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Cheat sheet for creating pharmaceutical training courses online

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Introduction

Challenges in pharmaceutical training and development

The pharmaceutical industry is one of the most vibrant and dynamic industries in the world today. This is great news for patients around the world, who benefit from increasingly effective treatments and technologies. New solutions are continually being developed, resulting in an incredible array of new products and services every year.

For L&D professionals in the pharmaceutical industry, these ever-changing conditions also pose many challenges. Whether it's product knowledge for sales teams or health and safety information for laboratory technicians, pharma training is a huge responsibility. How can HR managers, trainers, and L&D teams ensure that training content is effective and accurate enough to keep up with the rapid pace of change?

Fortunately, modern technologies are also quickly improving the ways learners access and acquire new knowledge. L&D professionals at pharmaceutical companies can now benefit from the powerful tools that online learning (or e-learning) has to offer.

A data-driven cheat sheet for creating perfect e-learning courses

This cheat sheet for creating the perfect e-learning course is based on the findings from our own research conducted with over 200 participants. We also conducted market research in addition to our own findings.

For our research, learners completed an online course consisting of a pre-test, a lesson, and a post-test identical to the pre-test. After that, they rated how likely they were to recommend the course to others using a Net Promoter Score (NPS). Two versions of the same course were distributed randomly to the participants to assess whether factors like structure, design, or pictures influence learning outcomes and NPS.

The study showed that optimizing courses in the following ways led to a greater improvement in learner performance between the pre-test and post-test. Moreover, the tweaks appeared to increase learner engagement, because the learners were more likely to spend time on the course.

This study was not conducted solely on pharmaceutical training courses. However, its findings can be especially effective for learners in this industry.

4 tips for creating online pharmaceutical training courses

1. **Use learning objectives**

When creating your online pharmaceutical training course, always identify your learning objectives first — even before you start designing your content.

Learning objectives refer to the new skills you want your employees to have acquired after completing your course. We recommend stating the intended learning objectives at the start of each section within your course. This allows your learner to approach the content with a clear understanding of their goals, enabling better focus.

At the same time, clear learning objectives can help streamline your content creation process. Knowing exactly what you want your learners to achieve makes it easier to determine how to organize your content and filter out irrelevant information.

2. **Include quick-fire questions**

It's not enough to simply share educational content with your employees. You'll also need to assess their progress by giving them opportunities to recall their new knowledge. Quizzes are a great way to do this.

When including quiz questions in your course, make sure that they're easy to answer. Each test question should ideally take around 30–45 seconds for the learner to answer. That's how long it should take for the learner to process the question, filter out distractors, consider their answer, and digest the feedback on their response.

For multiple-choice questions, each choice should be roughly equal in length. For the best results, offer 3 to 5 possible responses for the learner to choose from.

Response times can vary depending on the complexity of the question and feedback. A question that involves a scenario, for example, may take up to 90 seconds to answer. In any case, it's important to write and structure the question clearly and simply.

Quiz questions should not only test the learner's ability to recall what they have learned but also focus on their comprehension and critical thinking.

Always include immediate feedback, especially when the learner answers incorrectly. This enables the learner to recognize what went wrong, adjust their comprehension, and retain the correct information.

3. Keep content short

Because the pharmaceutical industry is heavily regulated, it's crucial that your training content is accurate. But it's just as important that the content is easy to understand. Keeping your content short will enable learners to spend less time deciphering the information and more time internalizing key points. Here are some tips to keep your content brief:

- Limit your courses to 1,000 words
- Break your course up into shorter sections
- Keep headlines under six words
- Break your content up into short paragraphs.
- Write in short sentences that get straight to the point.

Research has shown that attention spans online are getting shorter, so knowing how to keep your employees engaged is key. Using shorter and simpler sentences is one of many steps you can take to optimize your training content for an online learning environment.

4. Add visuals strategically

The high-stakes nature of keeping pharmaceutical content accurate calls for an engaging learning experience. For this reason, it's worth including visuals to enhance your text content and grab your learners' attention.

According to the Visual Teaching Alliance, people mentally process visuals 60,000 times faster than they process text. Moreover, people tend to skim through large bodies of text, reading only about 25% of the words in a page.

Visuals make it easier to quickly grasp important concepts, keep learners engaged, and increase their attention span. But it's important to know how to add them strategically without overdoing it.
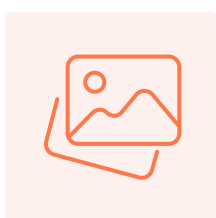
Images

The ideal number of images varies depending on the course. However, there are some general rules. For example, to avoid distraction and confusion, you should add no more than two visuals per page.

Most importantly, the visuals you add should always be relevant to the content. This allows you to use images as a tool to help learners store information in their long-term memory.
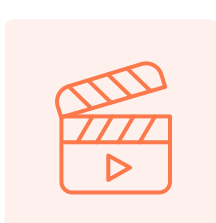
Videos

Videos will make your pharma training course more dynamic and interactive. By combining audio and visual elements, videos offer a multisensory experience that captures the learner's attention and makes it easier to digest complex topics.

Videos are particularly effective when they take a "how-to" approach. For example, you could use a video as an opportunity to walk your learners through a multi-step procedure or a list of tips. Try incorporating immersive scenarios and storylines to make educational videos more applicable to real-life situations.

To maximize the impact, choose only videos that are on-topic, focused, and no longer than 6 minutes. Beyond 6 minutes, learners are less likely to keep watching — at least not with the same level of focus — which means they'd be less likely to retain information.

Conclusion

With these 4 tips in mind, you're ready to create an engaging and impactful learning experience. As with all pharmaceutical content, be sure to fact-check your courses and have your work reviewed by a colleague. Using an authoring tool like Easygenerator, you can easily invite a teammate to review your content and add comments throughout the course.