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Tips for using icons effectively

Intuitive, fast and effective, icons can be a very useful graphic element in eLearning. In order to be truly advantageous, however, these graphic elements must be used in a conscious and precise manner.

One of the most repeated tips for designing an online course is to make both the contents and the design of the platform simple and understandable. This suggestion must be extended to all the elements of e-learning as it is essential that the students can take advantage of all the potential of the online course in an easy and intuitive way.

One of the elements that help students move within the content and the platform itself are the icons, small images that are used to implement certain actions on the web page or to transmit a message to the user. The typical icon with the shape of a little house, for example, brings you to the homepage of the site.

What are the advantages of using icons? Essentially, they serve to save space and use less text. Moreover, the icons, if used well, are intuitive and immediate and can be a pleasant graphic element within the pages. All these advantages, of course, also apply to e-learning. However, what are the best strategies that allow us to make the best use of icons in an online course?

1. Be clear

As we have said since the beginning, the icons must be an intuitive element that helps the students to easily move between the pages and the contents of the online course. For this reason, the images and styles used must help make everything clearer and not worsen the usability of the platform. It is therefore preferable to use symbols that are already widely used rather than to be original and to risk confusing students. Attention must also be paid to the size and position of the icons on the page, to prevent them from turning into a navigation obstacle.

2. Choose a single style

There is a wide range of icon styles, from the most minimalist to the most detailed. The design of the online course is the moment in which you need to choose the style of the icons, based also on the aesthetics of the entire platform. It is a fundamental choice as you will always have to use the same style to avoid confusing users.

3. Use the icons for multiple functions

Icons are an effective and quick way to communicate something. For this, they can be used to perform various functions. In addition to being fundamental for the interface (icons to return to the home, to return to the previous page, etc.), they can also be useful in other cases, for example, instead of points in a bulleted list, to create a visual effect much more direct. Similarly, they can be used to reinforce concepts and explanations, for example in the case of infographics.