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Format for eLearning: communicating products effectively

How to prepare the format of an eLearning course with which to present the main points of the project and develop them with appropriate modifications?

When we **create eLearning courses** for our customers or for the employees of our company, we must necessarily deal with the marketing of our products.

How do we sell our products? How do we convince our clients that we are proposing the right solution for the specific training needs of their employees?

Instructional design, in this sense, cannot be limited to organizing the content received in a format that the user can understand. You need to study, investigate trends, gather information and develop solutions that keep engagement high, through tools or content.

For this reason it is necessary, upstream of the production of courses in eLearning mode, to know how to present a series of solutions that can, if you wish, be accompanied by examples, case studies, portfolios and so on.

What does format mean

Taking the word in analysis for its broad meaning, a format is a working grid, a description of a standardizing and flexible process that allows us to determine the main points of a project and to develop them with appropriate modifications.

I have not always been an eLearning course design consultant. My cine-television training, particularly in the production of promotional products for film festivals, introduced me to the concept of format as it is understood in radio and television.

On these particular media, the format is a diagram of a broadcast, a structure composed of several elements that follow one another and that can often be resold to broadcasters in other countries.

This product introduces us to another particular concept, which is industrialization. For start-ups, the concept of industrialization is certainly not new: it involves creating and then fixing a model that will subsequently allow for rapid production and thus enable product scalability on the market.

In simpler terms: creating something that can be replicated with just a few changes **allows you to do more and spend less**, whether it's spending time or finances on a specific project for a client.

The stages of designing a format

First of all, let's choose a mode for the presentation of a format: the realization of courses in eLearning mode does not have a "canonical" form, unlike media such as TV and Cinema.

For this reason we have a certain flexibility in the creation of a format that we can present to our client. One of my favorite choices is, for convenience, the presentation in powerpoint format, a document that allows me to start from a base and then modify the content.

Let's start with the concept

When we create a format for courses in eLearning mode, we must allow our interlocutors to understand what we are going to create, before we create it.

It's an exercise in style, often accompanied by the creation of a prototype, which should be useful in launching a very complex project.

Every time I have to communicate a format, I basically set myself two rules. The first is not to assume that my interlocutor is in my head and has the knowledge to decipher everything I am communicating. Remember that people rely on you for your expertise, you don't have to speak to them in complicated and difficult language to imply your professionalism in the field. The second rule is essentially to remove all unnecessary information from the documents, which makes the speech complex and too rich. Remember: less is more, doing less is better, you will have way and time to go deeper with more details during the writing of the project.

For this reason, when we talk about the concept, that is, a description of the product, your objective will be to create a synthesis of what you can achieve for your course in eLearning mode.

If we are creating a course in eLearning mode that illustrates the functionalities of a software, an example of a concept could be:

Tutorial for the use of a software for [insert here the software for example: the management of the travels of company employees]. The course will be structured illustrating the functioning of the platform through different steps highlighted by colors, arrows, boxes, graphic elements and still frames. The graphic style is minimal, with graphics suitable for the business sector.

This is just one example, but you will already have come up with at least 5 or 6 possibilities that you can apply to your productions.

The title

Every self-respecting format has a title. Did you know that some chefs prefer to give a title to their creations that clearly shows their customers the key ingredients? This is because there is, and I fully share, the need to explain from the very first meeting point, what will be in our products. Whether it's eLearning courses or starred cuisine, it matters little. Be clear already in the title of your format and structure the content of your course.

Duration

When you propose a solution to your customers, regardless of their needs, you already have clear the duration that you will be able to propose. Why? Because according to your experience with other jobs, you know it works.

Performance indicators can be multiple: the percentage of course completion is, in this sense, the most common.

You can then validate your proposal with the results obtained in the field and include it in the format proposal.

The duration of the format is 30 minutes. This is based on the percentage of eLearning courses completed - 78% of learners complete courses of this duration.

The duration is also important for defining the costs for eLearning courses to communicate to your clients and for defining the effort with respect to the minutes: to create a complex 30-minute course, 20 man-days could be necessary; the same days could be necessary for a less complex 60-minute course in which only linear editing is required.

That's why it's critical to set duration in a format: to communicate and justify production effort, as well as project sustainability and audience engagement.

Serial is better

One aspect of producing eLearning courses that is often overlooked is the possibility of making the course scalable and therefore replicable not only for the entire market (replicability of the format on different clients) but for the same client or customer.

For this reason, when I present a format, I tend to leave a window open for the creation of a second, third or fourth episode.

Seriality is a simple concept, but it needs to be applied to your products with good writing skills. Creating courses in eLearning mode on specific topics such as, for example, IT security, allows you to set the format in modules and training units, but above all to divide it into seasons.

The first season of a course on cybersecurity can be set on a client's budget for the creation of 6 informative episodes of 5 minutes duration.

Leaving an open door at the end of the course will allow you to replicate that format for the next opening of your client's training budget and thus propose a continuing line for a new season, in fact.

The second season will deal with new topics or with topics that have already been dealt with but through a new point of view. This reasoning will allow you to increase your workload: you won't be asked only to update the contents of the existing course, but to create a course from scratch.

Structure and graphics are replicable

From this concept it is easy to understand that the structure of the entire course that we have created following the format and all the graphic assets are quickly replicable.

This allows us to industrialize the process.

This essentially means: cost reduction, potential increase in customer demand and the ability to increase the products produced in a year.

Creating a format for the structure of courses in eLearning mode also has a particular impact on the internal management of resources: as the number of requests increases, it will be possible to employ new collaborators and provide them with a more or less detailed recipe book from which they can obtain the starting grid from which to create the products.

In addition to the structure it will be possible to share with the collaborators sources of previous works, from which to start and, above all, the graphic assets to be used for the drafting of new works.

Serialize, set format, industrialize means to use and reuse to optimize time and resources. It also means setting a trademark: eLearning courses delivered by you will have a signature, a recognizable stamp.

In the document you present to your clients or collaborators, include examples of the graphics you will use for your eLearning courses.

How do I make the course interactive?

This is the question that every client will ask you, sooner or later. Try to anticipate it by presenting the main interactions within your eLearning course format.

The main concern of the client, in my opinion very motivated, when they are about to spend a budget on eLearning training, is to produce an engaging course.

Within the format presentation document, set a number of interesting interactions that you will introduce in your course: pop-up questions, insights, final quizzes, etc. and describe how they work.

Again: less is more, your work will do the talking for you!