ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 3 - number 87 Wednesday 30 october 2019

# Social groups: is eLearning the new frontier of social networks such as Facebook?

***Not only work related social networks, but also the most common ones seem to be more open to platforms and online learning groups. How do social learning groups work on Facebook and what are the advantages they can give to eLearning?***

Elearning has been using social networks to catch students' attention for a while now, but not so long ago social networks started to add elearning features to be offered to their users. Over the last months the most common social network, Facebook, has modified group functionalities giving administrators the possibility to post units or training contents. What's different from the past version and what are the advantages for instructional designers and online course recipients?

## What's the difference between social learning and eLearning features in social networks?

It might sound like a tongue-twister but for an instructional designer it all comes down to learning how new group features can be combined with e-learning.

Social networks are widely used in the e-learning environment because they can help apply Bandura's social learning theories. The principle is easy: people learn thanks to observation and imitation of others and group learning strengthens positive behaviours.

Given the popularity social networks have, there's no better place for an instructional designer than this to build a community where students can interact through comments, discussions and material.

Nowadays, online course users normally group up on social networks.

Facebook must have noticed this new use, that's why groups have been redesigned and trainers have been given the possibility to post content. That's the big difference with the social use of groups: Facebook is becoming a sort of miniature LMS learning management system.

## New eLearning features in Facebook groups

A new group can be created as usual: you have to pick a name, invite members and decide whether you want it to be public or private, visible or hidden. Clicking on "other" you can modify group settings and select "Social Training".

In "Tab" you have to select the function "Unit" to decide the order in which you want to post your content. You can add tags and, more importantly, link some apps that can be useful for the training. When in "Unit" you have to click on "create new units" and decide whether to make the units you have created optional or not. Any content is compulsory by default and users must complete it in order to move to the following contents and reach the training goals. You can also add games, pictures and videos.

## What are the advantages of a training group on social networks?

The initiative taken by Facebook, a diverse social network, indicates that online training is being given more and more importance. For a professional and competent instructional designer, the new eLearning feature by Facebook is quite limiting. Units have advantages over the classic discussion in groups: they let you decide the post order for any content while in discussions this is strictly chronological and each content has to be finished in order to continue.

Social networks used as a training tool don't impose content on users. The goal is to motivate course takers, have them exchange ideas, suggestions, material. In other words make them share.

If new social groups are used to strengthen information coming from an online course and to promote interactions between users they can have a positive impact on training experience. If they replace the wide LMS features for course takers and instructional designers they can be a limited tool.