ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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5 Tools to Become a Freelance Instructional Designer

Working as an instructional designer means having professional roots in multimedia design, but also having the right interpersonal skills.

Creating eLearning courses is, without a doubt, a complex activity that allows you to shape a block of clay (the source materials) into a sculpture that the public can admire (our eLearning course).

Creating eLearning courses is not so different from producing a film: you have to design and write the texts, produce the audiovisual material and edit it properly. And then ... try, test the solution, submit it to students ... in short, a real work of research and development.

1. Patience and listening skills

For this reason, the first tool that every freelance instructional designer should have is, without a doubt, patience.

Patience is a quality that is trained, not an innate ability that we possess from birth. It's time management, the willingness to enjoy the journey and not reach the goal quickly. In short, patience is a necessary tool to get things done right.

It's true, however, that deadlines, tight schedules, and increasingly complex client requests will test your patience, especially as your career begins to take off.

I'm not telling you to produce content for eLearning courses through the art of Zen, but simply to apply a set of rules that will allow you to improve your patience at work.

First of all divide and conquer: if the amount of work seems gigantic, start dividing the objectives and the deliverables into smaller portions of work. This is a step that will also allow you to deal with your colleagues or clients more quickly.

The ability to listen will also allow you to increase your patience levels: start listening and jotting down all of your client's requests and requirements, during the work you will be able to tick off all of the requests and deal with any extra requests that were not budgeted for more calmly.

Designing eLearning courses sometimes means re-designing. Don't get discouraged if something doesn't work for you or your client. The goal is continuity and maintaining working relationships.

2. Storytelling

The second, and very important, tool for any good eLearning course creator is **storytelling**.

Since ancient times, training has gone hand in hand with storytelling. The ability to design a format will allow you to **create a base**, a template for all the narratives you will have to deal with.

Storytelling for eLearning courses means, first of all, being able to extract the necessary information and tell it to an audience of people, whether they are employees of an industrial processing company or accountants.

Identifying a target audience allows us to adopt the right vocabulary, the right dictionary of terms and, of course, to structure the training units that will be part of the eLearning courses.

Storytelling can be of two types: multimedia or transmedia.

We talk about multimedia storytelling when we create courses in eLearning mode using, for example, audio content, images, vector graphics, pdfs, video content in a scattered and linear order during the narration.

For example: the training course on managing emergencies in the company will be based on a series of behaviors and best practices to follow; it will be realized following a linear composition, training unit 1 will be followed by training unit 2 etc. Each unit is characterized by a type of content: we have a video, an in-depth pdf, an interview with the head of safety, etc.

On the other hand, when we talk about transmedia storytelling, we have in mind the creation of a training project that can be offered on several media or channels, while maintaining narrative coherence.

For example: let's imagine we want to create an eLearning course on IT security for a generalist target audience. The transmedia narrative allows us to start the story of Super Anti-Malware on the pages of a comic book that is distributed in the company; the last pages of the comic book will carry an invitation to continue the story in a series of 8 short animated videos on the web; the last episode of the online video will allow you to download a series of extra content accessible via podcast to listen to in the car or train on the way to work.

You will then have created different products with different types of storytelling. We'll talk about transmedia storytelling and its applications for eLearning courses in another article in the coming weeks.

3. Training

If you want to do training you will necessarily have to...train! Never stop updating and learning new ways of content creation and new tools.

Software platforms, content creation services, LMS and content creation platforms such as DynDevice are constantly updated with new features and allow you to achieve results that were unthinkable a few months ago.

Just think of the introduction of the chatbot system for eLearning, or the possibility of introducing conversational agents within eLearning courses to increase engagement and to better manage particular interactions, quizzes and learning verifications.

New automated and personalized content creation services, gamification and quiz-building tools are rapidly conquering the eLearning course production stage and, I assure you, arriving prepared at an orientation call with a client demonstrating your knowledge of these technologies will give you a few miles of advantage over the competition.

Training is especially important when we're talking about basic skills: you need, we'll say it again, to have excellent writing, audiovisual production and multimedia design skills. If you don't feel prepared on some of these topics, try signing up for an online course or reading a book on the subject, you can never be competent enough on anything!

4. Minimalism

In the professional field, minimalism is seen as something negative. People often tend to believe that eLearning courses must be loaded with information, bullet points, documentation and everything else that can be stored in a training space.

Recent trends have shown, on the contrary, that giving the necessary information without overdoing it gives users the opportunity to learn with greater peace of mind and to request in-depth study if necessary.

If we think that about 300 hours of videos are uploaded to YouTube every minute, we realize that this is an impressive amount of material that is accessible to anyone for free.

And we're only talking about the productions distributed on this channel.

Thus, a creator of courses in eLearning mode can choose between two options:

Go along with the requests without a critical spirit - This is the easiest choice to make, that is, to include everything that goes through the head of a client.

Absorb and change - This is definitely the choice that requires more effort and time, i.e. to observe the requests and, with a critical eye, decide what is good to use and what is not. Absorb the arguments and then re-propose them in a way that is useful to the audience. If your experience has taught you that it is better to reduce, then propose a summary or elimination of that topic.

Avoid too much information, be essential in the presentation of the content, and go straight to the heart of the communication are the basic operations.

Also look at other trainings and see, if possible, how they run on the different platforms and how the result is presented, what kind of interactions are created for the user. Try to understand what is required and what is not.

Most likely you'll realize that 10 star transitions between footage isn't that elegant for a 1-minute movie or that you always have with contrast in post-production.

The benefits of reducing will be obvious: you'll have worked on the details and you won't have added clutter.

5. Entrepreneurial Mindset

The last tool, no less important than the others, is the ability to quickly test your products on the market by having an entrepreneurial mindset.

Starting out as an instructional designer means adapting to a vertical market, i.e. trying to fit into a niche and then growing and expanding your customer base. The years following the pandemic are, paradoxically, the best time to start proposing to small and medium-sized companies that need to train their employees remotely.

That's where our business begins today.

Offering short content, mircrolearning products, financially sustainable services. This is, once again, how you can present yourself: essentiality, doing less to get results.

It is useless to tell the owners of small or medium-sized businesses all the technicalities behind our operations, they would be confused or totally uninterested.
Instead, offer a simple, clean service, free from virtuosity and get straight to the point of your communication, of your story. Eliminate the superfluous, do less.

A startup mentality will allow you to quickly rid your product of what doesn't work and allow you to move much more quickly on fresh, innovative solutions than larger companies that struggle to introduce change because they are too caught up in complex issues.

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