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CURRENT TRENDS

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Microlearning: "The Future of Learning"

Background

  Today's businesses' dynamics is so fast paced; competition has been accelerating in the global technological revolution. Furthermore, Covid- 19 has been adding to the speed of the technological dominance. Microlearning is one of the effective solutions that had been adopted by the learning and development departments and entities to cope with the new business environment. Microlearning seemed the perfect meal for such a fast ambiguous environment. This is mainly attributed to the desire of supporting the fast-paced, multitask orientated and digitally savvy learners.

 In fact, microlearning as an idea has been around for a while. From short pamphlets printed on a press to short infomercials, to TED talks. The new thing about it, since its emergence, is the recent speedy dominance of digitization, especially after the pandemic. Thereby, intensively deploying technology in learning is meant to engage employees, make the most of their divided attention, and guarantee that the information gained is retained and used. Hence, microlearning is now creating waves in all sectors, aiding in skill development, faster onboarding, and retention of knowledge.

However, it should be remembered that microlearning is not a substitute for traditional online training, rather a complementary part of a larger learning program.

Defining the Concept of Microlearning and its Main Pillars

Microlearning is the process of delivering bite-sized content to learners that they can consume all at once and apply the knowledge immediately. It is a concept defined by the ability to access small units of narrow topics that form part of an inter-connected curriculum, via an "anytime and anywhere"-enabled technology platform, in under 15 minutes, or even short nuggets of 3-5 minutes long, with a specific focus and to meet a specific learning objective.

Pillars of Microlearning:

> • **Provides specific and targeted information:** Whereas, any training program includes 2 types of information – need-to-know and nice-to-know, microlearning mostly offers need-to-know information. This saves a considerable amount of time and makes microlearning modules specific, to the point with targeted information.

• **Brevity:** Microlearning is intended mainly for those users who don't have a lot of time to spare for skill development. Be it in the form of a video or podcast, an infographic or an interactive PDF, with only one performance objective per module and targeted information, microlearning is so structured that learners need not invest more than 8-10 minutes to complete a module. This feature of microlearning makes it ideal for today's learners with short attention spans and tight schedules.

• **Microlearning modules can be standalone, or part of learning assets on a topic/subject:**

- Standalone nature: by this feature microlearning doesn't require its learners to have attended any of the previous sessions. as microlearning is so self-sufficient, every lesson can be delivered independently.

- Or, they can support the usual training, adding interaction to the otherwise one-way communication.

• **Microlearning can be used at different stages of the learning lifecycle:** it can be used anywhere in the learning cycle as per the following examples:

- Offering a pre-test before a formal training program to gauge learners' prior knowledge.

- Providing additional references, examples, and activities during the training program.

- Reinforcing knowledge after the training program

• **Microlearning is accessible on all mobile devices:** Typically, all microlearning modules are designed so that learners can access them on any mobile device – smartphones, tablets, notebooks, or iPads. Also, the short duration of the modules makes it feasible for mobile access.

• **Interactivity forms a major part of microlearning**. learners get to apply the knowledge they have received, which allows them to seal the said learning in their long-term memory. These interactive elements include drag-and-drop interactions, eLearning games, simulations, etc. Since immediate feedback is provided, learners get the chance to correct their mistakes on the spot. They can also repeat the activity to improve their problem-solving skills.

Microlearning Modules

Microlearning can be used for both formal and informal training, with the aim of improving employee's performance. However, a single microlearning module cannot be used to convey a complete lesson. Instead, several such modules (with each one undertaking a specific learning point), can be successfully used as supporting pillars for a full-fledged eLearning course. Below are some examples of the modules which can be effectively deployed via microlearning:

- **Gamified learning:** Game-based learning mixes the world of L&D with gaming. Questions, videos, images, texts and audios can be inserted into games via slides, transforming the learning experience into an enjoyable game.

The gamified approach not only makes the learning process fun; it also gives learners a practical application of their knowledge from the main course.

- **Video based learning:** Videoing is used to reinforce ideas conveyed in the eLearning course. Videos are useful to depict situations to help users connect with their learning better. Learners can pause or playback a video as required, to get a better grasp of the subject matter. Interactive videos can be used as well.

- **Interactive PDFs/eBooks:** interactive PDF or eBook combined with user-friendly navigation and appealing visuals –act as an integral addition to the main learning program. Furthermore, it saves the headache of reading extensive documents on your phone or tablet. Interactive PDFs can be used to present quick tips, checklists, and fact sheets.

- **Infographics:** infographic microlearning modules greatly increase the value of the main course by covering all the key points once more in a single glance. It distills the main points from the course and presents it in a visually attractive manner.

Advantages of Microlearning

Microlearning is indeed the future of learning. Microlearning can be used very effectively to create sticky learning experiences thereby flipping the "Forgetting Curve" to a "Retention Curve". It delivers bite-sized information that is focused, and can be deliverable at any point of time, on any device. Achieving this, microlearning must be efficient and engaging. Thereby, it has numerous benefits for both learners and services' providers, as such:

- **For learners:**

    - **Supports just in time learning:** Microlearning is available at the moment of the demanded learning need.

    - **Accessible:** Microlearning can be designed for multi-device delivery (from desktops and laptops to tablets and smartphones) thereby providing higher flexibility to learners to learn when they need and on the device of their choice.

- **Rich media:** The design formats of microlearning has both rich media and flexible formats that results in better retention of knowledge.

- **Less time consuming:** Modern learners are hard pressed for time and their attention span is short. They want bite-sized information that is focused, this helps in enhancing the engagement of the learners.

- **Boosts knowledge retention and recall:** through microlearning, all the knowledge that the learners acquire can be connected to real-world applications. This practical form of learning is what helps in boosting the rate of knowledge retention and recall.

• **For business services' providers:**

- **Affordable and agile:** Microlearning costs are lower than traditional eLearning due to short training duration.

- **Easy to update:** Microlearning nuggets can be easily updated to enhance their impact, as they have shorter development cycle.

- **Wider and varied impact;** Microlearning nuggets can be deployed in different forms either as stand-alone assets or they could be part of a series of microlearning courses. Hence, their impact depends on its usage.

- **Efficient impact:** as microlearning nuggets are designed to meet a narrow but specific outcome. This has a positive impact on learning and application.

Challenges of Microlearning

The main challenge of Micolearning is to know when exactly it is the appropriate mode of delivering the learning course.

Microlearning, is truly an efficient method of learning , especially in the age of digitaiztion and pandemic. However, it won't replace all other forms of eLearning as it has its own share of compromises and disadvantages. With its emphasis on small isolated chunks of learning, it wouldn't be the best option when it's essential to have a holistic view of the training material, and be able to connect disparate elements of it into one coherent picture. In general, microlearning is unsuited when there's a large body of material that needs to be studied and comprehended in detail.

Again, the above are not meant to dismiss microlearning in the least. Just to show that it has a specific place in a broader range of eLearning methodologies. That said, that place is big at the moment, and will only get bigger, as microlearning is a natural fit for mobile learning **and all other devices.**

Illustrative Videos on Microlearning

What is Microlearning?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlbsuPAibfY

Overview of Microlearning:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIneSsndae8

Microlearning Examples

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nX7Mt6rccls

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