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Training part 2 – Podcasting: Pod training goes pop

by Debra Blundell.

Anyone up for a staff training day? No, I thought not. Mention training and most people groan at the prospect of a day stuck in a room with a bunch of reticent co-workers, a trainer who likes the sound of his own voice too much and a flipchart. At best it's a waste of a day that could be spent doing 'proper' work. At worst, some David Brent wannabe will get out their guitar...

Well I've got news for you. Training doesn't have to be like that any more. With a host of new technologies and creative ideas for using old technologies, training can be exciting, effective and even fun. In the first part of this article we looked at the impact podcasting is having on the world of training. In part two, we examine some other tools in the training kit bag and look at how they can work together to create compelling integrated training programmes.

Today, the most successful training programmes take an holistic approach. They pick a range of individual elements on their own merits and then fit these modules together like a jigsaw to build layers of knowledge, maintain trainees' interest and cater for different learning styles. Working with a good creative agency with experience in this area can really help with this stage.

Using different media to deliver your messages not only keeps the programme fresh and engaging, it

also makes it flexible. Time is precious and, for many people, an off-site training day isn't a nice day out of the office but a nuisance that probably means they'll have to work all weekend to catch up. Training methods that make use of 'redundant' time – commuting, longer journeys or evenings in the hotel room on a business trip – are therefore welcomed. Podcasts fit this bill perfectly but anything that can be downloaded onto a laptop, like vlogs and PDFs, are great too. Materials that allow users to review content at their own pace and convenience also increase effectiveness. It's about giving people a range of materials they can use when they like, how they like.

The integrated approach to training is more effective than any single method because the messages are more likely to stick when they're delivered in a variety of formats. Different people respond better to different stimuli. Younger people, for instance, are more likely to be engaged by cutting-edge technology whereas older ones may be happier with paper. Some people might respond better to interactive methods while some like to just listen or read.

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One thing that you mustn't overlook in the race to embrace new delivery mechanisms is content. Good design is key. Using lots of clean, simple graphics – charts, diagrams, pin-men, whatever – make the information easier to absorb. Video needs to look professional and not cheesy. Think about tone of voice too. Boring stuffy documents or stilted dialogue are uninspiring. Make your content upbeat, interesting and sprinkle it with memorable examples. Consider having content professionally written or scripted.

“All this sounds expensive,” you're probably thinking. Not necessarily. The beauty of some new technologies, like interactive PDFs, for instance, is that their advantages far outweigh those of the traditional paper-based training manual but without the overheads of print, paper and distribution. Technology really can offer the best of both worlds. So throw away the flipchart, bin the OHP and for goodness sake, put away that guitar!

Training media - New and exciting...

PDFs

These clever little packages of highly graphical content work on any platform, can be printed, searched, saved, stored and are small enough to email. Link them 'live' to data fed from an online source and they become extremely useful interactive documents. Add audio and video, with playback controlled by the user, and you have the perfect multi-media, portable training module.

Podcasts and video podcasts

Podcasts have all the advantages of portable audio (see part one of this article). Add video, and you enrich the experience and have the facility to explain more complex concepts; for example, step-by-step 'how to fix it' guides or software demonstrations.

Blogs

Blogs are effectively online journals that offer a cheap and effective way of providing staff with regular training updates or building their

knowledge by instalments. Staff can contribute their own comments or feedback to the blog, making them personal and interactive, and you have the facility to adapt the course as you go along based on their feedback.

Social networks

These online networks are a virtual way of creating communities of individuals with a common interest or goal. You can't just join a social network – you have to be invited. This combination of privacy and connection makes them an interesting adjunct to your training programme. They can be a great way to work collaboratively and share intellect and skills.

Old but not forgotten...

Print

Good design is critical, both in terms of look and feel and navigation. Questionnaires, participant feedback sheets and manuals should all work as a suite.

Presentations

Powerpoint – love it or hate it, it's still one of the best ways of communicating to a room full of people. Think about getting your training presentations professionally designed and avoid clipart at all costs!

Video/DVD

The days of stand-alone full-length training videos are probably numbered: they're expensive to make and often boring to watch. But short clips of footage, such as sound bites, testimonials or role-play, can add a much-needed extra dimension to other training media.

For more information on creative training solutions, contact Gary Clark on gc@indigocreative.co.uk