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What questions should an SME be asked before designing an online course?

The questions to be asked to a small and medium-sized company are useful to understand what its training needs are. Where to start to prepare a tailor-made online course? Simple: from journalism.

The analysis of needs is the first step of every training project. E-learning and traditional training in this sense are perfectly matched. A successful course has clear educational objectives that emerge as a response to the analysis of training needs. How do you do this analysis in concrete terms and, even more specifically, what are the questions to ask a small and medium-sized company that wants a tailor-made online course? The golden rule of 5W journalism could be a starting point for the instructional designer who deals with eLearning.

Who - Who is the online course for?

The first thing to know is what the target of the online course is. Will the students be managers or new hires? What is the age range, the business function? The more detailed the information on the target, the more the educational designer will be able to outline the Person. In practice it is an identikit of the student to keep in mind when thinking about the content of a course: the language to use, the examples to be made, the type of exercise to prepare, the cultural and functional references that change based on criteria such as age or the role one has in the company.

What - What topics should the eLearning project cover?

If an SME contacts an instructional designer to ask for a tailor-made online course it means that he already has an idea of the topics that are not answered in a standardized course. The needs of an SME can be different: transmitting certain skills to the students of the course, conforming to a new legal framework, taking a refresher course. The list of topics to be discussed emerges accordingly and will be the basis from which to start to understand which are the training deficiencies and with which activities and tools the set goals can be achieved.

When - Within how much time should the course be delivered in eLearning mode?

Sometimes companies set up training courses for scheduled company appointments that cannot be postponed. For example, taking a course in organizing events to apply the knowledge learned to an important meeting or during a trade show requires a well-structured timetable. The timing information is used by the instructional designer to decide how long it takes to prepare and deliver the course at the right time.

Why - Why would beneficiaries want to take this course online?

This is a fundamental question for both the SME and the final beneficiaries of the course. The SME knows exactly why it requires employees to take a training course. To ensure that an online course is successful, it is essential to involve the beneficiaries of the course and understand what their vision of the training course is and, above all, why they think it is necessary to train in a certain subject.

Where - Where to find reference material for the online course?

It seems strange that a trainer asks a company what are the sources to use for an online course. It would be even more controversial to do research to prepare material that the company has already used or treated in previous courses, without

obtaining the desired results. Cross-referencing the data on the list of topics that the company would like to discuss and on the sources used previously is a way to understand how to deepen certain points or totally diversify the training offer.

How - Have you already had experience with an online course?

The how is also added to the 5 W of journalism. It is obvious that those who contact an instructional designer plan to take an online course. One of the advantages of eLearning, however, is that it also allows the use of mixed formulas that include moments of distance and classroom training. Knowing if the SME has already had experience of an online course helps the instructional designer to understand how to deliver the course, totally online or in a blended formula.

To understand what questions to ask an SME before preparing a personalized online course, just start with the 5 W rule of journalism: who, what, where, when, why plus how.