

Effective E-Learning

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As electronic learning, or e-learning, takes off as a method of instruction, it is important that training designers keep a few things in mind. While the principles of good learning design remain the same as when designing traditional classroom training, there are some additional considerations that need to be taken into account when designing an e-learning is being developed.

"Electronic learning can be an effective learning tool if there is active involvement of the learner with the content."

To design an e-lesson that is effective and engaging, make sure that it is:

Interactive

But not interactivity that is over-produced and under-designed. The e-lesson must engage the learner in meaningful learning activities, and provide opportunities learners to assess their own learning. The e-learning lesson should also allow learners to communicate, so that they can help and support each other through online discussion and collaboration.

Learning centric – not technology centric.

The presentation of the content must follow adult learning principles and keep the end user in mind. Learning processes and styles must be taken into consideration.

Blended

With traditional classroom training, not separate from it. While e-learning is good for knowledge transfer, it doesn't allow learners to learn and practice new skills.

Furthermore, computer based learning is much more solitary and isolating.

Simple and easy to use.

Learners should not have to spend more time trying to figure out how to navigate the e-lesson than actually learning from it. A dizzying array of icons, expanding and collapsing lists, dropdowns and various buttons confuse your learners more than they help them. Keep extraneous content to a minimum.

Technology

E-learning relies on software, hardware, protocols and network infrastructure. Good technical support is essential, so that users aren't frustrated by the technical problems that may present themselves. E-learners are more likely to give up on an e-lesson when they don't feel that they move forward with it technically.

When it comes to elements of the media itself, there are some strategies that can enhance learning. These strategies are:

- Use lean text, nothing too lengthy or elaborated
- Add graphics and illustrations along with the text. Ensure however, that the illustrations are congruent with the instructional message, and are not just there for entertainment purposes.
- Place graphics and their related text close to each other on the screen. It is easier for learners to make the learning connections if text and illustrations are near each other, than if they are apart and seem disconnected.
- Use audio narrative in situations where information overload is likely. For example, if there is an animated demonstration of a process, it may be difficult for learners to both watch the demonstration and read the related text. By having the process

narrated as they watch the demonstration, learners can take in both the process and its explanation.

- Do not use audio narrative to read text that learners can read themselves. Narrative should be used only when graphic displays require much of the learners' attention, and when additional reading would cause overload.
- Make an audio replay option available, so that explanations can be repeated, if necessary.
- If you wish to add entertaining features (such as glitzy graphics or music), place them at the end of the lesson; they will be far less distracting if they are presented after the material has been learned.
- Use conversational language (using first and second person language), without becoming too informal. It is harder for the learners to relate to formal language, so conversational language is preferred.
- Use a learning agent (a character who guides the learner and offers instructional advice) to add some personable interaction. Make sure the agent serves an instructionally valid role, and isn't just an entertaining prop. Minimizing distractions should be a goal that e-learning designers take seriously.

As e-learning continues to grow in popularity, it is important to keep the preceding principles in mind. Electronic learning can be an effective learning tool if there is active involvement of the learner with the content. This can be achieved through practice, assessments, and especially, instructionally sound design.

Links:

http://www.suddenlismart.com/effective_elearning.htm