ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 6 - number 223 Wednesday 9 november 2022

How to use voice-overs in online courses

Voiceovers within online courses make it easier to remember information. But why are they useful for eLearning and how to use them in the right way?

If you have experience in online education, whether you are a student or a teacher, you will have participated in online classes or seen videos in which the teacher was not on camera. In the context of content creation, this technique is called voice-over and can have several benefits for eLearning.

In this article we explore what voiceovers are, why they are useful for eLearning, and how to use them in the right way in training.

What are voice-overs?

Voice-over refers to a narrative mode in which the audio component and the visual component are created separately and then edited together. For example, if someone has recorded their own voice and applied it to content that did not initially include it they are using the voice-over technique. In the case of e Learning, an example of voice-overs might be a video showing a picture of a graph and a recorded voice explaining it.

Some examples where the voice-over technique is the main narrative method are cartoons and video games, where animations and character voices are created separately and then edited together to bring fictional characters to life.

Four narrative styles are used when talking about voice-overs to narrate educational content:
Elaborative narration - when the text on the screen summarizes what the voice explains in detail.
Paraphrase - when the voice summarizes the detailed content of the on-screen text. Paraphrase is the opposite of elaborative narration. In this way, the audience can go over the written content while listening to the gist of the material.
Verbal narration - when the voice reads all the words displayed on the screen.
Descriptive narration - when the voice describes the images displayed on the screen.

Experts still debate which style is best but seem to agree that, according to the **principle of redundancy**, the verbal style is the least effective. In fact, scholars believe that repeating the exact words written on the screen only confuses the audience and makes it difficult to understand the information.

If you want to find out what is the best type of narration for your eLearning courses, it may be a good idea to experiment until you find the perfect solution for your learners. Try recording a few videos with different narrative styles and allow visitors to view them for free, so they can get feedback on the style they prefer.

Why is voiceover useful for eLearning?

Now that it is clear what voice-overs are and which voice-over styles are most suitable for eLearning, let's try to understand why this mode of communication can be useful for conveying information.

(a) A narrative method that fits the needs of eLearning.
The most significant difference between eLearning and traditional learning is that the material can be **prerecorded** because it does not take place live. In fact, in its most basic definition, eLearning is learning material consumed by learners online rather than in person. As such, eLearning can take place on smartphones, laptops, desktop computers, and many other devices at any time of day, and a prerecorded voiceover obviates the need for the teacher's presence. So voice-over is a mode of communication that is perfectly suited to the needs of eLearning.

(b) It makes learning more engaging.
If you sell online courses or plan to do so, including a voiceover in your E-learning course not only adds **value to the product**, but can be an effective tool to attract more customers and increase your profits.
Adding a voice to an online learning process helps users master new knowledge faster because it makes it more personal. Reading is one of the least popular forms of learning, and the more senses are used, the more information is retained (e.g., using images and sounds). In addition, eLearning is generally associated with written and visual online content, and only in rare cases are tactile elements integrated to satisfy the audience's sense of touch, but the sense of hearing is often left out. The proper use of audio in E-learning courses can make them even more exciting and engaging for learners.

(c) It adapts to students' needs.
The ever-increasing speed with which information is being devoured indicates that there will be more and more focus on **visual materials** in the future, which does not include reading, but instead concerns learning through the use of colors, graphs, charts, tables, maps, and more. Voice-over is a perfect complement to these kinds of training materials to further deepen topics.

(d) Facilitate the dissemination of learning materials.
The advantage for teachers offering online courses is that voiceover can discuss the entire lesson without the presence of a live educator. In addition, the voiceover can also be in **any language**, opening up the course to a global audience and increasing the number of viewers.

Some argue that students feel more connected and engaged if the teacher appears on the screen, and while this may be true, sometimes the emphasis needs to be taken off the teacher and put on the material. Some subjects are very complex, and having images on the screen that actually relate to the topic rather than a "talking" video is more effective for information retention.

How to use voiceovers in eLearning the right way

There are two ways to add a voiceover to an E-learning course: the teacher who created the course can either record the audio himself or call in a professional.
Regardless of which option you choose, there are several steps to follow and a number of tips to put into practice to make sure you are doing things the right way.

1) Use an informal style
Students do not want to enter an online course only to find that they will be dealing with a boring, mechanical teacher for the rest of the class. **Keep the tone inviting, light and conversational** to help students connect with the topic. This helps increase motivation and engagement because you keep their attention instead of boring them.
One tip for facilitating a conversational tone is to avoid using overly complex terminology that may be out of your audience's reach.
Finally, try to add words of inspiration and encouragement whenever possible.

2) Set the mood with music
The music you choose should always maintain a **tone in line with your communication style and topic**. Music should be used if you want to convey a specific emotion that allows learners to fully immerse themselves in the atmosphere desired by the teacher.
Therefore, it is essential to identify the desired atmosphere in advance and to choose the music carefully. For example, classical music is perfect for situations that require inspiration and calm, rap music can evoke strong emotions, and so on.

3) Choose royalty-free sound effects
Sound effects are very useful when designing eLearning courses, but keep in mind that you **risk breaking the law if you do not respect copyrights**.
Therefore, it is important to choose royalty-free sound effects or cite the correct sources within an eLearning course. Always be careful to check that the songs you choose will not cause you problems in the future. There are several sites online that offer free sound effects, but you must cite the creator before you can use the audio file.

4) Use background audio sparingly
The purpose of background audio is to evoke some emotion and create a sense of immersion. **If the audio is distracting, too loud or lasts for the duration of the eLearning course, it can have the opposite effect.** Learners may focus more on the background music than on the learning activities or texts.

5) Explain graphics with audio.
Audio narratives help increase knowledge retention and comprehension, especially when used to explain complicated concepts or graphics in the online course.
For example, if you have a complex graphic to include in your course project, you can integrate an audio narration that highlights all aspects of the image. If you have students with hearing impairments, you can add subtitles.

Tips for beginners

If you have never created online courses before and plan to use the voiceover technique in your material, here is a list of tips you should keep in mind before you start thinking about the best voiceover techniques for your course.

Identify your target audience
It is critical to know who your target audience is so ask yourself who the courses you offer are intended for. They may be aimed at youth, adults, children, foreign students, or perhaps you offer corporate training courses. In any case, knowing your audience makes it easier to choose the best voiceover style and tone. In fact, it makes a difference whether you are addressing a trainee who is getting to know the company or an experienced engineer who is taking an online course to gain further qualification.

Choose a style and tone to maintain
Once you understand who you are addressing you can choose the most appropriate style and tone.
The style and tone of the voiceover depends largely on the topic, the students, and the way the text is written.

Pay attention to translations
One tip for anyone who wants to use voiceover to deliver content in multiple languages is to choose a translator. There are many free online translators who offer sufficient translations, but don't underestimate the impact a rough translation can have on the tone and style of your lectures. If you are unsure of your language skills, ask a friend who knows the language to be translated for help or rely on native freelancers. This way you can be sure that the style and tone is maintained.

Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator