ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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Designing an e-learning course: mistakes not to make

The effectiveness of an online course depends on multiple factors. Here are all the mistakes to avoid when designing an e-learning course

From creating content, to focusing on interactivity, to respecting the needs of users, there are several steps to follow to make sure that an online course is constructed clearly and consistently so that it is truly effective. To achieve this goal, however, it is not enough to follow certain steps and rely on advice regarding actions to be completed. Fundamental, in fact, is also to keep in mind some **mistakes to avoid**, which could make the work previously done in vain, sending progress in the creation of an e-learning course to the wind.

Planning, what to do and what not to do

Although bringing an e-learning course to life is a long and complex task, which also requires the commitment of several **specialists**, it is also possible to start structuring a set of online lessons by consulting a **step-by-step guide**. This will show the steps to be taken by anyone who wants to bring e-learning lessons to life. In these steps, particular importance is given to the design phase, which is the necessary basis for being able to continue with organization and implementation, arriving at the finished product, to be presented to users. The work, therefore, may be incomplete or ineffective without proper design, which must be based on three key principles: planning, user focus and organization. Before the lessons are shared online and the project is promoted, therefore, the following steps are necessary:

1. Identify the **user** you want to target and understand what they may need in order to propose relevant content;
2. Decide which **training aspects** to give relevance to;
3. Define the learning **objectives** for the user to achieve;
4. Identify the **materials** to be used during the course;
5. Choose the teaching strategy to be implemented and the **approach** with which the topic is to be approached;
6. Identify the appropriate **platform** to support the course.

All these steps, which are part of the first design phase, representing the heart of creating an online course, need constant attention from those who intend to bring an e-learning course to life.

To make the course effective, it is important not to take anything for granted. Every detail must be taken into account, planned and organized, to offer the user a complete course, where nothing is left to chance. For this, the design cannot be filed quickly and superficially, but the course creator should spend a lot of time on it, paying attention to the storyboard of the project, to make it coherent and complete.

An effective course relies on **proper communication**, which implies the need to use simple and intuitive tones and styles, lest learners find themselves bewildered by a confusing and difficult-to-understand interface. Therefore, attention should be paid to typos, which should be avoided, logicality of the text, and excessively long periods or repetitive sentences, which would make lessons difficult to understand.

Fundamental importance already at the design stage also assumes **interactivity**, which is essential in an e-learning course, because it makes the user a first-person participant, actively involving him or her in the individual lessons, to help him or her maintain higher attention. Be careful, however, not to overdo it, alternating more interactive moments with static text and images. Otherwise, you might get the opposite effect, causing a decline in attention.

Another thing not to do is not to care about the device on which the course is offered, which can be a simple pc or a mobile device. When planning, the choice of tool cannot be put on the back burner because, depending on the medium used, specific choices will have to be planned.

A mistake would also be to not pay attention to the **interface**, considering it a secondary aspect, with the risk of making it confusing and unintuitive, going so far as to undermine user learning, which will trigger a chain reaction: an unsatisfied user will not recommend the course to other acquaintances and will not attend other classes if he/she has the opportunity.

The 10 mistakes to avoid

Designing an e-learning course is, therefore, critical to getting to the finished product. To implement it effectively, however, it is not enough to follow a step-by-step list of actions to take. It is necessary, in fact, to pay close attention also to the actions not to do, so as not to risk undoing the efforts made previously. Here, then, is a list of 10 mistakes to avoid when designing an e-learning course:

1. Not being clear about the needs of the **recipient**. Even before beginning the design of the online course, creators must determine the target audience and study its needs and requirements in order to come up with appropriate topics to cover. The level of preparation of the pupils also guides the choice of objectives to be achieved and teaching methods. Therefore, doing adequate research before designing a course is essential.
2. Create pages with many **text parts**. Asking the user to maintain attention when faced only with pages or slides full of written words is almost impossible. In order not to risk making pupils lose concentration, a good strategy can be to alternate written parts with images, videos and quizzes, without forgetting the power of interaction, which would make the student feel involved in the course of study.
3. Overdo it with **pictures**. On the other hand, however, filling lessons with images, without logic or at the expense of a fundamental textual part, can prove harmful. In fact, in this case, instead of helping the student to better understand the concepts, you risk distracting him or her and not leading to the achievement of the goals initially set.
4. Putting site **navigation** on the back burner. Paying attention to the content without worrying about navigation is a mistake that could jeopardize the success of the course. An intuitive interface that allows the user to move from one piece of content to another quickly, regardless of the device being used, makes the course more accessible and more effective. If, on the other hand, the student is unable to navigate between pages, learning may also suffer and the effectiveness of the lessons diminish.
5. Give more importance to **technology**. Technological tools are becoming more and more up-to-date and allow for actions that were previously unthinkable, from the development of quizzes and games, to simulations, to student-teacher interaction and between the students themselves. But placing emphasis only on these aspects could be dangerous if there is not sufficient focus on content in the design phase as well. Getting distracted by the new tools, without taking into account the objectives to be achieved would be a mistake that could nullify the effectiveness of the course: therefore, it is necessary to choose technologies that can lead the student to the results that the lessons propose.
6. Use traditional **training**. For e-learning training, it is not enough to transfer traditional, classroom-based training online. The methods used, expectations, and abilities of users are different, and, therefore, lessons need to be set up differently. In addition, the online world allows the use of unique content and tools not found in traditional training, which can be leveraged to build interesting lessons and completely new and personalized learning experiences.
7. Ignoring the **social** aspect. Learning and training are social actions. In the classroom, students and teachers can address each other, making social interactions an integral part of the training experience. Not emphasizing this aspect in e-learning would deprive users of an important aspect of learning, even to the detriment of achievement. Therefore, when designing an online course, importance must also be given to shared spaces of interaction.
8. Pay no attention to the **emotional** aspect. Traditional training also involves the emotional aspect of learners. Therefore, even in online learning, this cannot be taken for granted or take a back seat. In fact, if the student is emotionally connected, concepts will be understood more and will stick in his or her mind more effectively and durably.
9. Do not give importance to **assessment**. To enable the user to learn effectively, the mode of assessment is also important. In this sense, it may be useful to provide the possibility of periodic evaluations, either through quizzes or intermediate exercises, or through final assessments for each topic.
10. Poor content **management**. In addition to design, content management is critical, to allow it to be updated or images, text, or videos to be added. In this way, learning and training can evolve according to the user's needs and requirements.

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