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CORPORATE
Essential Skills for Your Organization

Marketing Blended Learning Successfully

Your Guide to Using the "Illegal" Approach

This guide outlines ways that you and your learning and development team can encourage employees to use a blend of learning resources.

Please share it freely inside your organization.

Encourage people to take advantage of what's available.

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It can be a challenge to encourage the people in your organization to take advantage of all of the learning opportunities they have.

In today's information age, there's no shortage of learning material for L&D practitioners to access and use.

This plethora of both learning materials and delivery media is an obvious boon for learners and L&D practitioners, but it's also a challenge, especially when it comes to determining the most appropriate blend of these materials for a diverse audience.

This audience may, for example:

- Be in different locations around the world.
- Be from different cultures.
- Have different backgrounds, education, IT skills, and expectations of the learning.
- Be from different generations.
- Speak different languages.
- Be under different time pressures.

Moreover, in the corporate environment, learning is far from being a finite event. Unlike a course, which results in a recognized qualification such as a university degree, corporate learning has no "end game." It's an ongoing process – a sometimes intriguing journey which never quite gets to a recognizable destination.

Fulfilling Potential

When corporate learning fails to fulfill its potential, it's often because insufficient attention has been paid to ensuring that people want it and will use it voluntarily. People don't use the learning materials available to them for all sorts of reasons. Encouraging them to change their ways involves borrowing some ideas from those who want to sell us things to build customer acceptance, adoption and loyalty in order to build the "brand." This means seeing learners as consumers of learning.

Developing Loyal "Customers"

There's a five-stage process for developing loyal customers: awareness, trial, ad hoc use, regular use, and "champion." Intervention is needed at "points of drop-off" – at the end of each stage – to prevent losing the customer.

This entails L&D professionals becoming "learner centric" in their approach and involves applying John

Keller's four key characteristics – well-known to L&D professionals – of Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction (ARCS).

The "Illegal" Approach

There are seven steps to marketing online learning successfully – encapsulated by the acronym "illegal":

1. **Interest** – Create interest through teaser campaigns; stealth campaigns; providing previews; and making it aspirational (getting people to stop thinking of L&D as "being back at school").

2. **Launch** – "Put it on the map"; offer a compelling call to action; make it worthy of being gossiped about. Don't blow your entire budget and goodwill on impressing the senior management team at the outset of the project. The launch of the program is only one part of building user loyalty.

3. **Loyalty** – You need a compelling reason to get users to engage with the online learning; ensure their quality expectations are met; make sure that there are recognizable features and benefits, and ensure that the program is "fun."

   The watchword for "quality" is "brand" – promote the brand so that users can have their quality expectations met.

4. **Enroll** – Enrolling on the program must be a physical act, where users identify themselves with the program.

5. **Goals** – Maintain momentum (perhaps by getting learners' managers to present them with a completion certificate rather than allowing learners to simply print them for themselves); create a sense of achievement in the learner; renew peer pressure for others to complete the program; and renew interest in the program.

   Increasingly, this is an area that gamification apps are targeting. The idea behind gamification is that, if you can help your employees to enjoy what they do, then you should reap rewards in terms of employee motivation and productivity.

This process of adding motivational elements within a learning framework or system to increase user engagement is based on game theory and mechanics. While it takes a systematic approach to rewards and recognition programs, it adds a layer of human incentive and helps motivate learners to learn.

You implement gamification by running competitions against your performance objectives, learning goals or key performance indicators; making sure you set the pace of competition, and ensuring the top performers are displayed on a leader board. It's also important that you reward your participants – even the ones who're struggling in comparison with the others.

6. **Acknowledge** – Visibly celebrate what learners have done; find ways to maintain public interest in the program, and find a way of producing a "feel good factor" among the users to keep their motivation levels high.

7. **Leverage** – Offer benefits from the program that are "beyond learning." These include structures for career enhancement and benefits; measuring the outputs of the learning; measuring the commercial benefits of the program, and so on. In this way, the organization should "buy in" to the program – because it will have measures of the program's effectiveness (hopefully these will go beyond the "it reduces costs" measure). These measures are what the business is interested in – even if they're not necessarily what the L&D department is interested in. And, of course, when you have the performance figures, tell the world about them – so that everyone can benefit!

Strategic Factors

Three strategically important factors that are also crucial to the long term success of a learning initiative are:

- Gaining top level support to open doors and keep up momentum.
- Picking the "hot topic" project that will get noticed.
- Choosing the right partner with which to work.

Ensuring Uptake and Engagement

To ensure that there's uptake and engagement with learning, as an L&D professional you should:

- Ask the marketing professionals in your organization for tips, techniques and practical help. Don't underestimate the need to over-communicate. Nor should you underestimate the level of effort required to do so.
- Use emotive promotion. Learners always want to know what's in it for them.
- Do whatever it takes – including using such things as: internal newsletters; senior executive/program sponsor endorsements (via face-to-face, video, webcast and so on); intranet ads and banners; pop-ups; competitions; email campaigns; social network promotions; centers of influence (champions); testimonials; groups/communities (social media and face-to-face); and, engagement surveys.
- Give the learning a life of its own by creating an ongoing narrative.
- Design learning program/interventions with the marketing plan in mind – because no learning intervention should go live without an associated marketing plan.

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