

CURATION CONVERTS

BY JAMIE WALKER

Using curated content has been a revelation. The flexibility it provides coupled with a great return on investment have improved the way we deliver for our business.

In mid-2016 we launched a leadership development program for emerging talent selected from across the front-line of our business. The program relies entirely on curated content to enable independent learning of core concepts. They are then applied in a practical workshop, followed by on-the-job application and coaching. As we complete our third intake, these are some of our practical insights in terms of the process, the learning, and the program.

The process of curating

Relevance is key

The design of our leadership development program is based on rigorous identification of the key needs of our audience and the practical challenges specific to our business. This clarity of purpose is crucial in focusing our efforts. We are always guided by what our learners specifically need to know, and select content to address that need. There is a huge amount of information available to us and it is easy to stray into related content or provide supplemental material that is not really necessary. Discipline in this regard is essential for success.

Quality

Quality is important, up to a point. The quality of content sourced from the web varies. It is important to ensure that what we provide is valid, and checked against other sources and our own knowledge. It also needs to fit with our leadership principles and other programs. We are mindful of bias in our choices and think critically about what we are selecting. It also needs to have as much instructional quality as possible, though it is usually not written for that purpose.

However, at some point you need to be able to say “yes, this does what is

needed well enough” and move on to the next item. Otherwise hours can be spent searching for a mythical perfect item.

Accessibility

Accessibility is a factor. Content needs to be direct and concise in proportion to the complexity of the material, and within reach of the learner group. We don't want learners to sit through a 20 minute video to receive a singular salient point. Nor do we want a key concept hidden amongst a complex academic paper, when a well written blog post presents the same information with clarity.

From a technical perspective it needs to be easily accessed – without membership sign-ups, or installing downloaded apps and the like. Our people also have limits on web access at work. We have broader access and need to check that what we view is also available to our learners.

The basics still apply

Curated content in this program is offered as learning resource, and needs to be fit-for-a-purpose. For example, we know people learn in different ways so we incorporate different types of media. We also ensure progression from simple to advanced, which includes extension material in each curated package for additional value.

Be organised and systematic

Good search engine skills are vital to expedite the process. We also found having a general sense of who the reputable experts or institutions are in the field provides a sensible starting point and a way to validate the material. It helps to have a simple checklist that content is assessed against before selecting.

The learning experience

Clear structure

Clear structure supports good outcomes. Our module themes are clear, they link to observable behavioural

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outcomes for each module, and the content is collated under each of those outcomes. This direct line-of-sight for the learner makes the purpose of the curated content apparent, so it leads them to the right focus as they review it.

Curated content

Curated content promotes higher-level thinking. Learning to learn independently and developing critical thinking are valuable outcomes and deliberately intended. It is important to share that intent with the group. For example, if this is not clear they will question why there is some overlap in the material, rather than looking for the unique value in each piece. Curating content often requires us to include surrounding material that is not directly on-point. Learners need to navigate the learning process independently. They respond well to this.

Checking for understanding is worthwhile

While we never repeat the content back to learners in the workshops, we do check for understanding of key points and address any problematic pieces for the wider group. It is a good way to link the pre-work with the subsequent practical workshops and lead into the more experiential learning. This also helps us to assess which content might need to be changed next time round.

Unintended extras are common

Curated content is rich and broad and learners bring their personal perspective to the whole of the content. This causes them to make links to their own job role in ways we did not imagine when selecting a piece of learning content.

This adds value for them and also brings valuable insights to the group. Many also explore beyond the suggested content to other material and learn more as a result.

Program benefits

We were confident that curated content would be effective from a learning perspective. The program focuses on topics where there is ample, high quality, online material. Where it really exceeds our expectations is in the flexibility it gives us after implementing the program.

Carefully crafted content often starts to date as soon as it is created. Over time programs are often delivering well below 100 percent for learners until an update or rebuild occurs. The time and cost to produce content in that way makes reviews periodic at best, and significant change is expensive.

The curated content in this program allows us to easily swap out a single piece of content with something better - or an entire outcome, or even a full module if that is needed. This change can be quickly made when the new content is found.

This means the program remains current. We easily include new content when we come across something which adds value. The program is constantly enhanced.

Shifting business priorities can be built into the program directly or distributed across the modules. For example we are increasing our focus on diversity and inclusion as a business. We want to see more of this in the program, so we swap out some existing material and plug in new diversity content. Now we have diversity included in the decision making

topic, and indigenous models in our feedback and conflict topics. This way we maintain the strategic relevance of the program and are highly responsive to business need.

It also gives us the ability to apply the framework in different locations, with different audiences who have unique needs. This is an important consideration when operating across multiple sites in different countries. The adaptive quality of the program adds to an already strong return on investment.

Overall, in our experience curated content has sparked a new approach. We now have an active relationship with an agile, dynamic and constantly evolving program. It has proven to be a powerful option in our design toolbox and we are now curation converts.

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