CONTENT CREATION AND CUSTOMISATION

BY VICKY BARTOLACCI

You can't go far in training and development circles these days without the issue of curation *vs* creation being raised. Organisations big and small, old and young, are grappling with the question of how best to meet their current and likely future needs for training content.

Can you safely assume that a rapidly evolving and increasingly responsive industry will keep providing relevant materials that you can simply tweak, or do you bite the bullet and develop an inhouse capability that allows you to produce exactly what you'd like every time? It's a complex question with many variables, but some basic principles can help bring clarity and assist the decision-making process.

The important point is to be clear about what we mean by personalisation this context. It is more than simply personalising a course by adding a logo or an opening message from the Managing Director; the ability to do that should be a given these days. Curating is where an organisation seeks to amend or embellish the content and/or structure of the course it has purchased.

So, the first question is, do you actually need to do either? For some organisations, with relatively simple needs, the answer may well be no.

In areas such as compliance, where training is largely driven by regulatory requirements, generic courses may well be sufficient. Your staff learn the fundamentals from the course, then you provide your policy and any organisational specifics by other means. It doesn't have to be in the course itself, especially if internal things are likely to change but the fundamentals aren't.

This sometimes also applies to organisations that do have the ability to curate. They don't have to spend the time and money to do it every time.

Each organisation is different, but that does not mean their training needs are unique. If most of your requirements fit into the regulatory basket, it is worth talking to potential L&D providers about how to get the occasional course personalisation for you (but not by you) to complement a suite of off-the-shelf products. That is more cost-effective than setting up an in-house capability that may be little used.

At the other end of the scale are organisations with such comprehensive and complex training needs – and budgets to match – that they virtually always look to create something tailored to those needs. Some establish an in-house team and commit to keeping their technology up to date, while others look to find a trusted provider that understands their culture.

Most organisations sit somewhere in the middle. For them, the curation *vs* creation debate comes down to what offers the best return on investment – in more than just financial terms – and what will bring the best learning outcomes. Those are both business decisions, and so your L&D choices must be part of a larger business strategy.

The variables in play are technology, internal capability, cost effectiveness and a realistic appraisal of what you actually want. The first two of these are sometimes linked, particularly if you have an existing team that is developing online content.

If you have people with the right skills and/or the ability and willingness to upskill, then you may feel your decision is halfway made. However, there are still the business considerations around whether the likely investment in some new or upgraded technology is warranted given the amount of new work to be done and the cost of having to employ and train new people to assist with what will become an expanded total workload; assuming your existing demand for online content will continue.

Drilling down, there is the question of whether an existing team is better equipped to create or to curate. Just because you have the resources to develop from scratch, doesn't mean that will necessarily be the best option. And you need to be clear that they really do have the right skills. Building and maintaining a comprehensive bullying and harassment course, for example, is not a simple undertaking.

Of course, curation and creation need not be mutually exclusive. It is quite possible to create something unique then add on some components that you have curated, or vice versa.

The thing to keep in mind – and it is surprising how often people overlook or at least downplay this consideration – is that L&D technology is constantly changing, in response to the way people want to learn. If you choose to create your own courses it is incumbent upon you to keep abreast of these technical changes, as well as the frequent changes in content, regulation and best practice principles.

The other factors to consider –

certainly in relation to individual courses but also overall – is the nature of the subject matter something your internal experts are better placed to deliver on or is it something that would be better served being directed by an expert outside of the business? Building the subject matter is one thing, but maintaining it and staying across the latest developments in that field can be time consuming and better left to those outside who do it as part of their business.

If you opt to curate, you need to find vendors that are committed to assisting you, not just to selling you things, and you need to ensure that the pricing and licensing of the content allows enough flexibility to let you use it how you want to. You would also expect that any analytics and reporting can be captured by your system. What you don't want is to be running dual systems or dual reporting for curated content.

As is so often the case, it comes down to doing your homework and a little legwork. Find out what is available that is directly relevant to you needs and tap into the numerous learning and development networks and communities that can provide support and advice.

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