



Engaging Advisors with the Essentials of Digital Learning

The past two years have shone a spotlight on digital learning. While some companies already had robust digital learning platforms in place at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, others struggled to engage a newly remote workforce in a fully virtual environment. In both cases, the digital learning experience — and its effectiveness — came under greater scrutiny than ever before.

The debate over in-person versus online learning is not new. And now — as we begin to move out of the pandemic — some training organizations are breathing a collective sigh of relief about finally getting “back to normal.” But let’s be honest: Normal is a thing of the past, and consigning digital learning to second-class status is a mistake for several reasons.

Many businesses will continue to support remote work, if not on a full-time basis, then in a hybrid work environment. And remote workers are often geographically dispersed, making digital learning

options even more necessary. Gen Z, the incoming workforce, has grown up with digital learning. These self-directed digital natives look to TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to learn new skills. And they expect the organizations they join to provide similar (or better) experiences. Finally, and perhaps most important, digital learning is cost-effective, efficient, and — when done well — as engaging as in-person, instructor-led training.

The question every organization should be asking is not whether to continue providing digital learning options; the question is, does your digital learning platform achieve the results you expect?

Creating an engaging digital learning experience requires a learner-focused design based on fundamental learning principles. As you evaluate digital learning platforms for your organization, consider these five essential elements required for an effective digital learning experience.

Purposeful

A fundamental principle of learning is that adults are motivated by learning that helps them achieve a goal or solve a problem. Whether they want to move into a management position, increase retention, or penetrate new markets, financial services professionals will be more motivated, will retain more, and are more likely to apply learning that serves a specific purpose. Through videos, case studies, assessments, and other media, an effective digital learning experience



regularly reinforces the why behind the learning, not just the how. And since effective digital learning programs typically consist of brief, tightly focused microlearning modules, learners can select modules that have the most relevance for achieving their goals.

Personalized

Microlearning modules satisfy another fundamental principle — adult learners want the flexibility to control what, when, how, and where they learn. In today's business environment, that often means mobile learning, something for which microlearning modules are especially well suited. And because microlearning is modularized, with discrete learning objectives, learners can personalize the experience based on their specific interests. A strong digital platform will also recommend custom learning paths, usually identified through online assessments, to ensure that the program addresses all skill gaps. Two new

financial services managers, for example, may require different learning paths, based on their strengths and weaknesses, with the online assessment ensuring that all essential leadership areas are evaluated properly for both new leaders.

Actionable

A training module is only as good as the action it produces. Effective training includes actionable takeaways that learners can apply soon after completing the learning experience. A coaching module for new managers, for example, should provide a coaching model, script, or other guidelines so that managers can apply their new coaching skills immediately. It should also suggest activities for practicing the new skills after completing training, to transfer and reinforce learning.

The Forgetting Curve

Digital microlearning modules work well with spaced learning formats (learning that occurs over time). The cadence of this type of learning, learn-apply-review-reinforce, provides the repetition needed to overcome “the forgetting curve.” Introduced by German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus in the late 19th century, the forgetting curve shows that, on average, people forget 70 percent of what they learn within 24 hours of learning it and 90 percent within one week.¹ The most effective way to overcome the forgetting curve is to use active recall and review activities and apply new learning early and often. Active recall activities often found in digital learning platforms include quizzes, flashcards, scenarios, and critical-thinking questions.

Practical

Practical learning is related to, but not the same as, actionable learning. Actionable learning ensures learners have takeaways they can apply immediately. Practical learning takes into account different on-the-job situations to ensure learners have resources at a specific moment of need. A comprehensive digital learning platform includes resources to support five moments of need: new, more, apply, solve, and change.



The Five Moments of Need

The “five moments of need” approach, developed by Conrad Gottfredson and Bob Mosher, focuses on applying learning in the workflow.² Learning a new skill or concept and then learning more as skills increase are the bread and- butter of traditional training programs. Effective learning platforms will also support learning that happens on the job: when learners apply new skills when they must solve problems because something did not happen as expected, and when they must relearn skills because systems, processes, or situations changed. Because of their modular design, accessibility, and the variety of delivery formats available, digital learning platforms are ideally suited for addressing these needs.

Engaging

Last, but by no means least, an effective digital learning platform actively engages participants in the learning experience. This element, perhaps more than any other, influences learner retention. And it is the one area where digital learning platforms often fail to perform.

Quizzes are the most common engagement activities included in digital learning. Ideally, these knowledge checks also provide meaningful feedback to learners,

reinforcing correct answers and reviewing material for incorrect answers. Some platforms award points or badges for activities completed. Some include leaderboards that show learners how their scores compare to others. The most sophisticated use simulation and virtual reality.

Fortunately, you do not have to develop the next Minecraft game to engage most learners. Any activity that reviews and reinforces learning points and supports the on-the-job application of key concepts will encourage learner participation. In addition to quizzes, case studies, what-if scenarios, and critical-thinking questions can keep learners engaged. Varying the types of media used (balancing text, video, and infographics, for example) also helps to retain learner interest.

Digital learning is here to stay, and it is a valuable tool when designed well. These five elements, when combined in a digital learning experience, can motivate team members to use your training platform, transform new skills into increased productivity, and provide you with the ROI you are looking for in a digital learning platform.