



talent development

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A Systematic
Approach
to Talent
Development

Employee
Engagement:
An Epic Failure?

LMS Features
Most Appealing
to Employees



COACHING THROUGH QUESTIONS

A coaching approach that relies more on asking questions than giving answers better engages employees.



Innovations in Learning Technology

BY STEPHANIE CASTELLANO

It's a brave new world in learning technology, one where anyone can transform herself into an instructional designer with the aid of a few well-chosen tools and a keen understanding of her audience. It's an environment where professional development can take place on the bus or in a cafe, and where learning ripples through digital communities spread across the globe.

TD reached out to some of the architects of this new world, asking for their commentary on the latest trends in learning technology and what they mean for end users—both the learners and training professionals.

From “nice to have” to “must have”

Learning technology has gone from clunky, to convenient, to downright stunning in its capabilities and presentation. Features and functionality that used to be on users' wish lists are now taken for granted. The providers we spoke with discussed what talent development professionals can now expect from learning technology.

For most, mobile learning is the main focus. “If you can't get it on your phone, don't bother,” says Darik Volpa, founder and CEO of Rehearsal VRP, a web-based platform for video role playing. “We live in a society where people work and play at the same time. If they can't learn wherever and whenever they want, it won't happen.”

Josh Blank, co-founder and senior vice president at OpenSesame, an online marketplace for e-learning courses, agrees. “Most learners, especially younger generations, now expect learning to be quick, interactive, and fun. They're used to having information literally at their fingertips through their mobile devices, and being able to crowdsource answers using social media. As a result, mobile readiness is an absolute must.”

Let's go back to that word “crowdsource.” You're sure to see it crop up from time to time as more learning technology suppliers bake social elements into their products. Following suit with Jelly, a tool launched by the founders of Twitter that enables users to ask questions of their vast social networks, many providers will design solutions so that learners can query their peers for answers and advice.

The suppliers also spoke about the importance of providing a good user experience. It's all about “aesthetics, aesthetics, aesthetics,” says Barry Stern, senior vice president of accelerated development solutions at Development Dimensions International, a consulting firm.

“So much has changed in the past 10 years. Once upon a time a green or black screen with some boxy text was perfectly adequate. That's no longer the case,” he adds. “What you deliver during someone's workday needs to be ...

pleasing to the eye. If you aren't paying extra attention to the user experience, the look and feel of a learning technology product, it will surely be dismissed.”

The appearance and functionality depends on tools that graphic and multimedia designers have long been familiar with, says Melissa Layne, director of research methodology and editor-in-chief of *Internet Learning* at the American Public University System. Getting beyond merely inserting video and graphics into learning materials, these tools include “infographics, rollovers, accordions, branching scenarios, drag-and-drop, and progress bars, to name a few.” The suppliers we spoke with agree that any learner using these interactive features will be more engaged.

Integration with existing talent management systems also is a must. OpenSesame's founders, frustrated with both the inflexible purchasing options of large e-learning providers and the disparate systems of smaller providers, developed their own curated catalog of e-learning courses.

“OpenSesame customers like that they can order courses from a single source, without a long-term contract, and easily integrate the content into their learning management systems,” says Blank. Thankfully, the struggle to track data from multiple e-learning providers is quickly lessening as solutions offering more flexibility arise.

Other developments in learning technology

Working on the cutting-edge of learning technology, these providers always have to keep an eye out for the next big thing—because it could dramatically alter the market for their products and services.

“The wide availability of rapid e-learning creation tools has removed previous barriers to creating courses,” says Blank. “There are now thousands of subject matter experts who

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can create high-value content quickly. These courses are modern, up-to-date, and targeted—ranging from short videos to more advanced interactive courses that cover complex technical concepts.” The startling array of choices presented a golden opportunity for OpenSesame, which helps organizations make sense of the many and ever-changing opportunities for training and developing their employees.

Volpa insists that video will play an ever-increasing role in learning. “The proliferation of webcams on computers and mobile devices opens up a lot of opportunity for training and development. Rather than simply watching video content, we will interact and participate with it in new ways. Look at the engagement and success of the ALS Association’s ‘ice bucket challenge.’” He continued, “I wouldn’t have started a video-based company if I didn’t feel video was going to be a ‘must-have’ learning technology. ... If you think video is not going to be a requirement for our incoming workforce, think again.”

Creating incubators for innovation in learning also is something many providers are working on. The American Public University System fosters bright ideas in e-learning through its APUS Prize for Innovation in Online Education. In 2014, the prize went to Osmosis, a platform-based startup that enables medical students to extract the text from course materials, and uses a cluster algorithm to bring in related articles, videos, and other content. Sources like these are worth paying attention to as the learning technology industry continues to evolve.

Changing workforce demographics

Changes in the learning technology industry are driven largely by the shift in workforce demographics—Baby Boomers are steadily leaving the workforce and Millennials are taking their place. Stern says that the “swipe generation” is setting the bar very high for learning professionals. “When their interest isn’t piqued, they

want to swipe to the next thing. In the past, your learner may have given you 10 minutes to illustrate your point. Now, you need to do it almost instantly.”

Millennials also want to grow their careers quickly, and they won’t stick around for years waiting for a promotion. “According to our most recent Global Leadership Forecast, Millennials are more likely to leave in the next 12 months than leaders in other generational groups,” says Stern. “To keep this from happening, we must keep their preferences in mind when designing and delivering content.”

He says that while Millennials’ expectations for formal training and developmental assignments mirror those of other generations, younger workers have a stronger preference for using social and mobile learning.

Not only is it a younger workforce; it’s a more dispersed one. Organizations can’t always resort to classroom training anymore. For Discovery Learning, a leadership development company, this means “designing content that is highly accessible on multiple platforms,” says Nash Musselwhite, director of marketing. And in addition to highly accessible content, learners are demanding more immediate feedback.

“We have reconfigured all of our psychometric assessments with the option of providing immediate feedback to participants when it fits the design parameters of the program designer and facilitator,” says Musselwhite. Discovery Learning also allows its customers to receive certification in its products virtually. “With the scheduling demands and budget constraints put on talent development professionals, it is unrealistic to expect people to take days or weeks out of their schedule to get certified to use a tool. All of our facilitator training is now a hybrid model of virtual learning through online courses and custom one-one-one coaching calls. We have eliminated the need and expense of traveling to a training event.”

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Real-World Sales Training

BY DRÉ NORONHA

Video role plays enable these sales reps to practice and perfect their skills, while learning from one another.

Sales training often is a trying experience. There are many roadblocks to interest, availability, and engagement. Timing always is a factor because salespeople are in various deal stages at any given point. Geography plays havoc with live or online event scheduling. And materials may not be relevant to all participants.

So, how does a training department interest and engage salespeople, coordinate various geographic locations and schedules, and accommodate different experience levels?

Training needs

Marketwired—a provider of news release distribution—worked on blended classroom, webinar, and self-guided e-learning approaches to combat training challenges, but was left looking for something to complete the experience. With more than 75 sales representatives and a growing team, effective training and onboarding is critical.

Typical classroom training programs allow for relationship building, story sharing, and crowdsourcing of valuable information. All of this, however, comes at a price. Hard costs include travel, meals, location, and materials. Up to 40 percent of total training costs are spent on travel and lodging alone.

Role play was consistently suggested as the solution to improve training, but how it could be executed in a scalable and cost-effective way was undetermined.



THE COMPANY: Marketwired
www.marketwired.com



THE SUPPLIER: Rehearsal VRP
www.VideoRolePlay.com

Selling is a profession, not just a skill

We decided to search for a solution that would use the benefits of role play, without the live public display. We wanted a solution that would feel personal and allow the unfiltered salesperson to shine through.

The desired goal was for reps to run through scenarios that dealt with a variety of verticals, business sizes, and personalities to transform them into professionals who could follow a sales process and adjust their delivery on the fly. Representatives would be able to learn from one another, cultivate solid answers, and share best practices.

The front-runner of the search was an audio solution whereby prerecorded statements were delivered via phone and trainee responses were captured and shared in a common web repository for all to review and rate. However, it didn't allow for one-on-one mentoring by managers, inclusion of contextual information, or an ability to export a sound file. We realized that most effective learning occurs when classroom role plays are captured by video for evaluation, so video became a new requirement. We continued our search.

A solution to meet the needs

Rehearsal Video Role-Play (VRP) was the top Google hit when searching for “video role play.” The training team watched the company’s demo videos and was impressed with the functionality, modern interface, and easy user experience. Furthermore, we did not need to physically capture video with extensive camera equipment. The only piece of equipment that was needed was a webcam. It was an all-in-one solution.

After an initial evaluation, we determined that Rehearsal VRP met most, but not all, of what we desired. The product was still young, and had several additions scheduled for release. We were assured that the lacking features we sought either were already scheduled for release in the coming weeks or would be added to the product roadmap. The company guaranteed that, by the time we were looking to implement the training program, our needs would be met.

Rehearsal VRP initiated a partner approach, which solidified the business relationship and enabled us to advise on product development. The company made good on its word, and all of the expected features were delivered on time.

Preparing for game day

Our management team decided to conduct a pilot with 10 sales reps to gather data on how learners would interact with the system. Representatives participated, and the experience was positive. The reps even suggested scenarios for the upcoming rollout.

Soon, additional client scenario recordings were created using both the capture feature and the import function. It was an all-in-one, painless solution, with the Rehearsal VRP team on standby to assist.

Results, challenges, and changes

Rehearsal VRP was a success. It provided a complete solution for our training needs. The product offered a platform where the team could provide contextual information, record and respond using video, give one-on-one feedback, and share top responses.

Approximately 95 percent of the reps performed their assigned role plays on time. The role plays were completed on laptops 80 percent of the time, on tablets 15 percent of the time, and on smartphones 5 percent of the time, with the recording location split 50/50 between home and office.

At first, many representatives were apprehensive, but after using it, the majority expressed positive feedback. Playful banter began as reps uncovered bad visual and oral habits, such as playing with their hair and saying “um.” It was eye-opening and drove reps toward self-improvement.

Sales managers and team leads noticed immediate improvement in live responses and increased confidence levels. Additionally, managers observed heightened conviction in responses. Sales representatives who were required to redo their initial submissions tackled the task with determination rather than disappointment. And they began recording responses at their desks and reviewed them with peers. The process became fun, competitive, and educational.

Unlike a traditional classroom setting, every person was provided constructive feedback. Rehearsal VRP encouraged knowledge sharing and provided a platform where role plays could be completed during off-hours, which gave managers more time to manage people during business hours. Sales managers began highlighting specific responses at team meetings. The training team then used the leaderboard feature, where exemplary



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responses were posted for everyone to view. We were extremely happy with the results, and managers were pleased with the solution.

The complete training experience

Rehearsal VRP has become a complementary piece of our training tool set. It enables the sales team to practice and refine its skills, and provides a platform where role plays and lessons can be added and tailored to the ever-changing sales market.

The engagement and learning opportunity that Rehearsal VRP provides has been invaluable. The team anticipates incorporating many of the upcoming features into its training program to take training to the next level.

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