

Treating Learning Content as a Strategic Business Asset

Increase value through quality over quantity.

BY KELLY RIDER

Imagine a warehouse filled with 50,000 boxes. Each box includes items that cost between \$12,000 and \$100,000 to produce. Of the 50,000 boxes, let's say only 25 percent are sold, leaving 75 percent of unused inventory. What's the value of all that unused product? The answer is easy: zilch.

Now, let's do a quick audit of your learning inventory. Run a report to see how much of your content has zero to 50 completions. Now, for each hour of unused content, multiply the cost to produce using industry averages: \$15,000 for e-learning and \$6,000 for instructor-led content.

Is this making you uncomfortable? It should. In many companies, the creation or purchase of learning content makes up 20 percent or more of the learning budget. So why are we spending that budget creating a learning inventory that goes unused?

To reduce content waste and provide a better employee experience, the learning and development function must employ content strategy practices.

What it is

Content strategy helps organizations provide the right content to the right people, at the right time, for the right reasons. It's a compass to guide decisions on priorities and helps L&D say "no" to projects that are not tied to strategic business initiatives.

How it works

In today's workplace, collaboration tools, such as email and instant messaging applications designed to keep employees connected, are interrupting employees on average every five minutes.

All this content and noise means employees are overwhelmed, distracted, and impatient. They expect faster access to the content they need.

The L&D team's job is to ensure that, when employees take the precious 1 percent of their workweek for learning, they receive high-quality content in the moment of need.

Guidelines

Here's some guidance to help you deliver the content that your business needs and your employees want.

Anchor learning content to strategic business goals. Gone are the days when L&D could tout its value based on the amount of content produced or the number of participants. In fact, many high-impact organizations are now de-emphasizing learner satisfaction scores and spending more time measuring business impact and employee performance.

Establishing a performance consulting practice to analyze needs is a critical step to ensure L&D invests in projects aligned



CHECKLIST

Move From Quantity of Content to Content Quality



Anchor learning content to strategic business goals.



Map the learner journey.

to driving business goals and objectives. In many cases, training is not the answer. Knowing when to say “no” to projects will save valuable time, resources, and money.

Map the learner journey. Marketing uses customer journeys to improve the buying experience by mapping the steps and engagement between customer and company (that is, awareness, interest, consideration, purchase, retention, and advocacy) and aligning content needs for each step.

Learner journeys can be adapted to illustrate the learning experience from the initiating event that triggers the employee to learn something new to the moment the individual is rewarded with skill acquisition (promotion or recognition, for example). L&D teams can apply a learner-centric approach by thinking more intentionally about designing content for context by identifying what is needed at a specific point in time.

Create a content architecture. Learning content has been defined as anything that supports or improves employee performance. The L&D team must develop a content architecture for learning assets, one that defines formal courses (e-learning, virtual, in-person), social learning (mentoring, coaching), experiential (rotations, stretch assignments), and enablement (job aids, built-in tool help) to gain better insight into the types of content being created.

Implement an enterprise content management system that uses metadata tags to make content easier to find and curate. Doing so will help L&D prepare for “smart” systems that can retrieve the most relevant content employees need.

Adopt a “curation first” mindset. If you inventoried the learning assets in your organization, how many of them would be redundant? Duplication is

RESOURCES

Association for Talent Development. n.d. ATD Master Performance Consultant Program. www.td.org/Education/Programs/ATD-Master-Performance-Consultant.

Casey, M. 2015. *The Content Strategy Toolkit: Methods, Guidelines, and Templates for Getting Content Right*. San Francisco: New Riders.

Halvorson, K. 2008. “The Discipline of Content Strategy.” *A List Apart*. December 16. <https://alistapart.com/article/thedisciplineofcontentstrategy>.

just as wasteful as unused content. Before starting a new project, ask if the content already exists. If not, could a third-party source it?

Conduct an analysis to see how many duplicate assets exist for common topics (for example, presentation skills and conflict management), then bring together cross-organizational content leads to develop a strategy for which content to keep. Implement rules for when content should be created (for example, only for custom content). By narrowing your content development and leveraging existing assets, you can reduce redundancies and focus on other, strategic initiatives.

Govern content throughout its life cycle. Governance arguably is one of the most important aspects of content strategy. Managing content throughout its life cycle keeps content relevant and increases employee trust in your learning brand.

Establish a set of standards and procedures that content administrators can follow to ensure content is set up properly. Regularly audit and report on content assets. If items are out of compliance, archive them.

Results

As L&D professionals, our value to the organization is measured by our ability to create learning experiences that improve employee performance and deliver business outcomes. Unused and redundant learning content diminishes our credibility. It’s time we change our approach and start treating learning content as a strategic business asset that delivers value to the organization and its employees.

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Adopt a “curation first” mindset.



Govern content throughout its life cycle.



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