ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 6 - number 221 Wednesday 26 october 2022

Engagement of eLearning courses: 4 components not to be underestimated

Let's discover the four elements that, according to Forrester research, help increase the engagement and interaction rate of eLearning courses

If you are looking for ways to increase the engagement and interaction rate of your eLearning courses, you probably need to sell a product on a marketplace or, going deeper into the topic, you need to increase the pace of instructional design of training units.

In this article I have selected the four components that, according to Forrester research, are the pillars of any successful transmedia narrative.

Doing transmedia in elearning

When we create an eLearning course, we must begin by thinking of training as a weave of a fabric rich in information. This information can be developed on different planes of interaction and, specifically, in different media.

We have talked before about how important it is to develop eLearning projects that have the ability to embrace communication channels that differentiate and, in a sense, allow us to step outside, at least momentarily, the LMS platform.

Thus we must get used to thinking of our productions as being made up of the pieces of a puzzle: each piece is content that will inhabit a particular channel.

An elearning project can thus start with a vignette made as a social network post where awareness is raised about a particular topic, and then develop into other channels. But it is from the first touchpoint that the engagement of our audience, that is, the people who will be interested in hearing about our topics, begins.

The components of engagement

So how do we measure the effectiveness of our multimedia and, strictly speaking, transmedia production?

Helping us out is research conducted by Eefje Op den Buysch, head of the Fontys Transmedia Storytelling Lab, and Hille van der Kaa, professor at the Fontys Future MediaLab.

This research allows us to understand what the right tools may be to measure audience engagement and, therefore, to contextualize the size of the audience.

Every instructional designer needs to understand what actually convinces his audience, especially to validate all the choices made when designing a course that will be usable in eLearning mode.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to present an engagement model that can be easily integrated into the daily activities of a transmedia storyteller and, in our case, of an instructional designer who wants to increase engagement through diverse content.

Per Attfield et al. (Attfield, S., Kazai, G., Lalmas, M., Piwowarski, B. (2011). Toward a Science of User Engagement), "User engagement is the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connection that exists, at any time and possibly over time, between a user and a resource."

This allows us to understand how important emotional, cognitive and behavioral factors are as we go in search of user engagement with our productions.

What, then, will be the emotion our learner feel when attending our eLearning course? Will he or she be interested, bored, or feel amazement at what he or she is learning?
Cognitive aspects, on the other hand, are important to check the development of the narrative. Is our audience endowed with good memory? Are the learners endowed with good or poor concentration? What kind of attention and how much time can they donate to our course?
You will certainly find answers to these questions with precise identification of the target audience and learner persona.

Behavioral metrics are really useful in defining our user's behavior in the dynamics of viewing a course: what aspects are most interesting to those who are donating time to viewing our content? On which buttons or units are the most clicks "spent"?

It is therefore essential, in this context, to check the tracking of our courses on LMS platforms and possibly install plug-ins or software that allow us to track a heat map of the use of websites or platforms on which our content is played.

This is a fundamental process for doing analysis and improvement of our training products and for improving our profession.

Forrester Research points

Supporting this thesis is Forrester Research (1. Forrester Research, (2007). Marketing is new.
Key metric: engagement. Marketing Leadership Professionals) whereby cognitive engagement can be measured through awareness, interest, and intention.

The key points of the Forrester research are 4:

- **Involvement**, i.e., user presence: let's come back to this concept again, i.e., the ability to keep a person focused on what we are explaining. Let's then go on to define what topics are to be covered and, more importantly, what kind of content we will need to offer. Optimal condition to maintain the user's presence is definitely the choice of microlearning content that allows us to break the vision and create interactions across different media. What we should be most concerned with here is the ability we will have to associate an experience with a particular audience. Once again, it is important to check our target audience in order to structure a suitable narrative.

- **interaction**, or user interactions: it is really essential to understand the impact of our course content by making effective interactions. It is not enough to include Gamification buttons or objectives, we need to study the real needs of our audience and include really useful elements such as, for example, search engines for documentation, tutorials with video on demand, etc.

- **intimacy**, i.e., the ability to engage people: the simplicity with which we are able to interact daily with hundreds, if not thousands, of people, makes us lose sight of the fact that, behind every screen, there are stories, habits, points of view and, above all, emotions. This is why a good instructional designer must develop effective storytelling that manages to emotionally engage his or her audience of learners. There is no shortage of performance analysis tools in this regard: sentiment Analysis tools can be leveraged to measure the engagement of storytelling and interactions, for example, to measure the need of such an audience with respect to a specific topic. If the course has numerous interactions where the user can write in a free field we will have the opportunity to perform a semantic analysis and see if the degree of engagement is in line with our expectations.

- **influence**, which is the possibility that a person may recommend taking a course. This value occurs, essentially, the moment we have retained our user base. This concept is particularly valid for those who produce eLearning courses to sell in the business-to-consumer marketplace, i.e., they use marketplaces to sell training directly to the end customer. In addition to measuring influence, Forrester research points out that this degree of engagement can also be tied to the emotional involvement of users. How many people will talk about the course on the blog? Will there be many reviews on the course sales portal? How did the surveys and questionnaires offered at the end of the course go? Have newsletter subscribers increased? What about website views linked to a scorm product?

These kinds of metrics are not a recipe to be followed to the letter; rather, they are content to improve an instructional designer's awareness of the possibility of improving the engagement of his or her user base.

What about you, what do you do to ensure engagement within your eLearning courses?

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