Maximizing the Value of Online Learning in Your Organization

Terrence L. Gargiulo, MMHS

President, MAKINGSTORIES.net

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Can You Feel Mike's Pain?

Mike was once a well-armed director of learning. GetHealthCare Industries was not lacking any of the state of the art tools. The learning library was stocked with all kinds e-learning development tools, a customized enterprise learning management system, off-the-shelf courses from vendors, and just about every toy and resource any learning professional might ever dream of possessing.

But the days of flying high were far behind Mike. His budgets and staff were being slashed mercilessly. His list of approved vendors was reduced to a handful, and the process for adding new vendors was onerous. The access he had enjoyed to subject matter experts (SME's) for developing new programs was non-existent. Off-site retreats, flying staff to multi-day internal and external workshops and developing customized, elaborate e-learning solutions were not in his bag of tricks anymore. Things were changing and Mike was wondering how he was going to add business value with his hands tied behind his back.

The Learning Landscape

Learning has become a diverse landscape with a dizzying array of options. In the dawning age of personal computers — back when client-server software began to live alongside mainframe applications- consulting companies scrambled to provide organizations with a way of conceptualizing and simplifying their choices. IBM came up with a blue print architectural diagram. At first glance it may have appeared complex, but the visual map was an elegant way to isolate key decisions about tools and standards for building new applications. Each part of the diagram illustrates the required building blocks of an application and the relationships and interdependencies of them from the ground up.

Our industry is hungry for a similar snapshot of our learning landscape. Here's a map for visualizing how all the pieces fit together to create learning solutions for your organization.

ASSESSING LEARNING & SKILLS
TRACKING REPORT
BUSINESS VALUE

SOCIAL MEDIA	LIVE ONLINE LEARNING
E-LEARNING	WEB-BASED	CBT
ILT	FACILITATOR	PEER-PEER	SELF-PACED

DELIVERY OF LEARNING

| GRAPHIC & VISUAL DESIGN | STORY-BASED DESIGN |

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

KNOWLEDGE/SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE

MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION
LINK TO PERFORMANCE
BUSINESS VALUE
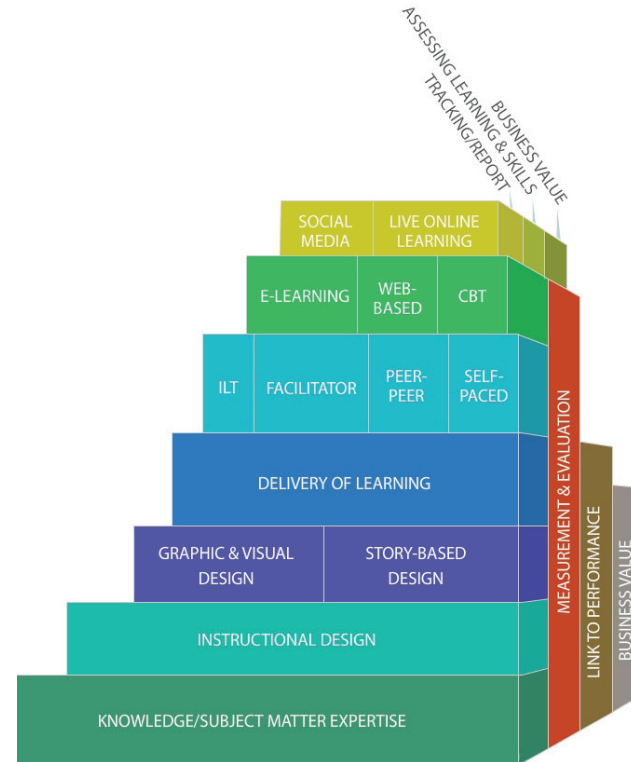
Foundation Of The Learning Landscape

It starts with the foundation. There are four building blocks:

1. Knowledge/Subject Matter Expertise — Every learning intervention addresses a need or a problem. Whether it is internal or external to the organization, or some combination of the two, there are sources of information that must be leveraged to build a learning intervention.

2. Instructional Design — Information is not enough. The development process and disciplines used to structure the information into digestible pieces must support the performance objectives. The scale and scope of every project is different, so there are choices to be made about what development life cycle is best suited for a project. This is not to say that the classic model of ADDIE (**A**nalysis — **D**esign — **D**evelopment — **I**mplementation — **E**valuation) has no place; even more rapid and iterative life cycles follow the principles and disciplines inherent in ADDIE.

3. Graphic & Visual Design — Time and effort need to be spent strategizing on how a learning intervention will engage learners visually. Visual metaphors and the graphical development of key learning concepts need to be considered right from the beginning alongside instructional design.
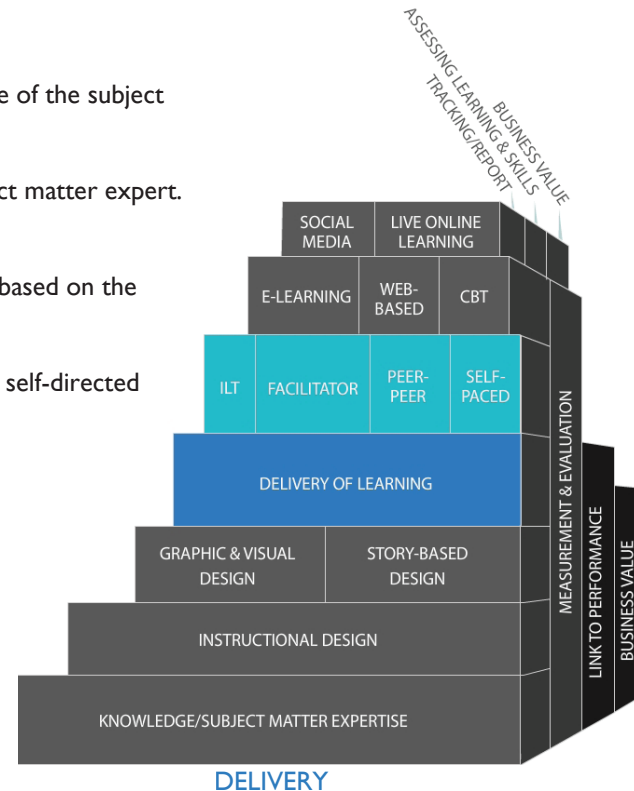
4. Story-Based Design — "If a picture is worth a thousand words, a story is worth a thousand pictures." The shortest distance between two people is a story. Effective learning incorporates a variety of story forms and strategies as part of its instructional design.
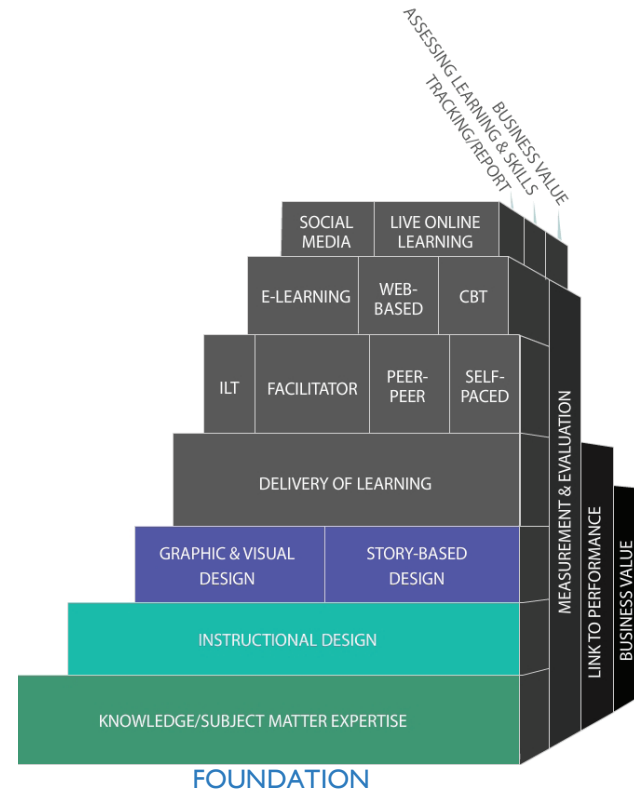
Delivery Modes Of Learning Of The Learning Landscape

There are four basic forms of delivery:

1. ILT — **I**nstructor **L**ed **T**raining is led by a trained instructor knowledgeable of the subject matter.

2. Facilitator — The leader of the learning event may or may not be a subject matter expert. Managing group processes is the central role of the facilitator.

3. Peer-to-Peer — Learning that is more informal, largely self-managed and based on the interactions of learners with each other.

4. Self-Paced — Learner assumes responsibility for learning experience with self-directed content.

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LINK TO PERFORMANCE

BUSINESS VALUE

DELIVERY

Delivery Mechanisms Of Learning Of The Learning Landscape

There are five categories of delivery mechanisms of learning:

1. E-Learning — A catch-all phrase to include any electronic delivery of learning.

2. Web-Based — Learning that is delivered exclusively through the web.

3. CBT — **C**omputer **B**ased **T**raining is standalone learning that typically runs on a single computer and is self-paced. More elaborate applications might involve network interactions.

4. Social Media — Web-based tools for connecting, collaborating, sharing, and interacting with others.

5. Live Online Learning — Real-time, instructor or facilitator led learning delivered over the Web.
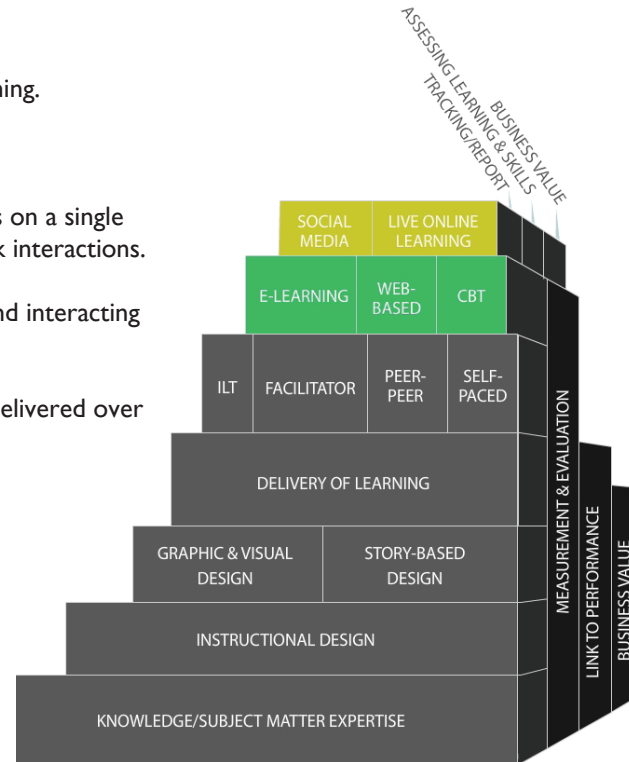
Top & Side Bands of Learning the Learning Landscape

The top and side bands of the model are essential pieces that keep all the other building blocks glued together. Inseparable from any learning intervention is the creation of business value. Learning must support the performance of individuals working to actualize organizational goals and bottom line imperatives. This is not as utilitarian as it may sound. Something interesting occurs when individual performers' energies are focused. People are more engaged because they are utilizing their talents, developing their capacities, and becoming part of something they can feel proud of.

The other parts of the top and side bands (Assessing Learning & Skills, Tracking/Reporting, Measurement & Evaluation, and Link to Performance) define other elements of managing learning. These represent the high-level buckets that may be a part of the learning management system (LMS) or live online learning tool. Regardless of whether your organization uses a large-scale enterprise solution or more simple systems and processes, these activities envelop learning.

How It All Works Together

The map shows how various pieces of a learning architecture build on one another. Each of the major areas (Foundation, Delivery Modes, Delivery Mechanisms) highlights the strategic choices that need to be made. There are pros and cons to any arrangement of tools and processes. Understanding the fit between the learning needs and the strengths of the options increases the effectiveness of learning. Using the map as a guide, you'll be able to streamline your decision making, and avoid reinventing the wheel.
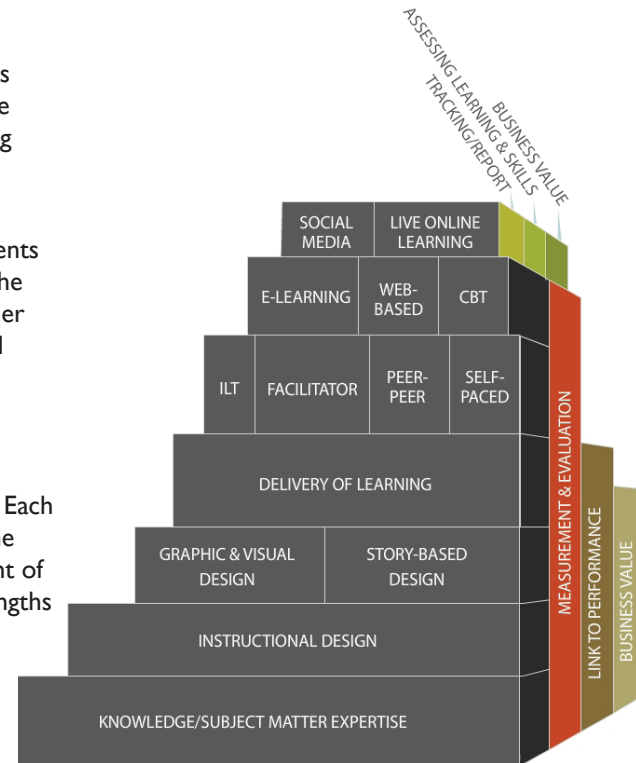
The Spectrum Of Learning

There is a large spectrum of learning in organizations. Analyze your learning objectives to see where it fits along a continuum of approaches.

Spectrum	Description
Extemporaneous	Spontaneous, unplanned and unstructured opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. Integrating social media as a part of almost any learning intervention fits at this end of the spectrum.
Blended/Ongoing	Learning may use a variety of structured and unstructured approaches — mixing and matching instructor/facilitator-led with self-paced computer and Web-based components. Some examples include learning key job skills, business processes, procedures and works flows, coaching, standards and regulatory requirements.
Traditional	Learning requires a highly structured and orchestrated space and time. Learning is often tied to specific competencies and leverages in-person, active and experiential learning components.

Knowing where your learning intervention is on a spectrum of approaches and utilizing the Learning Landscape map to identify key decisions of tools and strategies, will help you...

1. *Manage the risks of your learning project.*
2. *Increase the value you offer.*
3. *Allow you to collaborate more easily with your stakeholders.*

Learning Requirements In Today's Organization

It may sound cliché, but it's true — work has sped up. Many of our cherished and successful learning strategies and practices are not as relevant today under most circumstances as they have been in the past. Organizations are creaking under the strain of structures that get in the way of the rapid learning, communicating, connecting and innovating that is necessary to be competitive in tomorrow's market place.

The learning profession is fortunate to be saturated with a wealth of fabulous possibilities. Putting these to use is the challenge. I liken the situation to regional cuisines suddenly discovering one another and being thrust into a whole new arena of culinary possibilities; where fusion of one region with another region's ingredients and dishes becomes the new operating paradigm.

Business drivers are necessitating changes. We have a great tool box of tricks at our disposal, so we are well equipped. What we might lack is a good compass to help us connect all of the coordinates into a clear picture of where we are going. How can we build upon our field's richness? What will we do to fill this rapidly expanding space of the importance of learning and communicating in organizations that lead to substantive performance achievements?

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Going back to our Learning Landscape map I believe a lot of ideas can be found by looking at the following combination of building blocks…

| Live Online Learning |
| Web-based |
| Instructor/Facilitator Led |
| Story-based Design |
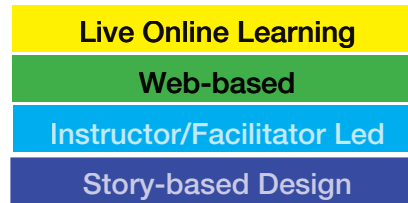
This unique bundling of learning blocks generates a powerful mix of new possibilities with tried and true practices from our field. Imagine short bursts of engaging, interactive content guided by the expertise of a professional trained in stimulating adult learners. Then add peer-to-peer sharing through a mix of informal, social media type tools.

Story-based design may not be as obvious as it may seem on the surface. Story-based design principles activate the natural power of story. Making stories work in learning entails employing story listening, story triggering/eliciting and storytelling. Although this goes beyond the scope of this paper, consider story-based design integrating much more than instructor scripts saturated with simple stand-alone stories with clean beginnings, middles and ends. Story-based design uses stories for more than vehicles for encoding messages or illustrating learning points.

Use Case — Sales Training At GETHEALTHCARE Industries

Let's use a sales training example to see what this look likes:

Situation

Every quarter, GetHealthCare Industries releases at least five new products. Across the organization sales people, sales managers, account executives, product development, customer service, marketing, accounts receivable, and shipping scramble to learn what they need to know in order to do their jobs. While many things are very similar from one quarter to the next, and from one product to the next, things are always changing. The sea of details is unsettling for everyone and there's always a herky-jerky start to the process. For each product there's an ever new and elaborate set of selling points, features, warranties, and sales programs attached to it.

Imagine short bursts of engaging, interactive content guided by the expertise of a professional trainer.

We'll consider three scenarios.

Scenario 1

Once a quarter, managers from their respective areas are pulled together for an extensive, off-site, instructor-led sales training event. Two days at a resort doesn't seem too bad, plus there's the added benefit of team building and networking so no one seems to complain too much. Managers go back after two or more days of mind-numbing data ruthlessly dumped into their brains, hoping that they have retained enough of the information to communicate to their respective teams and spread the word.

Scenario 2

Off-site sales meeting still happen but not every quarter. The organization depends on its internal Web site to disseminate information. Conference calls by product development managers for the first three weeks of the quarter are offered to any and all stakeholders needing more information. Select products are rapidly developed into e-learning pieces distributed on CD ROMs and the Web.

Now let's look at a solution that is built from our optimized assembly of building blocks.

Live Online Learning
Web-based
Instructor/Facilitator Led
Story-based Design
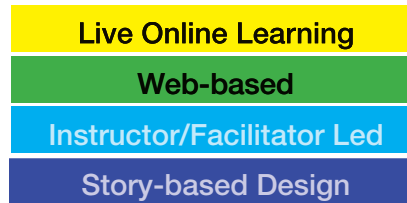
Scenario 3

New product releases are collaboratively evaluated by the business owners and learning team for their complexity, risk and opportunity. In other words, new products are not treated with a one size fits all strategy. Live online learning events are designed and led by learning professionals. These events are typically 45-75 minutes in length. Trainers use live online learning and incorporate story-based design principles to capture realistic stories of people in the field and customers.

Each scenario offers distinct challenges and opportunities. **Scenario 3** offers the **richest solution**. Coupled with social media strategies and executed well, a story-based designed, live online learning strategy will lead to performance and measurable results.

SCENARIO	OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
Scenario 1 "Off-site, instructor-led sales training"	• Team building • Thorough dissemination of information • Could be linked to incentives — travel to resort for sales team	• Expensive • Time consuming for participants and development team to organize the event • Can be too much information
Scenario 2 "Internal Web site, conference calls, e-learning CD-ROM products"	• Leverages technology • Provides a number of communication and learning channels	• Stretches development and delivery team in a lot of directions • While cheaper than off-site meetings, there are the hidden costs of the learning staff's time tied up maintaining so many channels of learning. It could interfere with other learning initiatives that could have as great of a need and business impact as the sales training.
Scenario 3 "Story-based designed live online learning events"	• Cost-effective • Rapid and collaborative development with stakeholders • Easily scales across the organization. Easier to get potential SME and other stakeholders integrated into the delivery of learning if required • Just enough training (since learning events can be developed and delivered rapidly, it is possible to expand or collapse the number of events and content in them based on the performance of participants	• Possibility of shallow treatment of material • Challenging to engage learners without face-to-face

Three Key Benefits Of Live Online Learning

1. Rapid Development

Designing, delivering, measuring and tracking are rapid with live online learning events. Since these work best as short bursts of learning (typically 45-75 minutes in length), there is less time required to design them. Here are some general rules of thumb to follow:
 • Be visual — let pictures tell a story and be sure to have enough of them.

 • Include key registration questions that help participants begin to reflect or discover something about the learning topic (These questions are used when people enroll for the event.)

 • Include two poll questions (yes/no questions or multiple choice questions used during the live online learning event.)

 • Provide one or more opportunities for people to respond to an open-ended question or scenario during the learning by typing their thoughts.

 • Give people opportunities to speak (depends on the size of the group and nature of the event).

Live online learning is a fabulous way to beta test and pilot any new learning modules or communication that you intend to incorporate into your more traditional set of offerings in your learning portfolio.

2. Structured & Orchestrated without the Overhead

Looking at the Spectrum of Learning we discussed earlier, we surmised that traditional forms of ILT are typically highly structured and orchestrated events. People are co-located in the same space, and experiencing a stable and repeatable learning experience that is tied to strict adherence to learning objectives carefully articulated by instructional designers. This takes significant time and resources. Live online learning, on the other hand is both structured and orchestrated in the same ways without placing the same strain on vital resources.

3. Flexible

Besides extemporaneous forms of learning, such as peer-to-peer, informal learning and social media outlets, Live Online Learning offers a flexible design and delivery medium. Here are two ways this flexibility can be realized:

- Learning can be stand-alone or it can support existing programs. Creating a continuous on-going learning program that can span a larger epoch of time than a single event can be easily achieved.

- Learning can accommodate lots of different people. Events scale easily to a few people or lots of people. Since events are short in duration customized programs can be tailored to address specific learning needs and interests of diverse stakeholders.

Live online learning is a fabulous way to beta test and pilot any new learning modules or communication that you intend to incorporate into your more traditional set of offerings in your learning portfolio.

While the benefits are many it is important to point out some of the constraints of Live Online Learning. Although the tools and platform for conducting live online learning are feature rich it will **never replace the effectiveness of ILT or facilitator led training** with co-located learners. There are some clever ways to employ experiential and active learning devices to generate learner engagement. Even games and simulations can be utilized. However, participant collaboration in the form of conversation will be the dominant form of interaction. Instructional designers, instructors, and facilitators will need to develop their skills in this area.

<u>Holding the interest of learners is demanding and unforgiving</u>. It is paramount to keep events short. With visually engaging learning
underscored with strong narrative elements. The visuals need to tell complete stories on their own. Changing the visuals frequently helps to hold the attention of learners. Try incorporating dynamic content like web pages, animations and software applications.

Three Ideas For Realizing Benefits Of Live Online Learning

1.Create Pre and Post Components to Your Learning

Online learning events that include pre-learning and post-learning components stand the greatest chance of leading to performance improvements. Pre-materials can be used to shape the direction and even content of your event. Pre-session assignments that require people to collaborate with peers and colleagues are a great way of involving people, getting them to start the learning process before they even show up and setup your session for strong participation and engagement. Examples of post-learning components include job aids, summaries of the remarks/ideas/conversations

made during the session and relevant articles. Be sure to weave informal learning and social media tools into the learning whenever it makes sense. Let these be owned by participants. If they feel these are being directed, they are less likely to actively participate. Also manage expectations around these. There is a tendency for these outlets to quickly wither.

2. Develop the Skills of Instructors & Facilitators

Solid platforms skills are not enough. Evaluate your staff. Live online learning skews towards facilitation. The tempo and pacing of interacting and engaging people is very different from what you do when you are in front of a group. There you have eye contact and body language and other subtle imperceptible cues being sent back and forth between learning leaders and participants. Over the network you are in a void. For example, learning leaders need to be adept at animating their voices. It has to be conscious and purposeful.

3. Expose Your Instructional Designers to Story-Design Principles

The natural power of story can be used to improve retention, stimulate engagement and encourage reflection that can lead to performance improvements. Slapping an illustrative story in the middle of a learning event is not enough. The entire piece from start to finish has to be built as a narrative that holds lots of story fragments. Story-based design triggers story making of

Weave informal learning and social media tools into Live online learning.

others. Story-design principles transform even a short burst of learning into a virtual reality simulator where people are merging their experiences and knowledge with what is being presented. Without learners realizing it well built story-designed learning events place learners in the driver seat. Live online learning is a perfect vehicle for the accelerating effects of stories.

Three Critical Success Factors Of Live Online Learning

1. Strong Partnerships with Your Stakeholders

Live online learning may not seem like a big paradigm shift to learning professionals, but for your stakeholders it may represent a whole new arena of training. Be proactive. Start simple. Success can be measured by the strength of your partnerships. If your learning events are successful you will see qualitative and quantitative increases in your partnerships. On the qualitative side, your stakeholders' respect, trust, and interest in learning will grow. On the quantitative side you'll be asked to design and deliver more learning. Watch out — you could become very busy and your stakeholders may mistakenly believe every learning and communication need can be met with live online learning; This is not true!

2. Active Participation & Word of Mouth

At first people will begrudgingly attend required and even voluntary live online learning events. For them it will be just another conference call their boss is making them attend. That's how they might feel until they experience how useful and engaging your events are. Then watch as they become your biggest advocates.

3. Invited to the Strategy Table

You'll really know you have arrived when your stakeholders invite you to the strategy table to hear your learning ideas and feedback when they are planning their organizational activities. You're no longer an after-thought at the end of a project, a check mark on the project planning checklist or allocated learning dollars that have to be spent.

Back On The Ranch With GETHEALTHCARE Industries

Let's go back and look at the impact of GetHealthCare Industries' implementation of live online learning for its training to support the quarterly launch of its new products.

The company has been using Live Online Learning for the last three quarters. Introduction of new products have been radically streamlined, as indicated by:

1. Speed of new product sales and market penetration

2. Unanswerable questions logged by customer service representatives have decreased significantly

3. Quantity and quality of feedback provide to the product development team from sales and other areas of the organization have increased significantly

4. Reduction in learning expenses

5. Surveys with sales team and other stakeholders indicate a marked increase in people's level of satisfaction as evidenced by their perceived levels of confidence to perform their jobs more effectively

How To Get Started

Survey your learning requirements and evaluate tools. Assess your present and future portfolio of learning needs. Using thinking guides such as the learning map at the front of this paper and the Spectrum of Learning audit your current and future offerings. Get a sense for what offerings might map well to live online learning. If you do not already have a tool, spend some time evaluating tools to decide which one or ones are best suited to your needs and preferences. Develop a prioritized list of criteria and then test drive and evaluate tools against your criteria.

Find a stakeholder with a clear learning need but lacking the resources to develop a traditional instructor-led training. You need a quick win. If you can come to a stakeholder's rescue and deliver business value you will be a hero. The word will spread quickly. There's nothing like a satisfied customer for spreading the word.

Provide your designers and trainers learning opportunities to develop their story-based design and online live learning delivery skills. Please do not make the mistake of believing your crew already has all of the skills and experience they need to succeed. You want to come out of the gates strong. There are subtleties to designing and delivering live online learning.

Summary

The possiblities are limitless. Learning has entered a new era. Our responsibility as learning professionals is to be tireless in finding innovative ways to deliver business value. There are very few degrees of separation between learning, communication, knowledge transfer and personal development. Selecting the right learning strategy today is being affected by the speed of work and fewer resources. Scanning the landscape of learning possibilities and understanding our organization's needs along a spectrum of possibilities helps us to make good decisions. Live online learning, supplemented with informal learning and made possible with social media tools has emerged as a star player and one that every organization is well-advised to begin investigating.

About The Author

Terrence L. Gargiulo, MMHS is an eight times author, international speaker, organizational development consultant and group process facilitator specializing in the use of stories. He holds a Master of Management in Human Services from the Florence Heller School, at Brandeis University, and is a recipient of Inc. Magazine's Marketing Master Award, the 2008 HR Leadership Award from the Asia Pacific HRM Congress, and is a member of Brandeis University's athletic Hall of Fame. He has appeared on Fox TV, CN8, and on CNN radio among others.

Highlights of some of his past and present clients include, GM, HP, DTE Energy, MicroStrategy, Citrix, Fidelity, Federal Reserve Bank, Ceridian, Countrywide Financial, Washington Mutual, Dreyers Ice Cream, UNUM, US Coast Guard, Boston University, Raytheon, City of Lowell, Arthur D. Little, KANA Communications, Merck-Medco, Coca-Cola, Harvard Business School, and Cambridge Savings Bank.

For More Info on Story-based Design & Web-Based Learning: http://bit.ly/lyWwE

Terrence Gargiulo
President, MAKINGSTORIES.net
Web: http://www.makingstories.net
Blog: http://makingstories-storymatters.blogspot.com/
Twitter: @makingstories
terrence@makingstories.net
phone — 415-948-8087