ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 4 - number 119 Wednesday 1 july 2020

SME vs. instructional designer: the roles of eLearning

Who is SME and what is its role in corporate training? What is the difference between the instructional designer and other eLearning professionals?

In the world of distance learning there are different professionals who are involved in the design, management and preparation of training materials. The Subject Matter Expert (SME) is an expert in a specific subject that has a well-defined role in eLearning. It can be either an individual or a specialized training institution and collaborates with the **instructional designer** in the realization of the online courses. How do these figures collaborate in the creation of company courses? What is the difference between the instructional designer, the SME and other **eLearning professionals** as the course writer?

SME: meaning and role in eLearning

The SME is an expert, a specialist in a particular field and is called upon to ensure that the content of a course is in line with **industry standards**. It can be an engineer, a biologist, a lawyer, a marketing or sales expert. This figure may be present within a company or an external consultant may be asked to train employees and clients in their field of specialisation. In both cases, the role of the SME within the company training is closely linked to the content of the course. The SME is a central figure in the development of **quality content**.

SME or Instructional designer?

The involvement of the SME in the creation of an online course takes place through the instructional designer, the professional who designs and delivers the courses. The SME is not responsible for the course, but thanks to his wide knowledge in the subject you want to teach it is essential to:

- Define the teaching objects
- Taking care of the resources to be used for the content of the courses
- Making **recommendations** and giving feedback on course materials, topics and quizzes

The main difference between the SME and the Instructional designer or, more generally, an **eLearning consultant**, lies in the latter's design role and technical knowledge of authoring tools and LMS, learning management system. A SME in the safety field may not have any concept of **eLearning platforms**, but without his knowledge on the subject it would be impossible to create a course that complies with regulations and meets the educational objectives.

What is the difference between the SME and the course writer?

In eLearning there are other people involved in content creation. In particular, the course writer is a professional who offers **writing services**. The course writer also has a knowledge of the subject matter to be covered in the courses or is able to do research in that area. What distinguishes a course writer from an SME? The difference is in the expert knowledge and experience in the field that makes the SME an essential figure. An experienced environmental journalist will never be called upon to chair a climate change committee, such as a geologist, for example. The journalist, on the other hand, is the key figure to disseminate the results of the committee and make them understandable to most people. The **course writer**, no matter how specialised he is, cannot replace the SME, but he can translate his expertise into language that can be understood by the beneficiaries of a course.

The role of an SME is to ensure high **standards of quality in the content of a course**. This is why it works with the instructional designer, the eLearning architect, who has a design role and can use a course writer to make the content accessible to a non-expert audience.

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