

Take Five - Brandon Hall

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E-Learning for Multiple Generations

Brandon Hall

Different generations have different traits. Research tells us that there are differences in how people learn based on when they were born. Here are five strategies for designing e-learning to address multiple generations in the workforce:

1. Target training for different preferences.

Sean Stearley at Aetna said the company's training strategy leverages the "upward compatibility" of generational groups. "We target our training techniques at the largest and youngest generation represented. When there is no clear single majority, we focus on the learning styles preferred by the younger generation. "For example, in our customer-service organizations, the bulk of our personnel is either Generation X (born 1965-1979) or Y (born 1980-1994), so we always target our training at Generation Y. Generation X will consider themselves savvy and progressive enough to adapt. We make sure that appropriate training options exist for each generational group. Sometimes that means providing different options for different learners in one course, and sometimes it means building separate courses for the different learning audiences."

2. Use Web 2.0 learning activities.

Dru Ryan, manager of technology training and learning resources at Montgomery College, uses gaming in classes. "We pre-configure the desktop of the computer in our training labs with mini-games, which allow for an impromptu learning moment. We find students would rather play a game that was created for them versus browsing the Web. "Primarily, class participants enjoy the self-directed learning before and after class or during the breaks. While the games are targeted to all staff, usage is dominated by younger workers. With a generational classroom, we try to target the middle. As the middle changes, our target also changes."

3. Design for continuous learning.

Dave Goodman, principal at SoftAssist, noted that some people automatically gravitate to the technology questions when they first think about generational learning. "Technology is only one facet of the solution. The real issues come within the instructional design parameters. How can the learning capture the attention, keep the attention and motivate the learning process for each learner? That's where the challenge kicks in. As well, generational learning design must address post-environmental learning design issues. Some people think that when you walk out of the classroom or finish the online course that the training is complete. Today's generation of learners fully expect that the adventure continues in the blogs, YouTube, ARGs, etc., and that they as the learner will help create the outcomes. Today's learners are enmeshed in the social network of the 'us' and the 'we.' Understanding the full dimensions and implications of 'us' will be the greatest challenge to the instructional designers."

4. One course, multiple generations.

Rob Lauber, vice president of global learning services and YUM! University, said his organization follows the same rule as always, which is to understand the target population. "Much like the ways we try to address

the many different cultures of our employees, when they are cross-generational, we make sure that each element of the course materials addresses those generations. This would include graphics, audio, as well as text size and likely screen resolutions. We continue to work to the common elements versus trying to individually accommodate each generation.”

5. Provide access anytime, from anywhere.

Holly Ramirez, director at Jenny Craig, said her organization leverages its LMS to provide learners with access to learning at anytime and from anywhere. “It makes our learners more accountable for their own learning plans and progress and empowers the younger workforce with the technology they are familiar with, while providing the older workforce the comfort of learning on an easy-to-use platform. “It allows us to manage training resources and reduces the cost of delivery and management. Because the delivery method is intuitive and easy, yet technology-driven, it services both the older and younger generation of employees. Trainers benefit by being able to use multiple media including audio/video, instant messaging, etc. Trainers can perform online testing and assessment, as well as manage online and off-line courses.”



Brandon Hall, Ph.D., is CEO of Brandon Hall Research, publisher of the new study "Emerging E-Learning: New Approaches to Delivering Engaging Online Learning Content."