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"The brighter you are, the more you have to learn."
-Don Herold

We are pleased to share an article from Bill Ellet, Editor of Training Media Review on "Selecting Media for Training". Training Media Review provides independent commentary and hands-on reviews of business training content, technology, and tools for live and online training (• http://www.tmreview.com)

Selecting Media for Training
by Bill Ellet

How do you select the best delivery method for training?

In the past, this question did not require a great deal of thought. The classroom was the platform, and other delivery methods supported it.

That simple model is gone forever. The hard part is realizing that fact and understanding the implications, one of which is knowing how to match delivery with training. Left to intuition, experienced trainers can make defensible choices. But rational individuals do not choose a 30-year fixed mortgage on intuition alone. They run some numbers to compare the options in terms of monthly payments.

A failing of many media evaluation and selection methods is that they are too complicated and time consuming for people to actually use. They have too many categories and fail to provide users with a sense of the big picture. Jay Bahlis has been working on this problem for nearly 15 years and has developed a method used by his company's software product, Advisor Online.

His experience can shed light on the analytic categories necessary for making optimal training delivery decisions. Decision makers need a reliable approach to training delivery that complements and assists intuition. This article describes the initial steps of media selection that the Bahlis Advisor model uses.

Identifying instructional goals

The first step is to identify the instructional goals of a training task and classify them according to a simplified version of Bloom's taxonomy.

* Knowledge, Comprehension, and Application: ability to recall and recognize information; understand, translate, and interpret information; and apply learned content in relevant instances.

* Problem Solving (Analysis): ability to compare, contrast, and break down a

problem in order to arrive at a solution

* Psychomotor Skills: learned capabilities whose outcomes are demonstrated through speed, accuracy, and quality of a physically performed task.

* Affective-Attitude: personal beliefs and preferences towards an object, situation, or person.

(For examples of these levels and more detail about the Advisor methodology, download the white paper "Selecting the Right Blend of Delivery Options." The file is a pdf requiring Adobe Acrobat Reader.)
• http://www.bnhexpertsoft.com/english/products/advent/wpaper2.pdf

Training will often have multiple goals that fall at different levels of the taxonomy. Harassment training is an example. Employees need to know the rules and procedures and understand when their behavior or that of someone else crosses the line into harassment (Knowledge, Comprehension, and Application). If they encounter harassment, they need to know how to deal with it (Problem Solving/Analytical). Ideally, the training also changes attitudes in those who have a different understanding of the behavioral boundaries in the workplace (Affective/Attitude).

In the case of harassment training, we already know a great deal about delivery. We know that the training has informational, analytical, and, possibly, attitudinal goals. We also know that each of the goals will rule out some delivery methods. The attitudinal goal, for instance, is not likely to be achieved by self-study.

The next step is to chunk the training into units or modules and identify the instructional goal of each. Bahlis recommends that in the case of multiple learning objectives, the dominant goal should be selected. When goals are of equal importance, the higher order one should be chosen.

Weighing delivery options

Now you are ready to consider factors related to
delivery of each module. The first rule is to consider all delivery options except those not supported by the organization. This simple imperative could be difficult to follow. We all have our pet methods, and it is hard not to start by saying, "Why shouldn't I use the usual mix"?

Assuming the fortitude of an open mind, you now need to think about critical requirements. These can be categorized into three: content-learning objective, audience, and environment. The following questions illustrate some of the questions the Advisor software asks.

As you make your way through the questions, remember that media selection is guided by the answers to all the relevant questions. And that may lead to a mix or blend of methods, as the sexual harassment example suggests.

Content

* Are you trying to change attitudes? If yes, you need methods that allow exchange and sharing of views such as guided discussion.

* Are you trying to teach something based on psychomotor skills? Then you need a method that involves an actual or simulated work environment.

* Does the content change often? If so, you need a method that can be readily updated.

* Do you need to provide a realistic representation of events or behavior? If so, you need a method such as full motion video or classroom role-playing.

Audience

* What is the range of reading abilities in your audience? If they are at the low end of the scale, you will need a method that does not depend heavily on print.

* Can the audience travel easily? If they cannot and they are widely dispersed, the classroom may not be feasible.

* What technology do they have? If your audience has limited access to computers, you are going to have to use other methods.

Environment

* What is the development time? A long lead-time allows a large set of possible methods, and a short lead-time substantially reduces the set. For example, a CD-ROM is a possible delivery method when the lead-time is long but not when it is short.

* Is the delivery date critical? When a missed deadline will have harsh consequences, a reliable and tested method probably makes sense.

* What are the testing requirements? If objective tests are adequate to demonstrate the learning goal has been achieved, a range of methods possible, e.g., workbook, CBT, web.

* Do you need to use real or virtual teams for training? If you do, then methods that simulate a teamwork environment should be considered.

* What's the availability of subject matter experts or qualified instructors? If you have few experts or instructors and many students, the classroom may have to be ruled out.

Using the method

Here is a quick demonstration of the thinking encouraged by
this approach. Let's assume the following:

* A realistic representation of the basic sales process is important.
* The audience is widely dispersed, and the various direct and indirect costs of
bringing them together are very high.
* They generally have good access to PC's.
* The delivery date is critical because the audience is new hires without sales
experience.
* The number of in-house sales experts is small.

Subject matter experts using virtual classroom software are an option, but that
wouldn't meet the first need. A second approach would be to have new hires view
a sales training video with their supervisor and then participate in a virtual
class led by the expert. Or the entire training could be delivered through video
conferencing. The choice would depend on the cost difference and a judgment
about the comparative effectiveness of the approaches.

In our next article, we'll describe how to prioritize the requirements.

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