



## How Digital technologies can enhance Capability Development

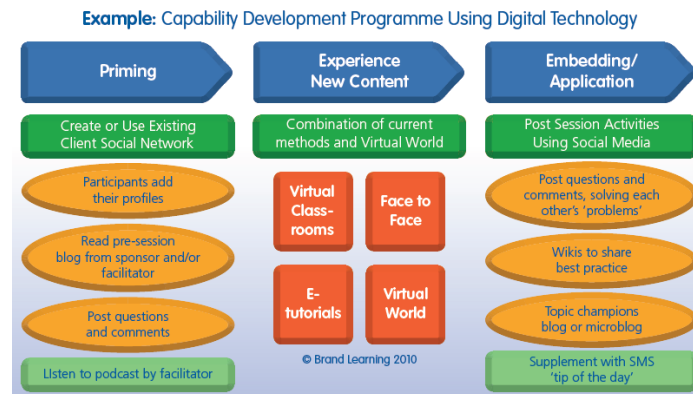


This month, Liz Lacovara, Learning Director at BRAND LEARNING, considers the implication of digital technologies for employee learning programmes, in particular how to give blended learning strategies even more impact in building new marketing capabilities.

There is a significant parallel between marketing itself and marketing capability development, namely both seek to change what people think and do - be that customers, consumers or employees, the task is largely the same. Ultimately, both have a shared goal - greater customer centricity in order to drive improved business performance. Because of these similarities, digital technologies provide as exciting an opportunity for capability building as they do for marketing. Just as marketers are finding ways to leverage digital technologies across marketing fundamentals, so too are those involved in marketing capability development evolving the concept of 'blended learning' to incorporate new media—social media, virtual worlds, mobile learning and podcasts.

### Key Challenges that Digital Technologies create for Learning

Digital technologies enable richer capability programme designs by providing opportunities to create greater engagement with programmes, delivering content in more effective ways and embedding new ways of working.



However, the proliferation of these digital 'channels', whether for marketing or marketing capability development, poses several challenges. These include:

- How to develop an integrated strategy rather than a fragmented approach?
- How to gain organisational commitment to new ways of working?
- How to ensure organisational readiness to deliver maximum return?

It's possible to meet these challenges by applying strategic marketing principles to the development of a marketing 'capability strategy' that effectively blends traditional and



digital approaches. As with marketing, when building a marketing capability strategy it is crucial to:

### **1. Define an inspiring vision that engages stakeholders' hearts and minds**

The start of any marketing capability change programme is a clear view of where you are going. Digital learning isn't the end in itself; it simply offers enhanced or supplementary ways of changing behaviours and building skills.

### **2. Apply insightful segmentation to identify priority target audiences**

In most marketing capability programmes, there are a number of target audiences with different profiles. There may be marketers at different levels who have both different content needs and different level of comfort with or enthusiasm for new technologies. However, it's important to avoid stereotypes like 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' based solely on age. A more sophisticated approach to segmentation based on need state or psychographics often reveals pockets of highly enthusiastic, 'tech savvy' marketers that cut across age or levels in the organisation. These may be a primary target when testing new approaches as they can help drive momentum as well as spot barriers.

In addition, the IT department is clearly a crucial target when trying to introduce new technology solutions to capability programmes. 'Early and often' is probably the mantra here as they need to help scope what is possible with existing infrastructure (bandwidth, processing speed, firewalls, mobile devices etc.). Their support and probably their budget will be necessary for any hardware or software upgrades and they will be key to successful implementation.

Finally, the Legal and HR departments must be closely involved in order to help define issues around corporate responsibility, confidentiality and appropriate usage. New ways of working can require the reframing of some policies and the development of new ones, and this should be considered as a key part of the strategy.

### **3. Clearly communicate the benefits from the perspective of identified target audiences**

As with the development of any marketing message, the benefits of digital channels for learning should answer one or more insights about the target audience. Senior stakeholders will want to know how the capability initiatives will drive improved business performance. They may be attracted to the fact that virtual channels cut travel budgets, enable faster roll-out of programmes and may enable more efficient involvement by senior managers and external partners. However, they may also be concerned that virtual worlds and social media aren't valid 'work', and concerns about time being spent on games and chatting need to be considered and solutions addressed.

There are a number of possible benefit areas for marketers in digital learning channels and again these need to be expressed in a way that reflects an understanding of their reality. Increased business pressure and smaller teams mean that time out of the office away from the 'day job' is a precious commodity. Similarly, they won't react well to capability initiatives that seem to add to the workload rather than reduce it. They will want to integrate learning and 'work' with minimal disruption, and some digital technologies allow this: virtual worlds or social media platforms can be accessed from the desktop; mobile learning on phones, wireless handheld devices or MP3/4 players can make use of downtime such as the daily



commute or when travelling on business. But an expectation that every participant will microblog or regularly post comments on discussion forums is not realistic.

In addition to the efficiency benefits, digital technologies enable greater collaboration and connectivity, both during 'learning interventions' and for ongoing application on the job. Virtual communities of 'Subject Matter Experts' or Knowledge Champions enable the sharing of approaches, examples and learnings in an efficient way.

They also make it possible for others to access this corporate memory even if they aren't active contributors<sup>3</sup>. Importantly, these behaviours are occurring regularly outside of the workplace, and not just among the early adopters of technology. Most users of web 2.0 technologies exist in a context of 'reciprocity rather than hierarchy'<sup>4</sup>. This means they believe they can produce and evaluate content, develop reputation and receive recognition for what they know and contribute, whether it's a professional blog, Amazon reviews or TripAdvisor.

#### **4. Match the right messages and channels (traditional or digital) to where your target audience is in its capability journey**

Just as there is still a role for TV advertising, Face to Face workshops have a hugely important role to play in learning and in capability development. However, using them as the sole option for capability building is an outdated approach. As with media planning, each possible learning channel needs to be evaluated against aspects like its relevance for the message, the target audiences' needs and motivations, and resource considerations. It is the smart combination of digital channels with more traditional learning approaches that will accelerate the embedding of new capabilities and therefore drive tangible value more quickly.

#### **5. Establish relevant KPIs and measure these over time**

The setting and tracking of KPIs is an essential part of marketing planning. It may be even more important when introducing new ways of working that have less of an established reputation in the business. While in some ways digital technologies enable better and faster tracking of key metrics, the challenge remains to make sure the right KPIs are set up front. For example, is the number of registered users on a capability social media site the right KPI, is it number of visits or the quality of posts? Is it number of downloads from the podcasting library or the reduction in rebriefing that's the result of using the new agency briefing approach and how can you make that link? Creative thinking and a healthy debate, as well as alignment with key stakeholders, including Finance and IT, are all important, particularly if you are in a 'test and learn' situation.

Competitive pressure, time and budget constraints are a constant in marketers' lives, and it's possible to see technology proliferation as adding complexity to these already difficult jobs. However at Brand Learning, we believe digital technologies offer exciting opportunities to enhance marketing capability development programmes, just as they offer the opportunity to build closer, more profitable relationships with customers and consumers.

1 See the Brand Learning Food For Thought article by Bruce Levi: Marketing Re-Mastered for The Digital Era. 2 In his 2001 article of the same name, Marc Prensky introduced this distinction to try to explain the difference between students today and



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previous generations. It has become a commonly adopted descriptor. 3 In fact, findings across a range of studies including those cited in Groundswell (Li and Bernoff, 2008) suggest the proportion of active contributors and commenters is much smaller than spectators, those who read/view but don't post. This is an important consideration when setting KPIs. 4 Living and Learning with New Media, MacArthur Foundation 2009.

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