

THE L&D THOUGHT LEADERS' CONFERENCE 2017

ANDY STOPPS Q&A

Q. CAN YOU DEFINE E LEARNING?

A. There is a 'traditional' sense of e-learning - in a modular format, probably authored to SCORM standards, viewed on a computer. However, it is possible to widen the definition to include any learning done digitally. This opens up the arena dramatically, but poses the question of how that learning becomes trackable and recordable in the same way that the traditional sense is.

Q. WHO DOES GOOGLE ASK WHEN THEY DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER?

A. Google always knows the answer! If someone can input a search that comes back with 0 results then I'd like to know what they are searching for. It's whether the answers it gives are correct that's the bigger concern!

Q. WITH TECHNOLOGY DO WE NEED TO WORRY ABOUT 'FAKE LEARNING' JUST AS WE HAVE 'FAKE NEWS'?

A. Fake learning is a problem. With the wealth of information on the web and the ability to publish 'viable' content it has become easy to fool people with mis-information. As I mentioned a client gave a team a research project and one delegate created a Wikipedia page which was then copied or referenced by 18 colleagues. In a World where everybody can claim to be an 'expert' you may have to dig deeper to look at their credentials and the level of research that goes into studies.

Q. HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THE PERCEPTION OF LEARNERS AND THE BUSINESS THAT REAL LEARNING NO LONGER TAKES PLACE IN THE CLASSROOM, BUT ON THE JOB AND ONLINE?

A. Most modern learners are conscious that they are learning all of the time and not just in a structured, classroom environment. If they can't see that then challenge them to record learning in some kind of learning log, like a CPD record. By doing this and considering entries they will identify the informal activities that happen on a daily basis.

Q. CAN E-LEARNING BE USED WITH THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY THAT WE HEARD ABOUT EARLIER?

A. The Levy is in its infancy and those in L&D are still getting to grips with its implications. We are working with one large employer who is registered on the Employer Provider list and is planning to create their own modules that map to the standards that they offer, so digital learning is very much an option for apprentice training. In the coming months and years we will see more e-learning mapped to the standards, but there is the flexibility to source learning that fits with the programmes you offer from a variety of providers using different delivery mechanisms.



Q. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON SOCIAL LEARNING WHERE THE INTERACTION AND FACEBOOK LIKE EXPERIENCE ARE THE ATTRACTION OVER THE LEARNING CONTENT?

A. Think about classroom learning - what emphasis do you put on the interaction between delegates in the training room and at the breaks? If this helps to embed learning and enhance the learning experience then that's a good thing? Social learning (or peer-based learning) can have the same effect - it allows for conversations, feedback, questions and opinions to be aired that may improve the learning experience. The difficulty comes with the monitoring this and ensuring it's not abused.

Q. WHEN SHOULD E-LEARNING BE SCHEDULED IN? DURING WORK TIME OR DURING THE EMPLOYEES OWN TIME?

A. We get asked this quite often. We see the best results and the best usage statistics when the learning time is part of the working day and learners are supported effectively. Clients have specified periods of the day to undertake e-learning and some have set up areas for it to take place.

Q. HOW EASY IS IT TO BUILD A REPOSITORY OF QUESTIONS SO WHEN A RE TAKE IS REQUIRED IT OFFERS DIFFERENT QUESTIONS?

A. Most e-learning authoring software allows you to create 'Question banks' and then to specify whether a question is a set question or a random one from the bank at any given point of a module. The Articulate products in particular are very good at questions and quizzes.

Q. HOW DO YOU SECURE LEARNING SO ONLY THE LEARNER CAN UNDERTAKE IT AS OPPOSED TO A 3RD PARTY?

A. This would depend upon the learning and what was to be gained from someone else completing it. Every user should have their own username and password to access their learning and learning records and certification should be in their name only. If the learning is for something that is deemed important like a qualification then you can use webcam recording and other similar technologies to ensure the right person is completing it and no cheating is taking place. The key to this is creating content that is engaging, easy to use and at a level so that people don't feel like they need their colleague or mate to undertake it for them.

Q. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF GAMIFICATION AND VR?

A. It's important to relate all learning back to the learning outcomes and determine whether the delivery format helps to ensure they are met. We see 'Gamification' more as a tool for recognising and rewarding digital learning in a similar format to levels and badges on a game, and this is an important function. 'Game-based e-learning' is an engaging learning format - the questions remain - does it help to achieve the learning outcomes and does it make the learning stick? The same can be said with Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality. Both of these emerging technologies have great potential if used in the right way. It's about identifying the best ways to utilise them and link everything back to the question "what do I want my learners to learn?".

Q. NOW WE UNDERSTAND THAT A LEARNER CAN ONLY HOLD ATTENTION FOR A SHORT AMOUNT OF TIME, HOW ARE YOU COMBATTING THIS WITH CONVENTIONAL E-LEARNING?

A. If research is to be believed then attention spans are getting shorter, and technology is playing a part in this. The average person touches their smartphone 2617 times a day! So what do we do? 1) Remove the distraction - make people learning in an environment away from their phones, 2) Make the learning engaging - remove the temptation to stray and 3) Don't create learning that's too long - split modules into smaller chunks and make these fit with learners who are time poor.

Q. THE TIN CAN API SOUNDS LIKE ILM CREDENTIALS HAVE YOU HEARD OF THAT AND ARE THEY THE SAME?

A. The principles of Tin Can API are beautifully simplistic and can be applied to so many different areas of learning. We will see their adoption in a variety of new initiatives in the coming years and the community that sits behind it are already coming up with uses that were never envisaged. ILM may have identified Tin Can API as an approach that works for them.

Q. DO LEARNING EXPERIENCES GOING INTO THE 'TIN CAN' REQUIRE VALIDATING?

A. It is possible to control what statements are generated. On our own tool we require evidence if the statement involves some kind of qualification. If you added "Andy passed his MBA from Harvard" then it would require a certificate. Where statements come from eLearning then the statements are easily evidenced.

Q. HOW DO WE ENGAGE OUR OWN TECHNOLOGY DIRECTORATE (IF WE HAVE ONE) ON WORK/PROJECTS LIKE THIS WHEN WE DON'T HAVE A COMMON LANGUAGE TO USE?

A. Do you mean a common technology language or a common spoken language? Answering both - the purpose of SCORM and now Tin Can API is to create a language within learning technology that's easy to follow and implement. It builds on the relationship between the LMS/LRS and the content in a way that makes it easy for non-technical people to become content authors. If the issue is the spoken language within your organisation then you can author content in multiple languages to overcome this. We get requests for English subtitles on our videos because written English is easier to comprehend than spoken English to someone whose main language isn't English.

Q. WHAT KIND OF GENUINE BEHAVIOUR CHANGE HAVE YOU SEEN IN LEARNERS FROM A NEGOTIATION E-LEARNING MODULE?

A. Negotiation has many different strategies and you will often see sales people use the same tried and tested formula. Just by identifying the other negotiation techniques can challenge a learner to think about implementing them in their role, and in doing so can help generate new business. In that situation, the e-learning provides the theory and the learner then embeds this by the doing. This may take some time to refine - as with any sales technique - and practice to make it successful.

Q. APART FROM TESTS, HOW ELSE CAN YOU TELL IF PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED WITH THE LEARNING?

A. e-Learning has many tools that can be utilised to engage with the learner. From polls, quizzes, branching, videos through to the emergent technologies such as virtual reality and other tools. It's important to also gain feedback and reflection from all forms of learning and encourage discussion with a line manager to identify how the learning may get applied back in the workplace.

Q. HAVE YOU COME ACROSS AN E-LEARNING COURSE THAT WAS ENGAGING ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU WANT TO DO IT IN YOUR OWN TIME?

A. My experience of e-learning may be different to that of a user learner because of my interest in the format, content and learning technology, but yes, I have looked and enjoyed courses that I have taken in my own time. Equally, I've experienced courses that haven't engaged me quite so much and there are ways that the learner can skip content and interactions aren't recorded.

Q. WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ENCOURAGE/MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES TO USE E-LEARNING?

A. A client once had a competition to see who could watch the most - THIS ISN'T THE ANSWER! The content should be relevant to that person's job role and their development firstly, whether this is prescribed (given by you) or self-selected. By understanding the learning outcomes you can identify if it's the right content. From there, the format needs to be aligned to the learning style of the person undertaking it. If you use a variety of content - video, audio, interaction, research then you have more chance of appealing to more learning styles. Not everyone will embrace e-learning though, but some will!

Q. WHAT IS A CHEAP LMS YOU RECOMMEND?

A. If you are looking at implementing an LMS then you need to consider the following: 1) What technical resource do you have internally? 2) What are the main functions of the LMS that you need? 3) Who is going to administer it? 4) Where are you getting e-learning content from? - If you answer these questions honestly then it should help to formulate a plan. Moodle, for instance, is free, but requires lots of configuration and comes with no content, so whilst you're not paying for the actual LMS, your deployment costs may be quite high. We have our own LRS which allows many of the functions of an LMS and many clients like its simplicity (and cost!)

Q. WHAT TOOL WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR CONTENT CURATION?

A. Of the main tools, the feedback we get from clients is that Articulate Storyline is the easiest to use and creates the most engaging content. Articulate have just released a tool called Rise that allows easy content creation that is mobile responsive, so that may well become a tool that we recommend.

Q. IN A FAST PACED LEARNING CULTURE WILL GOOGLE BADGES CHALLENGE MORE FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS?

A. There's no reason why the 2 concepts can't sit side by side. It's a bit like whether to get a degree or an apprenticeship - employers will recognise both and there will be times when greater emphasis is placed on one over the other. Google will have the edge for those going into digital roles such as SEO and Social Media marketing as it's got so much clout in those areas currently.