ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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eLearning and transmedia storytelling

How to use transmedia storytelling to create engaging eLearning courses? Here are some good practices.

The ability to tell stories and train in different media. The design of eLearning courses may require the creation of broader communication campaigns.

If, for example, we intend to launch a training and information project for a wide range of users in our company (or for one of our clients), we will necessarily have to structure a suitable training storytelling course.

Especially for medium to high budget productions, the techniques of transmedia storytelling, a methodology that has been used for decades in the US film market, can be used to help us.

What is transmedia storytelling?

Transmedia storytelling is a method of storytelling that makes it possible to use a variety of media and communication tools in a uniform way. Transmedia storytelling is when we tell a story in a coherent way using the potential of each medium.

For example, it is possible to tell the story of a superhero in the cinema, but we can also coherently tell his origins in a comic book and perhaps tell his particular exploits in the levels of a video game.

We will thus have used three different media to tell a single story.

The father of transmedia storytelling, Henry Jenkins first defined it in his 2006 text Convergent Culture as a narrative form that, by moving across different types of media, "helps to refine and supplement the user's experience with new and distinct information".

In this way, each medium can be used to develop the story and to enable understanding within the world (or universe) being narrated.

If you are thinking of the last 20 superhero movies you have seen at home or at the cinema, or any story set in a galaxy far far away, you are right on target with the topic I want to talk about in this article.

The proliferation of alternative entertainment systems, the constant use of gamification in eLearning systems and the interconnectedness of the internet and mobile systems have led to an exponential growth in people's consumption of stories.

As demand has grown, content creators have adapted to designing their productions for different platforms: YouTube, print media, ebook format, streaming services, podcasting and so on.

The possibility of involving people from outside the creative mechanism has led to the emergence of crowdsourcing phenomena, i.e. the generation of content from the active participation of people in a given story.

Transmedia and eLearning

In order to create eLearning courses using transmedia storytelling techniques you need to approach the concepts of continuity and multiplicity.

When creating a story for a learning pathway, you must take into account the principle of continuity which allows you to maintain coherence between all the stories you tell in different media. This is a special value that you give to your audience, allowing them to recognise those stories and characters wherever they find them.

Multiplicity allows you to create alternative narratives within the same universe, giving characters the chance to gain new perspectives in other contexts. This is why you can tell and educate your learners from a set of best practices that will be different depending on the context in which the characters in your stories will operate.

In such a complex system full of opportunities, the creation of courses in eLearning mode cannot diverge from a transmedia narrative, adapting and, above all, making itself compatible with a communication mechanism that combines **awareness, compliance and integration**.

The learners of eLearning courses like to recognise themselves in characters who deal with problems that they might also experience in their daily lives or at work.

Returning again to the case of IT security courses, it is very important to be able to select the characters of your stories to allow learners to identify with the stories in order to get the most out of the good practices you tell in your content.

This is why it is important to associate each character with a particular action and solution that can be repeated in a SCORM course, on social media pages or, if you want, in a story to send out in a newsletter.

One of the most fascinating texts you will ever read if you are involved in eLearning course content is surely Aristotle's Poetics. In these writings, Aristotle states that tragedy and therefore life is action and its end is a mode of action, not a quality.

Action is therefore character. A person is what he does, not what he says he is. A good character is made up of conflict, background and personality. To create a character, however, we need to establish a context, which is very important in the creation of a transmedia universe.

Defining universes and contexts

In order to create eLearning courses using the techniques of transmedia storytelling, we first need to define narrative universes and contexts.

For this reason it is necessary to be very clear about our communication objectives. If our narrative is limited to the eLearning space or to our client's platform, we will not be able to apply the techniques of transmedia storytelling.

Our eLearning product must, in the first instance, be included in an awareness campaign, i.e. it must include information that will allow the narratives and characters to fit together like pieces of a puzzle even though they are on different platforms. In other words, the advice is to define an objective that is common to all narrative segments in order to make the overall narrative coherent and linear.

At this point, the need to create a narrative universe will come into play along with the need to be coherent with the different stories. The information that you will have to give within the "pieces" of narrated formation will always have to be in compliance and therefore will always have to respond to a need of your audience: coherence also lies in information. Characters that move in the context of best practices in the use of information systems will necessarily have to move in that specific context to avoid losing the attention of the learner.

Another fundamental aspect in the creation of transmedia stories is the constant search for integration, i.e. structural integration within the possible ramifications that the story can have on different media.

In other words, integration is the ability of the content writer to adapt stories to each other so that they maintain continuity and follow a canon. If in the narrative line of the eLearning course we are talking about an energy operator who has to solve some safety problems in the workplace, within the stories on social media the same operator or a colleague will have to act according to the story already told.

Will they be in a timeline before or after the stories told in the course? The choice is yours.

Examples of products

But let's get down to business, with a few examples that may be useful when writing your first transmedia eLearning course.

One of my favourite formats, as I have already mentioned in a dedicated article, is that of animated series which tell of good practices for IT security.

Let's do a different experiment, let's try to start from the needs of one of our clients to set up a storytelling campaign that starts from a course on cyber security. We will still start with a story, but we will have to respond to a communication need.

So let's imagine we have to set up three types of products, but you might have a different need:

- E-learning course
- Awareness video
- Comic book episodes

Each of these products is to be made with a different language and will live on a dedicated medium: the course will be the core of our story and will have space on the **DynDevice LMS platform**; the awareness video will be a trailer of a few minutes posted on all the company's social media; the comic episodes will be made in a few hard copies and then available in PDF browsable format directly in a section of the website.

It's time to get creative! Here is an example of how to set up then universes and contexts:

The eLearning course is structured in 6 training units that are implemented through animated episodes with characters illustrating best practices on the use of corporate IT systems.
The title of the series is Pirates of the Kilobytes and tells the story of a group of pirates from the metaverse who try to attack the computer systems of company XYZ.
In the first episode the group of crooks will try a phishing attack, in the second episode installing malware, etc.
Only the intervention of Guy, the company's IT manager, manages to defuse the computer attack each time.

In each episode of the course we will therefore have a piece of the story which will have to be linked with the other episodes told on social networks or in comic books, for example:

In the video awareness on social networks we see a chest shining in the darkness. Opening this chest allows us to glimpse a great treasure, all the data that is stored on the company's devices and which the Pirates of Kilobytes want to get hold of. We thus have the opportunity to get to know the characters in a prequel to the episodes in the course and learn about their background.

The comic book episodes will contain an in-depth look at the topics covered in the course and will allow learners to study in detail technical elements exposed by some pirates trying to carry out their next heist.

This is just a very short example of how a transmedia storytelling campaign can be set up.

What will be your next transmedia story?