ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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User experience: what does it mean in an online course?

What do we mean by user experience when we talk about online courses? How can you tell if an online course is truly user-friendly?

In programming, we often hear about user experience, which is the degree of satisfaction of users using a program. Even eLearning software must respond to the needs of the user, indeed, since it deals with training content it is even more important that users are not distracted by the tool.

If, in using an LMS, an authoring tool, or a virtual classroom, learners are more engaged in solving technical problems or do not understand instructions, they are very likely to abandon the course and thus the training is ineffective.

User experience, then, is critical to the success of the training, so it must be the foundation of online course design. By answering a few key questions, you can have some sort of checklist during the course creation phase and thus ensure that the outcome is suitable for your learners.

What is the difference between user interface (UI) and user experience (UX)?

First, you need to clarify that user experience goes far beyond UI. UI, in fact, is about the **human-machine relationship**, hence the way the user physically interacts with the program.

In the UI, commands, buttons, navigation, and any other user-operated elements count. The user experience, encompasses the UI, but goes beyond the navigation buttons, hence usability, because it also concerns the content and in general the way the interaction takes place with the software, i.e. interactivity.

Understanding that user experience goes beyond the technical aspect helps you better **design your training course**. Below are some questions to help improve UX.

Is the online course responsive to mobile devices?

If a course is not responsive, and therefore does not adapt to be enjoyed with the same quality on **smartphones and tablets**, it is definitely doomed to failure. The massive use of smartphones makes it mandatory to have a course that can be followed on any device at any time.

Is navigation intuitive?

Basically, the user experience should be based on usability, i.e. the ease of using a software. Students should not have to constantly wonder where they need to click to perform an action. **Navigation buttons** should be exactly where the user expects them to be and guide them straight to their destination.

Are the instructions clear?

Sometimes there are space issues in programming and some instructions that help guide the student are likely to be unclear. To avoid distractions and reduce the risk of **dropping the course**, the language used to give instructions should be clear and precise. Instead of writing "Video" on a button, it is always good to use active verbs: "Watch the video."

Is there additional information about the course content?

Tooltips are hidden boxes that are activated on mouseover and are used to give additional information to the user. They help students understand where they are, what they need to do, and why.

Is the content properly organized?

The key part of online courses is the content. This is where the user needs to focus their attention, so they need to meet their needs and expectations exactly. A content is also enjoyable if it looks good. Is the text aerated? Does the content load quickly? Is the format (audio, video, text, images) preferred by users? Is the information included the most important? Just think of a PowerPoint slide loaded with text to understand that a proper distribution of content helps the eye, but also the mind to better assimilate the information.

Is the course appropriate for my students?

The visual aspect of an online course is definitely important to ensure student engagement. The most important aspect that allows you to make the leap, from interface to user experience is the **analysis of your students**. Only by knowing the tastes, preferences, and needs of your students can you create a user experience that is truly a learning experience.

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