

Combine Streaming Video with Hands-On Demos for Blended Learning



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If you've ever played a YouTube video, caught up on a television series using Hulu, or enjoyed a movie on Netflix Instant Watch, you've already experienced the latest wave in the field of learning and development: online web streaming.

Online web streaming is content sent in compressed form over the Internet and displayed by the viewer in real time. Information travels as a stream of data from a server. On the user's end, a special program is needed to decode the information, such as a stand-alone player or a plug-in that works as part of a Web browser. The player decodes, or uncompresses, the information so you can watch video, live or pre-recorded, free or for a fee.

In its infancy back in the mid-to-late 1990s, streaming video was painfully slow and choppy — a slow computer or dial-up Internet meant users spent a lot of time waiting for the video to "buffer" or load. Users were also tied to their desktop computer or laptop. Today, high-speed Internet and the arrival of 4G not only means you can watch seamless video, but you can do it just of the most popular Internet activities. By 2006, 20 million of us were already watching 100 million videos daily on YouTube.¹ It was only natural then for businesses to harness this information delivery system for training purposes.

Video offers cost-savings, flexibility

For cost, flexibility and engagement, streaming video is hard to beat. Users don't have to pay for and then wait for a physical DVD to show up in the mail; once they pay, it's streamed in real-time to their computer or other device. That means no shipping costs, and no need for physical storage space. The product can't be lost, misplaced, scratched or broken like a DVD can be, so users never have to worry about replacement costs.



Video is incredibly convenient. It can be accessed anytime, anywhere the user has an Internet connection, and on any device that supports a Web browser. Employees can gather, access and process information at their own pace, and they don't have to do it in a traditional learning environment. They can watch a training video when it is convenient (during downtime) or when it is needed (solving a workplace dilemma). Other applications include pre- and post-formal training preparation and evaluation, field certification, and procedure demonstrations.

Video-based content helps to motivate and engage learners, and focus their attention on critical learning objectives. The Masie Center is tracking a rise in the use of short video as a supplement to the learning process at major organizations. A key driver, says Elliot Masie, is the desire of learners to hear context and work examples from multiple voices. "The more the video segments focus on targeted bursts of context, including the 'back story' or 'field truth,' the more learner consumption and appreciation grows," Masie says. Bottom line: you deliver more effective training.

In a survey conducted by the Brandon Hall Research Group and shared in a July 2011 webinar entitled, "Using Video to Deliver More Impactful Remote Training," 73 percent of survey respondents listed "effectiveness" as the main reason why they used video as a learning tool, and 59 percent said that video increases the level of engagement in learning.²

The future is here

Streaming video dovetails nicely with another trend in training development: mobile learning. Mobile learning is the delivery of training via mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets. This style of learning is what the up-and-coming workforce is conditioned to and expects. Research shows younger generations live online in increasingly mobile and social ways.⁴ It's where they get their news on current events and communicate with friends and family. Technological advances make it possible — research conducted by International Data Corp. predicts the mobile web will replace wired Internet as soon as 2015.⁴

Plus, a survey conducted by Project Tomorrow shows half of all high school students in the United States own a smart phone, and 58 percent of them want to be able to use it for research at school. Project Tomorrow also found 63 percent of middle school and high school students want online textbooks, and 40 percent want online textbooks with collaborative tools.⁴ It's not much of a stretch to believe that in a few years when these kids enter the workforce as young adults, they will expect to learn via online mediums such as streaming video, and they will want to do it on their mobile devices, whether that be a smart phone, tablet or other device. The small screen of such devices lends itself to short video rather than lengthy text.⁵

Maybe that's why a recent survey by the Masie Center found that 30 percent of organizations worldwide are piloting the use of mobile and tablet devices for learning purposes.⁶ These companies might be responding to the evolving communications habits and learning-style preferences of their workers.

One more training tool

But don't think that streaming video will make other forms of training obsolete. Sure, it can be more cost-effective than in-classroom instruction with a live trainer. But certain subjects will always need some hands-on training as well as mentoring by real people. Learning and development will never move entirely away from human interaction and experience.

Rather, streaming video is just one more tool to add to your training tool kit, making training more versatile and effective. In fact, while streaming video can be used as stand-alone training, it can also be used as part of classroom training. That fits well with today's trend toward blended learning — training that combines online and offline ways of learning.

Sources:

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