Switching from classroom training to digital learning
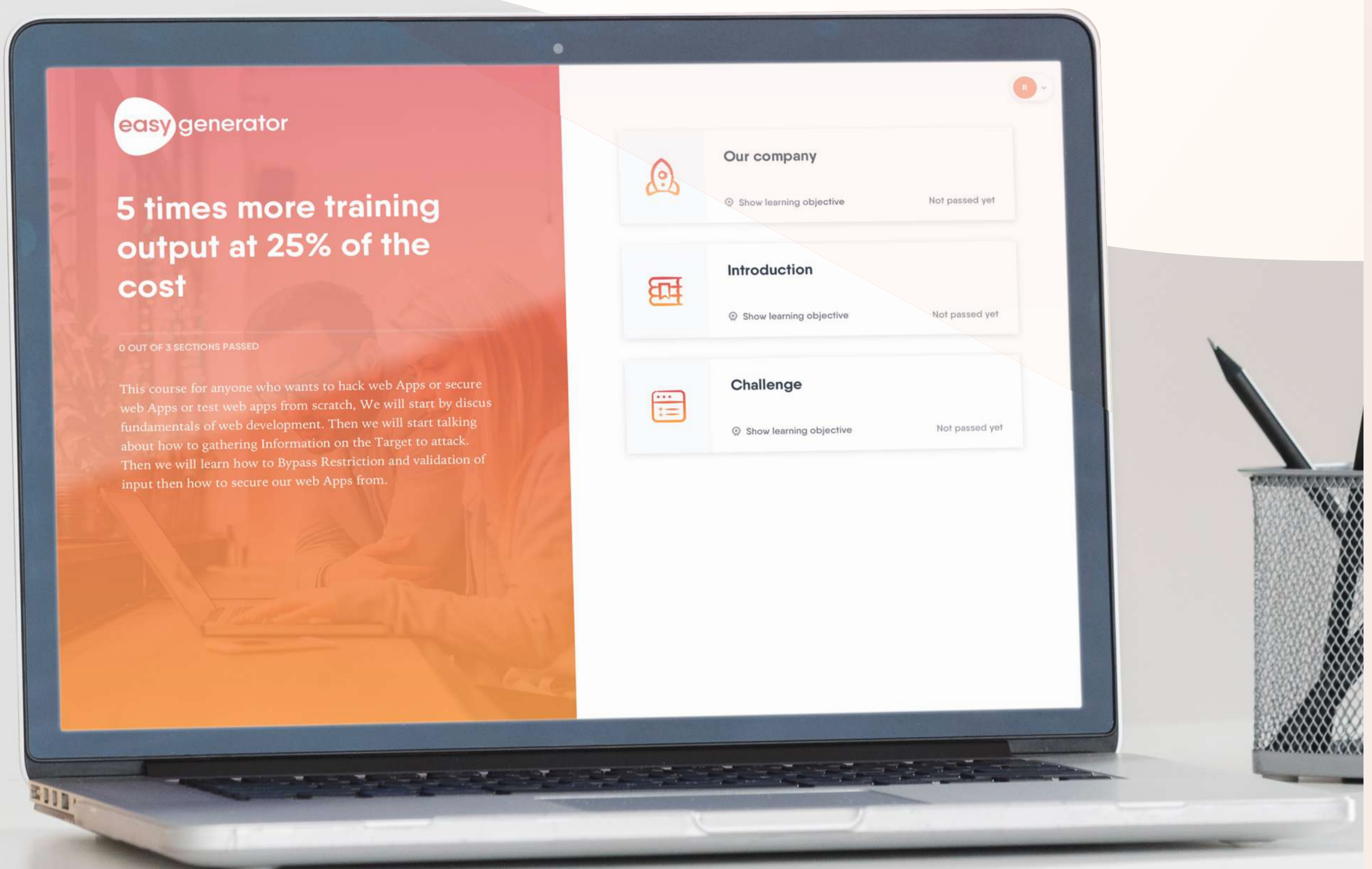
easygenerator

Switching from classroom training to digital learning

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Switching from classroom training to digital learning

Digital learning is an indispensable part of modern employee training initiatives and is only becoming more prominent as time goes on. This trend towards digital learning, while simultaneously moving away from in-person education, reaches across all industries. It's even affecting retail, where many employees cannot work from home and health care, which consists of many "essential workers." Both industries have seen a sudden, urgent increase in the need for virtual training delivery.

Shifting from classroom learning to a digital platform has become a necessary undertaking for organizations. With the COVID-19 pandemic forcing a large percentage of the workforce to work-from-home indefinitely, digital learning sits poised to replace traditional classroom training. Many organizations have already adopted virtual training protocols and self-paced e-learning to fill in the gaps created by the pandemic. Organizations have moved 72% of their training programs to virtual e-learning, compared to 52% before. That significant 20% jump in less than one year looks to be the very beginning of this gradual shift.

When we talk about e-learning, it's helpful to compare it with instructor-led training (ILT) to get a clearer picture of digital learning as a whole. ILT takes place in-person, whereas e-learning is web-based. While e-learning is available around the clock as long there's internet access, ILT has many restrictions, including time and space.

Let's look at some scenarios that illustrate why e-learning has become a no-brainer for organizations:

1. E-learning is always available as opposed to classroom training, which calls for more planning and scheduling.

2. Since instructors lead classroom training, they're tightly scheduled to cover more content, which isn't a prerequisite of digital training, modified to suit the employees' schedules.

3. E-learning is more modular than ILT - long classroom hours aren't as efficient as pacing yourself through digital learning modules.

4. Classroom training is limited geographically and is only available to specific employees at particular times. In contrast, e-learning is globally available, which significantly opens up access to it.

5. Course material updates happen instantly in e-learning, whereas in instructor-led training, the instructor needs time to update and delays the inclusion of pressing updates.

Chapter 1

Why should we switch from ILT to e-learning?

Before we switch over from instructor-led training to e-learning, we'll first need to better understand why this shift is critical and how we can be effective in this new digital-learning domain.

> "Online learning is not the next big thing, it is now the big thing."
>
> Donna J. Abernathy

Reasons for shifting from ILT to e-learning:

E-learning is flexible, dynamic, and easy to tailor to fit your team size, content, demographics, delivery methods, etc. The content can be swiftly prepared, tested, and modified to suit the employees' requirements. Employees can design their courses and learn at their own pace. They can also revisit difficult or complicated sections that require more time and effort to understand fully.

- E-learning is anytime learning. Employees can access the training programs from the comfort of home, a coffee shop, or even a shared workspace. These programs are device-agnostic. Employees can access at any time, day or night, and reference course material whenever they need to. Ultimately, employees save time when training online. Frequently, e-learning condenses content in ways that offer more information in smaller windows of time, potentially saving upwards of forty to sixty percent of your employees' training time.

- Compared to classroom learning, this type of training cuts down on the costs of instructors, classrooms, infrastructure, supporting material, and travel times. This method is all-encompassing and reaches an expanded audience when compared to the typical scope of classroom training. This method makes learning available to everyone without travel or budget constraints.

- E-learning students are less likely to get bored because they're in control of their pace of learning. These programs are device-independent and can fit into the learners' style. Learners can use desktops, surfaces, laptops, or even mobile phones to access digital training.

- Online courses are less cumbersome. They can be easily mixed and matched with other classes as required. The courses can be standalone or be a part of a more comprehensive program.

- Online courses are the most cost-effective way to reach broader audiences (barring the initial investment).

> In short, online courses are more engaging and provide a flexible learning experience that contributes value to the learner's overall education.

Process of converting from ILT to e-learning:

Once we've accepted and understood the merits of converting from conventional classroom training to e-learning, the next step is developing the learning process and protocol. Let's examine the probable steps involved in this conversion:

1. First, existing materials need to be reformatted to fit the digital environment. Online content is entirely different from classroom-training content. Your online learning objectives need careful assessment, including considerations like delivery methods, design elements, and other essential factors of effective online learning.

2. Once the content's reformatted, select and finalize the learning tools that best fit your training materials. There are many learning management systems available to suit your requirements.

3. Next, you should meet up with a subject-matter expert (SME) to develop the training program's content. Here, the designer can take inputs from the SME and create a tailored e-learning course.

4. While revamping your content to fit an e-learning program, you may notice that the resulting content isn't tied together well or easy to understand. That's going to happen and requires patience and many iterations before you'll strike the right balance with your new content.

5. Since there are no humans to conduct classroom training activities, creating fun-filled, interactive, and engaging e-learning counterparts is imperative. Providing learners with bite-sized information and clear visual aids enable employees to learn quickly and retain information.

6. We can also enable employees to choose and design their courses, leaving them satisfied with a personalized experience.

7. After taking the steps outlined above, test your course, gather feedback, and make necessary improvements from there.

Chapter 2

Can we substitute instructors in training?

We're attached to the idea of instructor-led training because it's been the default mode of education for so long. That attachment is mostly due to the fact that in-person training creates a safe, formal atmosphere for learners to interact with their instructors.

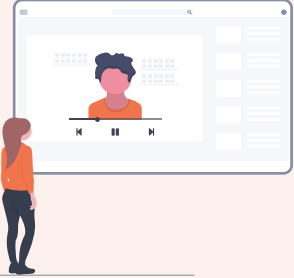> " We need to bring learning to people instead of people to learning.
>
> Elliot Masie

In ILT, we hire and pay trainers dedicated to contributing to the training and development of employees. However, with the forced arrival of e-learning due to COVID-19, the face-to-face approach is being put aside for the time being. This departure from ILT could mean that employees may miss the comfort of trainers being available in classrooms, along with the opportunity to ask questions live. A blend of ILT and digital learning could be a healthy alternative to organizations operating from home.

Differences between ILT and e-learning:

In the infographic below, you can get a glimpse of the critical difference between ILT and digital learning.

Instructor-Led Training	E-learning
Extensive training material	Material is concise and to the point
Restricted by space	Anytime and anywhere available training
Better for classroom-conducive material	Better for remote learning
Limited to a smaller number of employees	Can accommodate larger audiences
Scheduled time and place	Self-paced learning; students can revisit topics later
Time-consuming	Takes 40-60% less time compared to classroom
Expensive when compared to the digital medium	Money saver

A combination of classroom training and e-learning methods could be the ideal scenario for L&D in organizations to pursue. However, combining these disparate methods while guaranteeing results is no easy feat. Let's walk through some of the strengths of classroom training to better understand how to blend them with e-learning seamlessly.

Bring the in-person flair to e-learning training:

As discussed earlier, learners miss seeing the trainers live and direct when e-learning. They interact with computers instead of human beings, and this can sometimes be stressful. While not a perfect substitute, video-simulated training lends a personal touch to the e-learning experience.
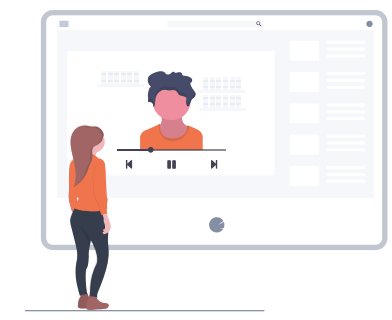
Feature familiar people in the videos:

Remember those useful SMEs? Include them, along with relevant colleagues, in short videos with crisp content. This way, they'll share their pertinent expertise, which can help retain employees in the digital medium and add extra enjoyment and value to the training. Combining SMEs in virtual classrooms, paired with opportunities to ask questions, can profoundly impact the quality of their learning experiences.

Build interactive sessions:

Modern content authoring tools come equipped with powerful techniques to establish a web-like environment on any platform. These tools can produce appealing visual design coupled with animations, slideshows, transitions, interactive elements, and image galleries. These added elements further enhance the user experience in e-learning. And that's not all – other additional features include quizzes, tests, discussion forums, simulations, and gaming tools, all aiming to retain users and provide unique digital learning challenges.

Useful tips while converting from ILT to e-learning:

- Account for the time it takes to convert from ILT to e-learning. This step is critical because converting from ILT to e-learning can prove to be deceptively time-consuming. Plan wisely.

- Since an instructor is no longer available in online learning, it would be great to fill the gaps with videos featuring personal instruction to add that special touch.

- Identifying areas of improvement should be an ongoing process. You should be taking feedback on your e-learning experience even after it launches. The name of the game is incremental improvement.

- Come up with an attractive design for the course. Unlike classroom training, where instructors can make-up for lousy design with charisma and presentation skills, the design of your e-learning will make or break its success, calling for careful consideration during its development.

- The last and most important tip is to keep your learners engaged with various interactive activities and exercises. Learning needs hands-on trial and error, even if the learning medium is digital.

Chapter 3

Five factors for switching to digital learning

According to the Training Industry Report, more than 70% of organizations are switching to digital learning. So, what should these organizations do to get off to a good start?

Our plan (the five Ps of e-learning) covers the essentials for developing a meaningful e-learning program. This plan helps small and medium-sized firms that may not have well-defined L&D/HR teams but are looking for guidance on transitioning to e-learning.

People

It's crucial to gain your stakeholders' buy-in with any change in talent development or management practices. For small and mid-sized firms, the most pressing challenge is addressing preconceived notions about traditional learning approaches that can potentially prevent e-learning from taking root. Like management teams and employees, key stakeholders need an extra push of persuasion to complete the switch from classroom training to digital learning.

Getting Started:

Management/Business Leaders

Win over these key stakeholders by showing them how e-learning speeds up content creation and distribution while cutting costs. E-learning also means faster alignment between business problems and learning solutions. Stick to the tangible benefits and long-term pay-off to their bottom-line.

Employees

Digital formats are much more comfortable and quicker to access, so employees benefit from having the right information precisely when they need it. With collaborative e-learning solutions, employees are more engaged than ever because they are instrumental in co-creating relevant learning content to meet business goals.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy is the practice of teaching. In the workplace, L&D uses various pedagogical models that are central to their training strategies. When switching from classroom to digital learning, take care to choose the right pedagogical model. For the best results, select a social, blended, or mobile learning model. It's also vital to consider the behavioral, social, and technological preferences of millennial employees.

Getting Started:

Let's take inspiration from a few examples of modern digital learning solutions:

- **Mobile learning:** Mobile devices have taken the corporate world by storm. As a result, BYOD-compatible learning is an essential requirement for modern L&D. That means creating mobile-compatible and accessible learning content/resources.

- **Social learning - Employee-generated Learning:** Rapid social sharing and instant lookup/resolution have become second-nature for today's digital-native employees. A learning model that naturally dovetails with this behavior will be far more effective than a massive, centralized learning-system overhaul. Employee-generated Learning is one such model that encourages sharing and learning to team up, fostering peer-to-peer knowledge sharing habits and encouraging anyone to create content on their areas of expertise. Here are a few examples shared by some of our users:

  - Product leadership teams developed learning content about new models and services

  - Client service teams shared best practices on optimizing working relationships with clients.

  - Call centers shared lessons on how to answer calls and resolve issues effectively.

  - Field representatives created courses on how to interact with clients.

  - The analytics team has created content on process tips and tricks for using analytics tools.

Products

Among the plethora of e-learning products and platforms, how can you choose the right one for your digital learning solution? Organizations often fall into the trap of implementing a learning management system (LMS), which is more of an administrative tool for tracking and managing learner courses.

Getting Started:

When planning to launch a digital, social, and collaborative learning approach, here are some criteria to consider:

SaaS:

To keep things easy, choose cloud-based products/platforms with no installation required.

Minimal learning curve:

Choose products that are quick to learn and easy to use.

Didactic support:

Choose products with built-in didactic support and a responsive support team to help you and your employees whenever you need them.

Responsive content:

Choose products that are mobile-compatible for creation (authoring), curation, and consumption.

Co-authoring:

Choose products that allow you to collaborate with other stakeholders and employees in creating a learning resource.

Admin functions:

Choose products that offer essential admin functions like results tracking, certificates, engagement reports, etc.

Tracking and tracing:

Make sure the product supports XAPI/CMI5 for result tracking. If not, the product is outdated.

Potential

After you've figured out what to implement and how to implement a digital learning solution, it's time to reflect on what sort of skills/capabilities you need for success.

Getting Started:

Analysis:

Identify the employee-performance pain points that need addressing through learning content/resources/courses. The key is to identify the best approach, whether it's training, e-learning, on-the-job aids, or face-to-face conversations. Remember not to assume that e-learning is always the answer.

Mentoring:

If you choose a social and collaborative learning approach, it's essential to mentor and coach employees. Instead of creating content yourself, you now guide and support the content creation processes.

Marketing:

A digital learning resource/solution is much easier to promote and campaign for than a classroom model. L&D professionals should draw lessons from marketing to raise awareness of the resources available to their employees.

Data:

In our data-driven world, L&D should use analytics to understand the level and context of usage. Analytics show you how a piece of learning content can be improved and fine-tune future digital learning resources.

Process:

Digitalization of learning involves streamlining people and workflows to sustain their effectiveness. From conception to execution, L&D must select quick, easy methods to ensure the adoption of new approaches.

Getting Started:

Initiation – use cases

Remember, the goal is not to replace the classroom but to complement it. You must carefully choose which learning requirements can be met by the e-learning format. Try to avoid carelessly dumping all your classroom content into it.

Content creation

After you've identified the "sweet spots" where e-learning can have the most significant impact, you can access the tools to create and digitize content. When you're just getting started, it's essential to stick to no-nonsense authoring tools that support easy, rapid authoring. When collaborating with others, SMEs should be able to access review tools without a lengthy setup.

Publication and distribution

For beginners, we recommend an automated and embedded publishing approach. You can post content at the click of a button without the hassles of LMS integration. Also, distribution and sharing must be equally accessible, along with social media integration.

Maintenance

Updating content is a regular occurrence in the e-learning life-cycle. Instead of chasing SMEs for input, give them direct access to authoring within your content systems so they can make changes directly. To facilitate seamless teamwork, look for an authoring tool or system with collaborative authoring/review options.

Tracking

Sometimes, it's necessary to track learner performance or engagement. Compliance, onboarding, and safety courses are classic examples of instances in which tracking is mandatory. For these cases, look for engagement reporting options and a system that supports LRS, a trending data-reporting system.

The way forward:

Digital learning empowers organizations to deal with changes and training requests much more rapidly. HR/Operations/L&D can now play a more strategic role in identifying which aspects of classroom training either convert to e-learning or are retained within the in-person format. For collaborative approaches, L&D can now focus on strategic initiatives because SMEs, who are highly qualified to develop content, are brought into the creative process early on. Ultimately, digital learning is the way forward, saving time, cutting costs, and multiplying L&D's capacity with technology's help.

Chapter 4

Common mistakes to avoid

While e-learning heavily relies on technologies, its real strength is its ability to cater to different learning styles. To succeed, organizations must use it for the right reasons without losing sight of learner behaviors and education's real goals.

Let's look at how digital learning redefines the way learners acquire and apply knowledge at work today. If you are new to the world of digital learning, this section gives you some practical do's and don'ts, so you can avoid some of the common pitfalls that occur as you transition from the classroom to e-learning.

Time for a change

While technology doesn't decrease the demand for training, it provides instructors with new tools for reaching learners. The latest trend in instructor-led learning is "enablement through technology," whether it's a fully digital platform or a combination of classroom and digital learning. Enablement through technology now allows us to rethink and improve traditional learning formats.

Companies new to e-learning commonly start by selecting and implementing a learning management system (LMS). Unfortunately, this is where things can go off the rails right out of the gates. Digital learning isn't about the technical solution itself. Instead, it's about enabling and empowering learners. LMS limit an organization's learning capabilities instead of enhancing them.

LMS primarily serve the needs of learning administrators — not learners. It's much more beneficial to focus first on learners needs' and see how you can facilitate them through small but meaningful solutions. We encourage organizations to build a learning culture and a matching ecosystem of small solutions and avoid falling into the LMS trap.

Budgets and resources

Since many organizations typically focus on an LMS, most of their available budget goes into this expensive system, leaving little funding for essential content creation activities. The pressure to reduce costs and stay on a budget sometimes leads managers to convert old PowerPoint slides or training manuals directly into an online format. However, statistics show that reading slides on a computer screen is tedious and disengaging for learners, making it an ineffective teaching method.

As a result, many organizations have been plagued by uninspiring and discouraging results — simply because they lacked proper guidance and adequate support during the initial stages of e-learning implementation.

Transforming to online

An e-learning course isn't the same as face-to-face training. There are many key differences, including the lack of an in-person instructor, a new generation of learners, and BYOD access, which fundamentally redefine classroom training principles. Do the same principles even apply to online training? Maybe not. Let's take a look at how to update training principles to match today's learners' needs.

1. Blended or fully online?

It's not about showing off technology; it's about learning.

Going digital is much more than merely revamping your existing classroom training structure and materials using shiny new technology. Technology is just a medium, and it's up to you to decide which parts of the training must be digitized to benefit your learners most.

2. Understanding learners and their needs

Digital learning takes more than just understanding your employees' training needs: it also takes understanding their context, behaviors, career goals, challenges, devices, communication, and access modes.

In the digital learning industry, we've had plenty of debates about millennial learners versus the previous generation of learners. Digital and mobile technologies have had an undeniable impact on learners' lives, behaviors, and habits. Today's learners are no longer the same passive audience used to sitting through three-hour classroom training sessions. They are constantly distracted and multitasking. This paradigm shift needs addressing in your learning strategy.

Don't assume everyone is using a Windows PC. Digital access to learning content means seamlessly supporting a BYOD culture, whether online resources, chats, apps, or other tools. Enable ubiquitous access to learning content in a multi-device cloud environment.

3. Learning goals or outcomes

Instead of focusing on how many courses your learners complete, focus on meaningful educational outcomes.

The beauty of digital learning is that it provides knowledge to enable learners to see the benefit of what they are learning immediately. L&D should move beyond defining which skills and capabilities need to be understood and focus instead on increasing the relevance of content. Start by defining what you want learners to "do" as the end goal of the training. Forget about "content dumping" and embrace content relevance.

4. Content in action

Why convert entire classroom sessions into e-learning courses when you can offer short, engaging, and relevant pieces of knowledge that can be accessed any time the learner needs them?

Instead of remaining stuck in a "training" mentality, think in terms of performance support. That means improving performance by embedding information seamlessly into workflows. Forget about copy-pasting PowerPoint presentations into digital training courses, and start creating "hubs" of knowledge that learners can refer to whenever they need. In addition to laser-focused content, it's crucial to develop exercises that reflect real-life scenarios and enable learners to see how learning relates to their work quickly.

5. **Applying knowledge**

Digital learning is the ultimate form of "learning by doing." Instead of cramming and memorizing information, learners deepen their understanding by applying knowledge in problem-solving situations.

Adults learn by interpreting and solving problems that enable them to reflect on real-life situations. Technology is a perfect tool for this because it can give most workers quick access to information they need when they need it. There's no need for them to memorize every single process that goes into their work. L&D should allow learners to engage with the content right on the job to foster reflection and application of knowledge.

6. **Interaction with instructors**

Being a real instructor doesn't mean you have to be a "sage on stage." It means offering support and serving as a guide, mentor, coach, and facilitator — someone who encourages learners to connect the dots and carve out their career paths.

In our hyperconnected world, it's L&D's job to facilitate content creation and connect learners to the information they need. Digital learning enables learners to quickly go to the right sources of information without depending on just one resource. Since employees learn best by sharing ideas and knowledge with their peers, L&D must create a collaborative working and knowledge-sharing culture.

7. **Motivation**

Forget about carrots and sticks, badges and avatars, and make sure content is meaningful to the learner's work.

Employees are task-oriented, so they weigh the information's significance and relevance before deciding to internalize it. L&D must ensure that content and activities are relevant to their learners' jobs and career paths. When learning content aligns with the things that matter to employees, the motivation to learn takes care of itself.

8. **Assessments and feedback**

The real sign of educational effectiveness is how successfully the learner applies their new knowledge.

Unless there is a strict need to accredit your employees, L&D should focus on providing learners with project-based tasks or activities that prepare them for their real jobs. As mentioned earlier, it's not about memorizing every step, but knowing where to find the information you need, when you need it.

When designing exercises, make sure also to include opportunities to provide meaningful feedback that resonates with learners. Educate your employees about the right and wrong choices and teach them what consequences these choices have on their work.

The evolution of learning

Faced with fast-paced disruptions and business changes, organizations must enable their workforce to adapt quickly. L&D struggles to keep content up-to-date on its own, which means e-learning content can soon become obsolete. Ultimately, this has real implications for the company's bottom line — even more so if the perception of e-learning is a one-time, static program.

e-learning is not a "set-it-and-forget-it" concept. Learning evolves continuously, which means the content has to be kept up to date. It's time for companies to ditch old-school, top-down, centralized L&D models and explore bottom-up, decentralized models. That's why we advocate an original employee-generated learning model, in which employees self-serve their training needs with guidance and support from L&D. For a digital learning program to succeed, L&D has to stop trying to create all the content itself and start empowering learners to share their knowledge.

Chapter 5

This is how to improve your e-learning course creation

In the previous chapters, we looked at the benefits of e-learning, how to move from ILT to e-learning, and uncovered useful tips to move from ILT to e-learning. In this chapter, we would like to show the ways and means of improving e-learning and ILT.

Many experts within their respective domains can contribute by sharing with others. However, e-learning course content creation requires a different degree of expertise. Here are a few steps that you can follow to create meaningful, influential, and useful learning content.
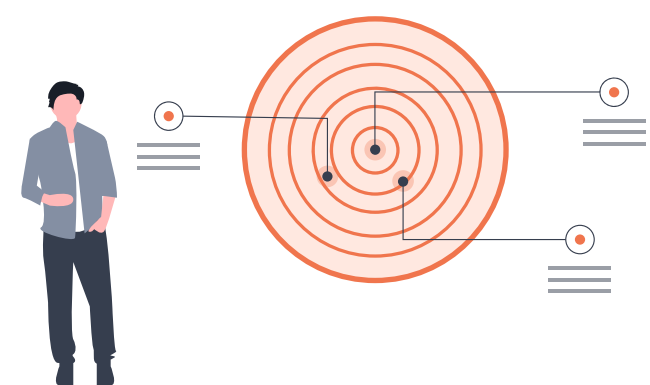
Keep your goal clear and create precise learning objectives:

E-learning content creators often do not differentiate between the end-goal and the learning objectives associated with the goal. This can be accomplished by engaging learners with periodic assessments aligned with learning objectives. Learning objectives focus on the critical learning components that learners have to achieve.

Use the right instructional strategy:

As opposed to ILT, e-learning uses specialized instructional methods to promote a high-end teaching approach. Once you select a strategy, analyze the techniques used on a segment of the audience to see their effectiveness. This analysis helps in deciding the plan that works for your organization or the team in question.

Repurposing existing ILT content:

The ILT content is vast and exhaustive, and cannot be used in e-learning without some reformatting. On the one hand, this material may be cumbersome, and on the other, it may not have the critical information required in e-learning courses. An analysis of what content to retain, what to repurpose, and what new content needs preparation is an unavoidable part of the process. Assets like video lectures, PowerPoint presentations, whitepapers, case studies, and movies enhance the e-learning experience.

Training material to suit multiple platforms

An ILT typically uses a slide projector, screens, and white and blackboards to train. Online learning is designed to cater to huge audiences and also comes with technical challenges. Online courses have to be device-independent to suit laptops, desktops, mobile devices, and tablets. Hence, online courses' content must be designed with this in mind and made responsive to all devices.
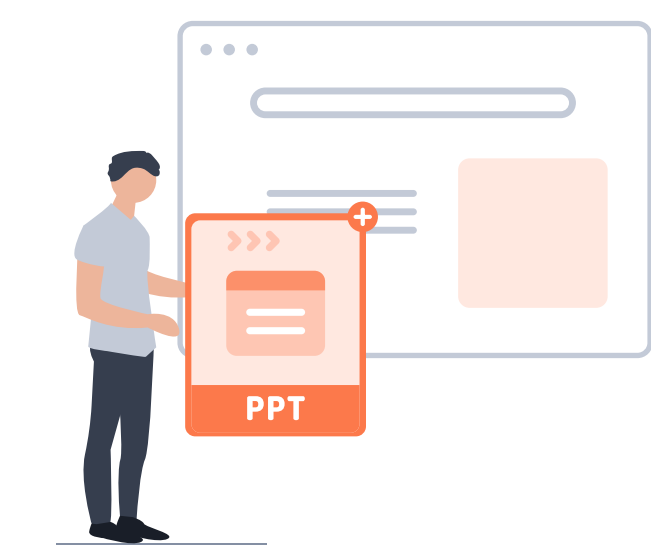
Use the existing PowerPoint presentations:

Instead of creating from scratch, designers can use the existing presentations resulting from hours of work by SMEs. You can convert these presentations using authoring tools and convert them to ready-to-use audio and video, compatible with all devices.
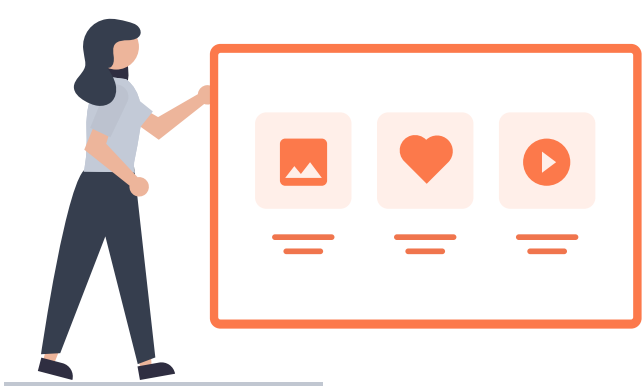
Add the relevant information:

Move away from content dumping of the ILT and create necessary information in easy-to-use chunks. Containing an online course to 20-30 minutes is directly proportional to retaining learners. Breaking the information into silos and creating relevant quizzes that assist in retaining new concepts and ideas.
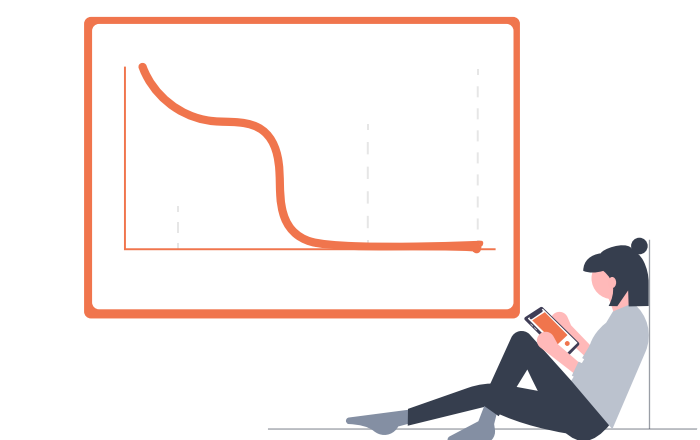
Beat the forgetting curve:

An area where we can make a perceptible difference in learning is providing ways and means for learners to retain information. To overcome this challenge, you can provide ways to recall information digitally. This means the e-learning courses can be digitally reclaimed whenever required, thus facilitating learners to use them fully. You can facilitate this by providing activities to repeat information for a lasting effect. Repetition comes to the rescue when introduced in different formats. For example, a piece of data can be represented in diagrams, quizzes, objective tests, videos, or infographics.

Focus on good writing:

Fresh and digestible content is always a boon to the ease of learning. Learners prefer courses that have explicit, goal-oriented content in simple sentences and an active voice. Concise content with real-time examples for targeted audiences is more straightforward to accept than random content.

Provide feedback:

Feedback is an effective mechanism for learners to understand where they stand about the course they have attended. With immediate feedback after the lesson and assessments, the learner can plan further training in his environment. Input with the right explanation can help trainers to get a clear idea of where they stand.

Conclusion

Having discussed the various factors about ILT and e-learning and its advantages, we can now decide on the areas where this medium is useful and productive. Apart from the software industries, traditional industries like retail, manufacturing, and consumer industries have started adapting to e-learning.

Self-paced learning has indeed gained popularity in this decade and more during the COVID-19 pandemic. As per IBM's internal statistics, e-learning can boost productivity by as much as 50%.

The e-learning modules allow employees to engage in the courses at their convenience and not disturb their production schedules.

While ILT has always been an incredible operational tool since times immemorial, e-learning is currently dominating the educational space. To quote Bernard Bull on the merits of e-learning, "in order to create an engaging learning experience, the role of the instructor is optional, but the role of the learner is essential." This new educational medium is here to stay.