of what to shop for in the marketplace. There are four key stages to consider when developing and delivering online training. Firstly, identify subject matter expertise. Organisations usually have this in-house, so it's about identifying where the knowledge exists, harnessing this expertise and working out the best way to distribute it. Second, choose an authorware tool. This is the software product that is needed to create the e-learning. There are a number of tools in the marketplace that organisations can use, with one of the most popular being 'Articulate'. Using an authorware tool enables organisations to be independent of developers, but means that they will need an individual in-house who is comfortable learning how to use it. This would ideally be someone who is skilled in graphic design and able to create courses that aren't too bound to generic templates.

authorware tool, as the result will often be overly-detailed and have inaccessible information. Large chunks of information can be off-putting to learners, who generally respond to carefully crafted, bite-sized chunks of interactive information. Organisations rarely have the expertise to create this in-house, so the option is either to invest in training someone internally or outsource this aspect to an instructional designer. An outsourced Instructional Designer will work with HR to storyboard the content and map out clear learning outcomes in a more systematic way.

Developing a learning management system (LMS) is the most complex purchase for HR. This is the system that distributes and records the usage of the technology-based learning. While there are free, open-source LMS systems that organisations can use, there are a number of advantages to outsourcing the LMS to a specialist. Indeed, the value of a good LMS is generally well recognised by HR, so it is not unusual to find organisations have purchased a learning management system before they

can provide opportunities for social engagement with others on learning material, and develop their learning through shared experiences and interaction. As social media becomes a more integral part of our lives, it can be harnessed for learning too. Whether with a blended learning approach or providing space for learners to share and build upon their experiences, technology is increasingly being utilised as a tool for both formal and informal shared learning opportunities. Ultimately, social learning that enables interaction via technology, will transform e-learning from being an effective information delivery system to a driving force for progressive learning.

It's understandable, with media coverage on misuse of social media, to be resistant to implement this as a learning tool. However, with careful guidance and championing by HR, to manage and drive change internally, it could be of tremendous benefit. It empowers individuals to support colleagues' development by coaching them through topics, or offering opportunities for discussion around e-learning topics. An online community for e-learning content could create an internal buzz that helps to improve the uptake for course enrolment too, meaning less reminders and a more highly-trained and engaged workforce. Technology has the potential to become "the great leveller" enabling users from all backgrounds to access the best standards of teaching and resource. And if learners enjoy it, so much the better. ●

Social media be harnessed for learning, with a blended learning approach, or providing space for learners to share and build upon their experiences

Paying an external expert to take care of the design will have cost implications. However, advantages include better design, a more user-friendly course, and a final product that is more likely to be used by employees. When choosing a tool, HR should look for one that is future-proofed and well supported. For example, it is often a good idea to use those that have HTML5 back-up and are not reliant on Flash. Assign an instructional designer; the main area where organisations go wrong is in the content. It can be a mistake to simply allow the subject matter expert direct access to the

have the content to use on it. Another key factor is HR should consider when planning their LTT strategy, is the increasing need for 'adaptive e-learning' that can be delivered across different devices and operating systems. This addresses the increased requirement for training that can evolve to support a multi-device global workforce.

Technology can also create social learning in the workplace. For example, a well-designed intranet can provide employee polls and forums, or a well-designed e-learning course

For further information:

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