



FREE EBOOK

WHAT ARE THE **MOST** **EFFECTIVE TIPS** FOR SUCCESSFUL CUSTOM EARNING CONTENT DEVELOPMENT?

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BY CHRISTOFOROS PAPPAS

Founder:

[ELEARNING INDUSTRY](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Everybody wants to be successful right? Ambitious people can't stand hearing words like "mediocre" or "average" as far as their own work goes. So, how do you craft memorable custom eLearning content that exceeds all expectations and truly aids employees in expanding their professional skills and changing costly work habits?

Well, let's all agree on one point for sure: Much like a single key cannot unlock all the locks in a house, so should your eLearning content be fully customized to address the needs and requirements of your respective employees? No single success strategy exists for developing custom eLearning experiences that solve the puzzle equally effective for everyone.

So how do you decide on what, how and when to do it? Do you think of this as a trial and error process? Do you waste time and resources on applying something, seeing how it flows with your employees, and then realizing you've been inadequate both in terms of your employees and your company? You guessed right, that's not the way to go.

Custom eLearning Content Development heavily relies on choosing the right strategies. It is directly related to picking up the right eLearning software that applies to the type of employees it addresses. It also involves finding the right eLearning company for the assignment.

We live in the digital era and there is really no excuse for developing mind-numbing eLearning content full of repetitive features that bore employees to tears. Custom eLearning is about crafting online training experiences that cater to the respective needs of the employees. Keeping them engaged is synonymous to designing high quality custom eLearning programs with interactive features such as animations, simulations, relevant branching scenarios, etc. Such programs involve employees in the learning process and create a smooth flow and transition from one topic to the next.

The reason we compiled this comprehensive *Custom eLearning Content Development eBook* is to give *the best Custom eLearning Content Development Experts* the opportunity to share their professional experience and answer all the issues posed here for you. Their tips are a result of long experience in developing radical and revolutionary eLearning solutions for a plethora of companies from many different industries. What's more, they have faced the same issues in deciding what's most effective as far as Custom eLearning Content Development goes.

So, let's dive right in!
Christopher Pappas



CHRISTOFOROS PAPPAS

Founder:
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Christopher Pappas is Founder of The eLearning Industry's Network, which is the largest online community of professionals involved in the eLearning field. Christopher holds an MBA, and an MEd (Learning Design) from BGSU.



BY ABIGAIL (ABBIE) MARTIN
CEO, GLOBAL ELEARNING CORPORATION

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

I've put together 3 simple, yet powerful little known secrets that I have used for eLearning success in my 24 years' as a corporate eLearning Developer. If you use these tips during content development, you should gain a solid positive outcome. Your SMEs, your learners and your stakeholders will be thanking you. Point blank, it's really all about understanding people, the way they think and how you communicate with them.

1 Understand Your Audience

As I mentioned before, know your learners. You can impress any stakeholder with a stunning zoom-in feature of the corporate logo synced with music for an intro or some cool animation with conditional action-variable features, but if your learners don't get what you're really trying to teach them and be able to put it into practice in their job, you've kinda sunk the battleship.

So here's first what you gotta figure out about your learners:

- What do they know/don't know about what is going to be taught?
- Where is their background from? Are they out in the field, are they in the office, or are they executive management?
- Are they from only one state, are they international?
- What motivates them to learn? Are they interactive doers?
- Do they already know this content ? If so, give them a pre-assessment so they can skip to the more advanced section of the eLearning so they don't have to take the basics again. Believe me, they'll appreciate it, and so will your stakeholders in the end, because those advanced learners will take less time from being on the job to take the training. And we all know the saying, "time is money".

You need to get into their heads as you start to formulate and design your content with them in mind.

2 Bond With Your SMEs

Have a really good sit down with them. Bonus points if the course has been taught before and there's a facilitator with previous subject knowledge, or better yet, if the SME has already been the classroom facilitator.

After getting a handle on where your learners are coming from, and after grasping the content with the SME, lastly, gain an understanding of any past teaching of this material from a facilitator.

3 Pilot Test After You've Tested

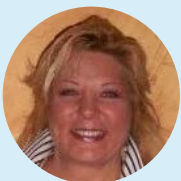
Make sure when you think you're done with the eLearning and you have tested it and have it on your LMS, that you have a handful of learners that can be your control testers, before you flip the switch to go global with the rest of the company. Your testers should be selected as a diverse group from as many types of avenues of your audience that'll be taking the eLearning.

Create on your LMS or intranet, a course forum or blog that can list a series of questions to get them thinking. Have room for them to indicate and identify things that are not working properly as they go through the eLearning, where they can add comments, indicate things that are not quite understood, and can add ideas they have. They may provide you with actual use cases they've had in the field or in the office that have happened to them.

With a cutoff deadline in place for feedback look through the material. With your SME and facilitator, analyze some of the comments and make easy changes. If there is something that would be "nice to have" that would take a while to include in the eLearning but would stifle the dissemination of the project, just keep the project going and fit it in if you have time for the next group of learners.

Depending upon the project, disburse your eLearning increasingly larger and larger groups. If there are some people that would like to comment about the eLearning, have them email you. Feedback is always great for future eLearning projects.

Hope this helps. Remember that understanding your learners, and communicating with SMEs is key!



ABIGAIL (ABBIE) MARTIN

GLOBAL ELEARNING CORPORATION - CEO

Global Corporate Instruction Design | Quality Development |
Cutting Edge Training | Hightech Enthusiast

Ms. Martin has been in the instructional design and eLearning business for 24 years. With her given talent in corporate training, she has helped many Fortune 500 corporations increase revenue and decrease expenditures by millions. In 2006, she started Global eLearning Corporation where she remains the CEO and Managing Director today. Her passion is to tap into what motivates people to learn.



BY ADRIAN PHOON
Head Of Content
[GRC SOLUTIONS PTY LTD](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Client engagement can play an important part in the success or failure of a custom project. Communication, keeping the client in the loop from the brief to delivery, is key.

But how and when do you communicate with your client, and how do you make your interactions meaningful, without wasting your or your client's precious time? Here are a few ideas about how to make the project experience as happy as possible for everyone involved.

1 Scope Of The Project

Communication with the client needs to be clear even before the project gets underway. You should meet with the client to scope deliverables. Get a clear idea of what the client's requirements are, as well as any limitations imposed on the project, including deadlines.

If the client has any guidelines, read over them thoroughly so that you know what exactly the project's specifications are. Ask the client for any existing materials that could help you develop the eLearning. Old face-to-face workshop manuscripts, previous instances of the eLearning, or policy documents and notes could all assist and inspire you – or, in some cases, let you know what you should avoid doing – in your own work for the client.

2 Set Expectations

Sometimes the client's ideas for the project are unsuitable. It's no good designing something for the Edge if the client only uses IE8. And if the client uses IE8, let them know whether their vision for the project – have they requested all-singing, all-dancing mobile-responsive gamified animations with clickable icons? – won't function within the specifications they provided. Work with your client to find a practical alternative.

3 Storyboard The Project

Give the client options for how the eLearning will look and feel. A storyboard should be a rough approximation of the product; it's not the final product itself.

A good storyboard will help the client visualise the direction of the project and select a path for how to proceed. You may have your own preferred option among the possibilities you propose. A storyboard gives you the opportunity to explain and justify your preference before you give the client the ultimate responsibility for the decision.

4 Tap The Client's Knowledge

Chances are, someone within your client's organisation is a Subject Matter Expert on the topic at hand. Find this person. Make it your business to harness his or her practical knowledge.

Ask your client to assign someone to be the single point of contact who can provide feedback on your work as the project progresses. Ideally, this person will not just be a Project Manager but someone with genuine knowledge of the topic who can advise you on the content, as well as keep the project moving. This person could save you a lot of time and pain by steering content development in the right direction.

5 Give Yourself And Your Client Some Flexibility

Sometimes you may not receive client feedback the way you want, when you want. For whatever reason, your eLearning project may not be their immediate priority. Or perhaps they're just not great at communication. Ideally, the client will coordinate and deliver all its feedback at the designated time within your mutually agreed-upon schedule in one go. But it doesn't always pan out this way.

Try to build buffers into your schedule, both for you and your client, so that you can accommodate any client feedback that may come at inopportune times. Give yourself and the client time to conduct quality assurance testing. Notify your client of any problems or challenges on the horizon, so you can collaborate on resolutions together.

That's what a custom content project should be, a collaboration between you and your client, from start to finish.



ADRIAN PHOON
Head Of Content
[GRC SOLUTIONS PTY LTD](#)

I oversee the content strategy for GRC Solutions' online products, manage our content team and project manage clients' e-learning solutions, including custom courses.



BY AMIT GARG
Founder & Director
UPSIDE LEARNING SOLUTIONS

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

How do we define the success of an eLearning program? Is it by uptake or completion rates? Or by assessment scores? Or by learner feedback ratings? Or none of the above? D, none of the above.

For us, successful eLearning is effective eLearning. It's eLearning that helps an organization to achieve a business goal or solve a business problem. And it does this by helping individuals align better with the organization and perform their tasks or roles better. Effective eLearning is also eLearning that has faith in adult learners' capability to think and understand, and engages them accordingly.

Learner engagement has been a buzz word in our domain for several years now, and is interpreted to mean different things. In fact, many confuse interactivity with engagement, so an eLearning program that's highly interactive is automatically considered to be very engaging. Because of this, interactivities based on game shows like 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire' or others are seen as ways to help develop highly engaging eLearning. However, unless used meaningfully, such "game" templates can do more harm to your eLearning than good. This is the key point of my tips for creating successful eLearning.

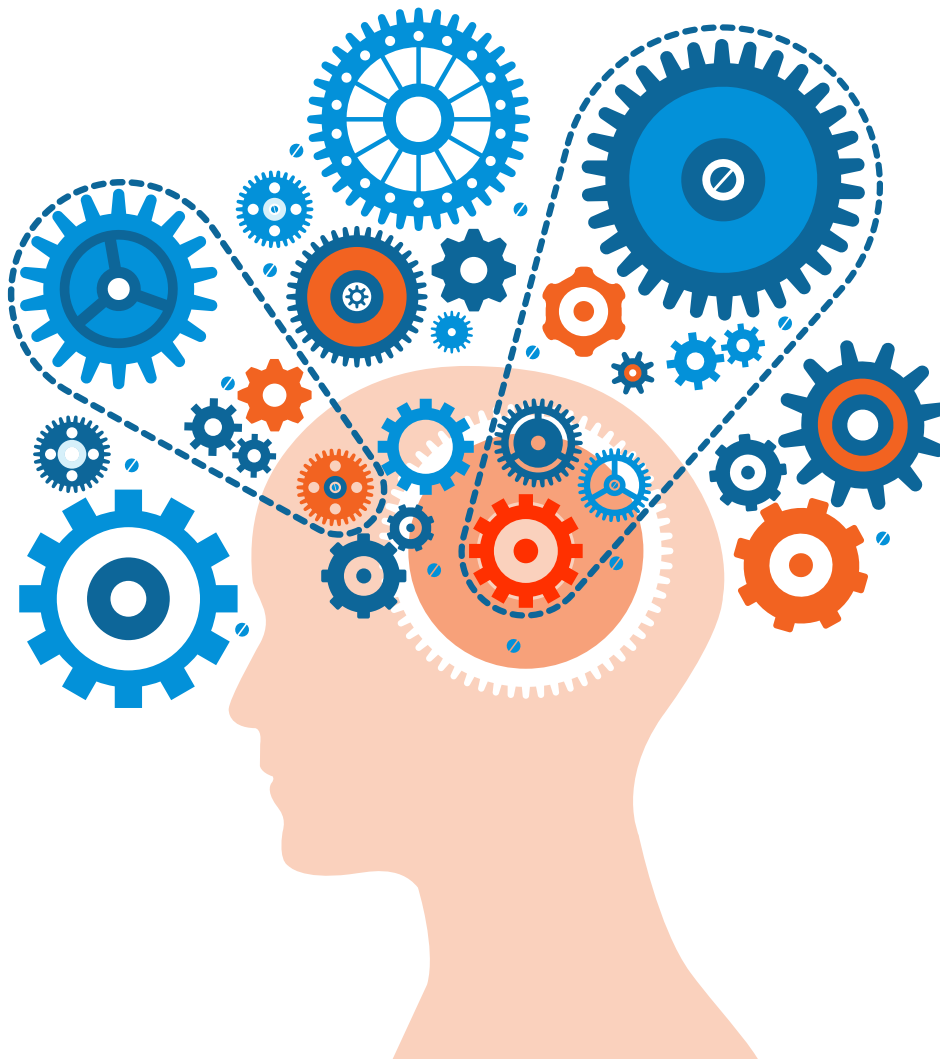
1 Who "Really" Wants To Be A Millionaire?

There's hardly anyone in your workforce worldwide who hasn't been exposed to the format of this TV quiz show. However, just wrapping your assessment in this "game" template does not make it engaging for your learners. Frankly they are all adults and I bet they can see through the noise quite easily. At the end of the day, take away the "game" frills, and it's an assessment for them. For all you know, the seriousness of the assessment is taken away by imposing a game template onto it. Don't get me wrong here. Games and gamified solutions are great for learning but sticking assessment questions into a game-like template is hardly either of those. In my view then, no one really wants to be a millionaire in such cases.

2 Interactivity Of The Head And Not Of The Hand

Perhaps it's the meaning or nature of "interactivity" that we should re-look at, for a moment, in the context of engagement. For many, "interactivity" means to click or to tap somewhere on the screen in order for something to happen. That's what I call "interactivity of the hand". We should instead be focusing on "interactivity of the head" by trying to engage learners' minds instead of just their hands. Even giving them something to reflect over, or getting them to think in a particular direction based on pointers, can be considered an "interactivity", despite there being no clicks, taps, or drag and drops involved.

A great example to drive this point home would be a fiction novel, let's say Dan Brown's 'The Da Vinci Code'. It keeps readers engaged for hours without a single "interactivity of the hand". It engages the mind and the imagination instead. It makes readers try to work things out for themselves. And that is the real engagement that we should all be striving for. If we achieve that, all our eLearning will be much more effective.



AMIT GARG
Founder & Director
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Improving Business Performance Through Better Elearning. I help creating and delivering custom learning solutions that meet organization's business needs.



BY ANNE SELLER
E-Learning Content Developer
[LIFE SCIENCE INTERACTIVE](#)



What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Scientists, researchers and educators in the life sciences explore the living world every day. From the smallest cells to the largest mammals, the study and teaching of biology, medicine & Co. can be a dynamic and interactive experience, especially when you include high-quality online resources.

If you are in academia, perhaps you would like to create your own “interactive learning objects” or “learning modules” to teach your students or explain your research. As Subject Matter Expert, you know your field of expertise inside out, but how do you find the right content to include? Here are some points to consider:

1 What Do You Want To Achieve?

What should the users of your learning module know or be able to do after they have completed it? It is important to clearly define what the “learning objective” is and to always keep this in mind as you review the available content.

2 Check Existing Resources

There are many online repositories, such as www.merlot.org, www.oercommons.org, www.creativecommons.org, containing high-quality learning objects, as well as other websites with links to interactive resources, such as www.hhmi.org/biointeractive, www.lifescienceinteractive.com, which you can make use of. These resources are either freely available or can be used under a Creative Commons license. Make sure that you use HTML5 and not Flash-based resources, to ensure that they can be properly viewed on all browsers.

3 Choose Your Information Carefully

If you develop your own resource, you will want to find reliable and scientific sources of information, such as text, graphics, and videos, which explain facts and concepts in a clear and concise manner. >

3 (Cont) Many textbook publishers share their glossaries online and provide an “educational resources” section on their websites, including free multimedia, graphics, videos, animations, lesson plans and handouts. Many news producers and research institutes provide access to educational videos and other materials. There are also many initiatives, such as www.ibiology.org, which provide helpful educational resources, including presentations by scientists on scientific topics. If you are having difficulty finding high-quality content, contact the librarian at your university. Librarians are incredible sources of information and can help you search the latest electronic databases, e-journals and e-books for the content you need.

4 Reference Your Content

I’m a firm believer that the content in online educational resources should be referenced. Otherwise, how will your students know that you aren’t just making it up? Even if you are the Subject Matter Expert, always indicate the source of the information you are using. I prefer to add the reference number, in superscript format, directly into the text and include the complete list of references at the end of the module.

5 Include Good Quality Multimedia, Graphics, Videos, And Animations

There is nothing worse than a fuzzy, low-resolution image. If you can’t find good quality graphics, try making your own or find a gifted student or colleague who can help you. There are some great online resources, such as www.canva.com, and apps, such as “Paper by Fifty-Three” for iPad to help you explore your inner creative child.

6 Copyright Issues And Credit

It is very important to check that you have permission to use the content, that is photographs, multimedia and data, that appears in your module, since this is often protected by copyright or patents. Always give credit to the people who helped you create your resource, such as developers, proofreaders, and testers. It is not only good manners to do so; those people will be more likely to help you again next time, if you thank them now.

7 Ask For Help And Always Test Your Modules

If you need help creating a learning module, you can find support at your university’s eLearning centre, if it has one. If you use a rapid eLearning authoring tool, you can find lots of tips via their websites and online user communities. Don’t forget to test the learning modules that you develop, and seek feedback from others. Finally, consider sharing what you have created with the world by adding it to your website or to one of the online repositories.



ANNE SELLER
E-Learning Content Developer
[LIFE SCIENCE INTERACTIVE](http://www.lifescienceinteractive.com)

I create interactive learning objects for the life sciences. These are produced in HTML5 format and are SCORM- or Tin Can API- compliant, so they can be added to a LMS or used as a stand-alone resource.





BY ASHA PANDEY
Chief Learning Strategist
[EI DESIGN](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Over the last two decades, custom eLearning content development has provided several advantages to organizations, and most notably its capability to provide the specific learning experience that would work best for specific learner and business needs.

Through learner-centric, interactive and immersive learning designs, custom eLearning solutions have been helping learners to:

- Enjoy the learning self-paced learning journey that keeps them engaged.
- Go through challenges that keep them intrigued all through the learning.
- Internalize the learning and practically apply it on the job.
- Enhance their performance and deliver better results.

Challenges That L&D Teams Face

As you move further with investments on custom eLearning content development, let us look at the challenges that L&D teams face. My aim is to show how these can be addressed through the tips I offer. Here is my list of top 7 challenges:

- 1** How to increase the efficacy of training?
- 2** How to make the learning stick?
- 3** How to push the acquired learning to application on the job?
- 4** How to trigger the required behavioral change?
- 5** How to adapt the trainings to varied learner profiles?
- 6** How to ensure that the learning and business mandates are met?
- 7** How to show a positive ROI?

Custom eLearning Content Development To The Rescue

Here are some effective tips to maximize your training's impact. Using custom eLearning development will certainly help you offset or mitigate most of these challenges. Do use my tips, as Success Factors, to maximize the impact of your custom eLearning content development.

1 Pre-Planning

- Design training delivery to map to the 70:20:10 model of learning. Retain focus on formal training but do invest on social or collaborative learning as well as performance support tools.
- Increase the use of blended training delivery instead of pure ILT. This will not only save costs but offer higher flexibility to learners. You can also explore digitization of ILT training to accrue further gains such as, cost reduction and wider access.

2 Learning Designs And Learning Strategies

- Adopt strategies that make the learning stick. Use innovative learning strategies like gamification, scenario and story-based approaches rather than page turners.
- Provide Performance Support Tools or PSTs. They push the acquired learning to get applied on the job. These just-in-time aids are available to the learners at the "time of learning need".
- Use engaging formats. Opt for strategies that include interactive videos and branching scenarios that provide reinforcement and feedback.
- Adopt strategies that increase employee engagement. Go beyond the obvious approaches and mix approaches like learning portals, social learning, and microlearning in your learning strategy.

3 Development Methodology And Authoring Tools

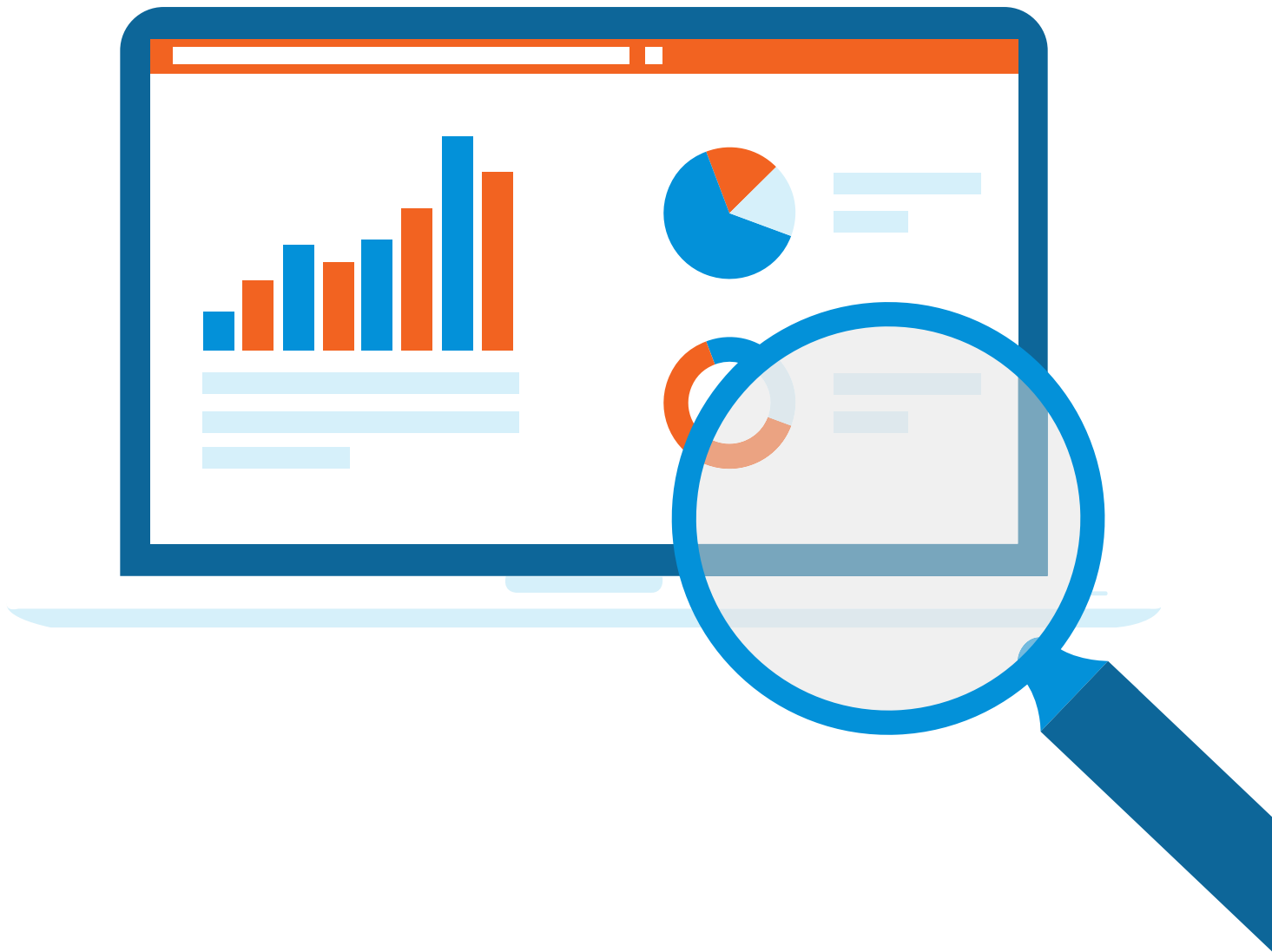
- Adopt an AGILE development methodology in your eLearning content development.
- Keep it collaborative.
- Opt for a centralized Project Management tool for effective tracking and managing projects.
- With a profusion of options, choose an authoring tool that addresses the need of training effectively. One size does not fit all. Instead, opt for different tools to match your varied training needs.

4 Take Feedback From Learners

- During development.
- Validate the impact with learners.
- Use learner feedback to improve.
- Gather data and analytics over and above what the traditional LMS can provide.

5 Measurement And Impact Analysis

- Evaluate, measure, and validate the learning effectiveness or learnability.
- Use analytics for continuous improvement of your learning design.



ASHA PANDEY
Chief Learning Strategist
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Asha Pandey is the Chief Learning Strategist at EI Design. She brings her rich 15 years' experience into play to help EI Design customers transform their learning and keep pace with the changing dynamics in the Learning industry.



BY AYA PORT

Instructional Designer And ELearning Developer
CATALYST ELEARNING DESIGN

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Custom eLearning content development, as the name suggests, should be about creating the right learning experience for the client and their learners. I believe a full tailored design and development process can lead to quality training and better performance outcomes, but it is far from easy. Here are some principles to keep in mind when approaching this task.

Content-Related Principles

1 Respect The Learner's Previous Experience

The big advantage of custom eLearning is that it is tailored to the client's specific needs and audience. So, don't disregard the audience and what they already know. Unlike creating an off-the-shelf course, here you can adjust the starting point and pace to the learner profile as identified by the client; yes, even for onboarding. Training that lets the learner draw on previous experience and feel that they bring something to the table, will be much more motivating and appealing.

Another aspect of this is to allow more experienced learners to skip over some content if they can demonstrate mastery of it. Focus on ensuring that the learner has achieved the learning objectives by the end of the training, rather than policing their advancement through it. Learners who are in control of their progress and pace are likely to be more engaged and proactive.

2 Tell A Realistic Story

Incorporating examples and scenarios in your training is always useful and has plenty of benefits. However, keep in mind that your audience knows their work and will be expecting realistic stories. What does that mean? Ill-defined problems where the solution isn't always obvious, time pressure, working with and >

2 (cont) depending on input from colleagues, genuine success rate, and realistic feedback. Remember people learn from mistakes as well, and eLearning is a great format for learners to experiment with making decisions without real consequences. Give your learners scenarios that are challenging, thought-provoking and an honest portrayal of what they can expect on the job.

3 Be Social

In many cases, custom eLearning content is developed for a group audience who knows each other, such as employees of a company, or professionals in the same field. Complementing the training with social features such as discussion forums, surveys or group activities can enhance the learners' experience, as well as foster a long-lasting community of practice. Allowing for peer discussion and learning is also a great way to deal with case studies and scenarios that do not have one clear answer, but can be approached in multiple ways. eLearning does not have to be a solitary activity. We all already communicate online on multiple platforms, so why not for learning purposes as well?

4 Process-Related Principles Ask Questions, Early And Often

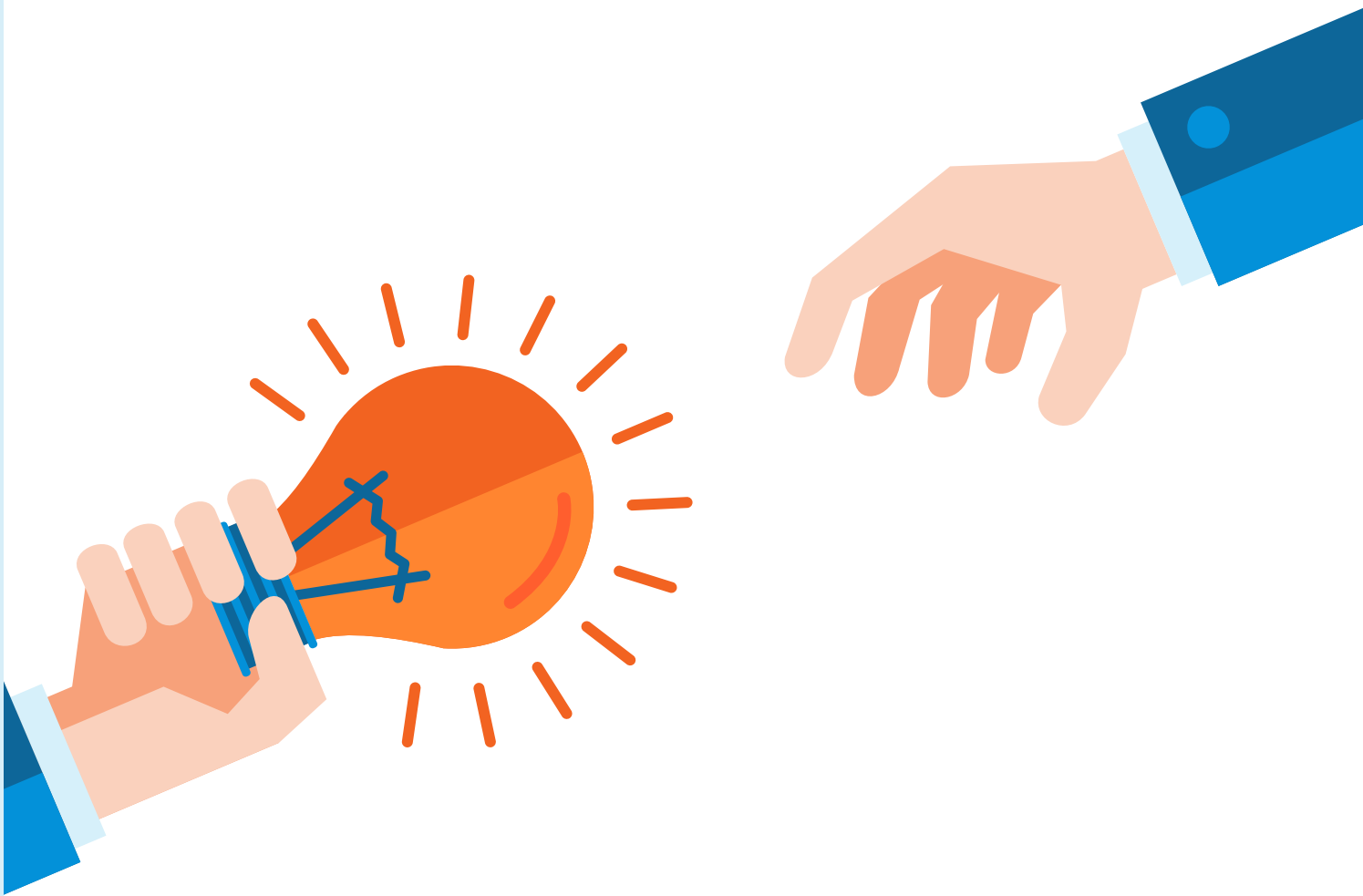
We all know these clients who want to hand over a deck of slides and receive an eLearning module with no questions asked. While they might get exactly what they asked for, the resulting training would most likely not have the desired effect on performance, just because it has not been designed to do so. This is similar to asking a web developer to build a website which features text only, which is possible and quite easy to do, but is it the right solution? Many times the client isn't even aware of the variety of activities and interactions eLearning technologies today afford, so, of course, they don't know how to ask for it. Use your own expertise and experience to gently question their assumptions, and, in the long term, they'll appreciate it.

5 Start With Needs Analysis

If your client is spending all this money and time on creating a custom eLearning course, they must have some expectations of what the impact of this training will be. It is important to understand what drove them to decide on this particular training, and which performance gaps they believe it will solve. Once the business and learning objectives have been identified, you can put your design skills to work in the right direction. Also, keep in mind that sometimes the right solution is not training, and a Knowledge Management tool or a job aid may accomplish better results.

6 Be Agile

Yes, “agile eLearning development” is a buzz word currently, and you’re probably tired of hearing it, but there’s a reason why it is. You don’t have to follow a specific methodology or system to be agile; just remember to be flexible and responsive. Sticking to an original idea when the wind is shifting is never a good idea. Brainstorm with your client, doodle on paper, send them rough mock ups for comments and early functional beta version for testing, and be open to making changes after every round. The earlier you find the areas of discontent, the better you can respond to them.



AYA PORT
Instructional Designer And ELearning Developer
[CATALYST ELEARNING DESIGN](#)

At Catalyst, we support social change organizations and small businesses in reaching their goals by creating custom innovative eLearning courses.



BY AYESHA HABIB OMER, PH.D
CEO & Co-Founder
COMMLAB INDIA

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

A good customized eLearning course goes a long way in meeting the learners' needs. It helps close gaps in their knowledge and skills, enhancing performance levels. Here are five proven tips to develop content for bespoke online courses.

1 Get A Clear Idea Of The Learning Outcomes

Clarity on the learning outcomes helps you create the right online course that meets the needs of stakeholders. Conduct a kick-off meeting with the stakeholders to know why they need the course and how they expect it to help their employees.

For instance, if they need an eLearning course to educate their manufacturing staff on the importance of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), you need to include content that demonstrates how GMPs add value to the business and propels employees to adhere to them.

On the other hand, if the course is aimed at improving customer-handling skills of the sales people, the content must be designed with the intention of enhancing performance by changing learner behaviors.

2 Understand Your Learners To Tailor The Online Course To Their Needs

Understanding learners and what they are expected to know and do after the course will help you choose the right content and Instructional Design strategy for the course. It also helps you stay focused on the goal of the course, while taking into consideration any limitations you might have to overcome, such as designing courses for sales people who are constantly on the move or training shop floor workforce with little computer knowledge. >

2

(Cont) You can get a clear idea of your learners' needs by asking the following questions:

- Who is the course for?
- What do they want or expect to get out of the course?
- How will they use the information and skills they learn in their jobs?
- What do they know about the topic? Do they need to be taught the basics or advanced concepts?
- Are they white collared or blue-collared employees?
- What is their work experience? Are they novices, mid-level employees, or seasoned staff members?
- What is their comfort level with computers?
- Is the training under consideration compulsory or voluntary?
- What prerequisites do they need?
- In what settings will they use this training?
- Are they native speakers of English or is English their second language?

3

Frame Proper Learning Objectives

This is inarguably the most important aspect in the development of bespoke eLearning content. Prof. Benjamin Bloom, an American psychologist, proposed six levels of learning, later revised by Dr. Lorin Anderson, viz. remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Here is a brief overview of what learners are expected to do at each level.

LEVEL	WHAT LEARNERS ARE EXPECTED TO DO
<i>Remembering</i>	Recall and recognize the information presented to them
<i>Understanding</i>	Comprehend the information and state it in their own words
<i>Applying</i>	Use the information presented in the training program in their jobs
<i>Analyzing</i>	Analyze the information acquired through the training program
<i>Evaluating</i>	Evaluate the information acquired to make decisions to solve problems
<i>Creating</i>	Use the information to put together diverse elements to create a “new whole”

A learning objective needs to “match” the corresponding level of cognition. For instance, if your online course enables your learners to recall the guidelines to use social media, you then need to write its learning objectives based on the corresponding level of cognition i.e., remembering.

4 Build Assessments To Measure The Achievement Of Learning Objectives

Develop assessments that help measure the achievement of the learning objective. You can use the following matrix to assess learners at each of the six levels of learning.

LEVEL	HOW YOU CAN ASSESS
<i>Remembering</i>	Fill in the blanks, multiple-choice questions (MCQs), and diagrams that need to be labeled
<i>Understanding</i>	Questions that require learners to summarize the information acquired and assignments that involve classification of cases, elements, events, etc.
<i>Applying</i>	Simulations of tasks and problem-based elements such as scenarios where learners need to provide the right response.
<i>Analyzing</i>	Case studies where learners are required to determine how various elements of a business function or interact.
<i>Evaluating</i>	Scenarios and case studies where learners are required to judge or critique decisions and actions.
<i>Creating</i>	Business games and what-if scenarios where learners need to formulate a new solution to business needs/challenges.

5 Evolve The Right Content Presentation Strategy

Here are a few best practices of presenting learning content.

- Collect all required materials from Subject Matter Experts, and check for gaps. If you find any, seek additional information from the SMEs to bridge the gaps. This will ensure content “flows” smoothly.
- Take time to chunk the content gathered from the SMEs. Content chunking helps weed out information unnecessary to the achievement of learning objectives.
- Choose an appropriate Instructional Design strategy based on the training requirement. For instance, you can go for scenario-based learning for compliance training, while guided learning is ideal for training new hires. Likewise, you can go for a simulation-based Instructional Design strategy to train people on software applications.
- See that you use the right learning interactivities to present learning content. >

5 (Cont)

INTERACTIVITY

Click-on-images

Hotspots and Rollovers

Click-on-tabs

Timeline

Click-on-numbers

Slideshow

Flip cards

WHEN YOU NEED TO USE

Distinguish points visually

Describe individual elements of a system

Explain related elements

Convey information about events that took place over a period of time

Explain specific elements in a concept

Describe the steps of a process

Display the key terms related to a concept

- Use Scaled Vector Graphics, SVGs, as they are rendered effectively on all devices.
- Go for images of humanoids to depict people as they are not associated with a specific culture.
- Utilize animated videos to explain the functioning of complex products such as a jet engine.
- Ensure the tone of audio narration is conversational.

A good custom-built eLearning course helps close learning gaps effectively, thereby enabling your staff perform better. By following the tips mentioned above, you can develop the winning content for your online course.



AYESHA HABEEB OMER, PH.D CEO & Co-Founder **COMMLAB INDIA**

Dr. Ayesha Habeeb Omer is the co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of CommLab India, a custom learning solutions provider serving customers across the globe. Ayesha has 19 years of experience in financial services, university teaching, training and e-learning. She is a gold medalist in MBA and a Ph.D. in e-learning. She also holds an Advanced e-learning Instructional Design Certificate from ATD.



BY BHANWAR SINGH
Senior Learning Professional
DELPHIANLOGIC TECHNOLOGIES

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

After investing almost a decade in consulting, leading corporates across the globe, if I have to really share a few tips for a successful custom Design & Development of eLearning content, it will go like this:

1 “Custom” By Choice Not By Chance

- a) One should really be convinced when going for a “custom” route and before you start with it, it is advisable to get educated about it properly. What I really mean is to be aware of all the factors that will impact quality, timelines, and course, costing.
- b) The crux of the word “custom” is in its Design aspect. To be specific, it has more to do with “Instructional Design” than anything else.

2 Play Within Given Business Constraints

- a) Even if you have opted for “custom” route it does not imply that one has to go really free hand, especially when it comes to time and cost.
- b) Define these parameters in advance, and consider a variation of $\pm 10\%$.
- c) Convey these 2 values to your potential vendors and have at least 3 proposals, even if you have a preferred or registered partner. Ask “What best they can offer you within these constraints?”, and then choose the one who is offering the highest instructional value to your investments.

3 Don't Let Rapid Authoring Impact Your Development Negatively By Any Means

- a) Don't let the choice of rapid authoring tool drive the quality of your custom development assignment.
- b) Vendors typically keep this at the centre of conversation and tend to load everything else on it. Cautiously, stop them right away and request to pick this up at last.
- c) Never, ever, choose rapid authoring because it is saving your overall time of development or cost. Go with an authoring tool, only after ensuring they really fit into the design strategy. At max, you will save 20% on time or cost, whatever, with any rapid authoring tool. However, you may end up losing 80% on meeting the learning objectives, at times.

Patience And Process Is The Key

- a) Bring out the best of your patience when it is getting designed. Have as many iterations as needed.
- b) However, don't even think of going back once you freeze the design. It will cost you the most.
- c) Try to have a single reviewer, or else it will become an endless job. One cannot have a storyboard which is perfect and can satisfy all your stakeholders.

Choose A Partner, Not A Vendor

- a) Custom development is a premium service which requires a real intention to do justice to the content. For example, from a 5 or 500-people's team, look for those who are going to work on your assignment.
- b) Don't choose a partner just based on their credentials, and only because they have done a similar work for some competitor. Are you looking to get a replica of what they have developed for someone else? Then why custom? And someone must have tried them first without having that credential and got an award winning project out of it. Think about it! For example, none or 10 awards/recognitions. Look if they are committed to developing a great experience for you.

There are many more things to talk about. However, due to limited space and time, let me stop here. Look forward to much more such social interactions and knowledge sharing opportunities.



BHANWAR SINGH
Senior Learning Professional
DELPHIANLOGIC TECHNOLOGIES

Bhanwar has over 9 years of experience in IT solution sales and business development, and for the last 7 years has been working in the eLearning domain helping Fortune 500 & Global 1000 companies adopt intelligent eLearning solutions and services. Bhanwar holds a Master's Degree in International Business & a graduate of Mathematics.



BY BRONYA BENVIN
Senior Learning Specialist
[PULSE LEARNING](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

When it comes to custom eLearning content development, a one-size-fits-all approach just doesn't cut it. True success and an exceptional educational experience require a mix of the right expertise, delivery treatments, and development processes.

Here are PulseLearning's top five tips for consistently excellent custom eLearning content development.

1 Determine The Business Goals

A successful custom eLearning project begins with getting the groundwork right. First, it is critical to determine the client's business goal, which is the need that initiated the training requirement that will provide a robust foundation to build the training upon. These key questions can help:

- What challenges will the training help overcome?
- What information does the audience need to know and why?
- What is the desired post-training result?

A skilled learning consultant can provide guidance to extract the information and distill the essence of the project. When the business goal is crystal clear, success measures can be set for use in evaluating training success after implementation.

2 Lock In Learning Objectives

Next, the business goals and success measures should be used to write clear, action-oriented learning objectives. You could think of learning objectives as the framework or supporting structure that will inform the required content for the custom eLearning project. Putting the time into getting your learning objectives right is essential. >

2 (Cont) The learning objectives drive decision making. For example, when assessing content to include, always revisit your learning objectives and ask if each piece assists in reaching the big-picture business goal. Importantly, learning objectives should never be written retrospectively.

3 Engage The Right Experts

When spending your precious training budget on custom eLearning, working with a development team you can trust is vital. Look for an established team with a strong portfolio, servicing clients across a range of industries. You should feel like you are in safe hands so you can stay focused on business while your experts look after the end-to-end content development process.

Engaging a development team with global presence brings major advantages, including time saving due to working across time zones, experience in localization, and access to international best-practice methodologies. A global eLearning development company will also have a larger talent pool to draw from when forming a project team with the right mix of expertise for a specific project.

4 Innovate Appropriately

When investing in custom eLearning, clients usually want something different that pushes the envelope creatively. The key is to provide appropriate innovation rather than “jumping on every train”. Just because a treatment like gamification is the latest trend, it may not suit your project. Innovation and creativity should always be used to enhance the educational experience and never come at the cost of learning.

A skilled development team will consider your technical abilities and propose the most effective solution. Content should suit the learner but also satisfy technical specifications. It is all about using a variety of media and content treatments for the audience and intended devices.

5 Follow A Watertight Process

The backbone of every successful custom eLearning project is a sound design and development process. The process will guide your design to realization from the initial client collaboration to understand the training needs through to translating these into the most appropriate learning experience. A streamlined process ensures your custom eLearning project comes in on time and within budget.



BRONYA BENVIN
Senior Learning Specialist
[PULSE LEARNING](#)

Bronya is a Senior Learning Specialist at PulseLearning, with a decade of instructional design experience across Australia, NZ and the UK. Her forte is bespoke eLearning through which she delights her audience by using anecdotal narrative, pop-culture references and engaging interactivity. Bronya keeps her finger on the pulse of digital trends to create unique, memorable and immersive content.



BY CARIN NEETHLING
Director / Elearning Specialist
YOKUFUNDA CONSULTING PTY LTD

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

“If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough” - Albert Einstein

1 Be The Learner

As content developers, our critical advantage often lies in the fact that we are not Subject Matter Experts.

Receiving source material from clients and converting it to eLearning is not enough. More often than not, source material assumes knowledge and understanding when, in reality, prior knowledge may not exist at all.

Successful custom eLearning content development requires that the developer fully comprehends the subject matter and that this learning journey is shared via the eLearning course. This requires the content developer to:

- Pose questions such as what, where, why, when, where and how to Subject Matter Experts
- Conduct Internet research

A useful measure to determine whether you understand the subject is to ask yourself whether you are able to run a classroom-facilitated event with your knowledge of the subject.

2 Create A Logical Flow

eLearning content must have a logical flow. Think of it as building blocks. You cannot build a wall before the foundation exists.

Group content that logically fits together into chapters or topics and ensure a coherent flow from one chapter to the next. An easy way to achieve this is to end a chapter off with a closing statement that leads onto the next chapter. This ensures that learners understand the relationship between chapters, or topics.

Nothing is more demoralising than opening a course with 20 odd topics and realising that it will take you a lifetime to complete. If your course becomes too long, split it into manageable modules. When learners can complete shorter modular courses relatively quickly, learner uptake and satisfaction is much higher.

3 Creativity Is Everything

Coming up with creative and innovative ways to present content is so much easier when we fully understand the subject.

As individuals, we automatically reference what we already know and then, attempt to connect this to course material to learn something new.

As individuals, we automatically reference what we already know and then, attempt to connect this knowledge with new concepts to learn something new. 'Transpose' your own learning process into the eLearning course to create connections to new concepts.

Use graphics, photos, images, text and/or video to ensure that your audience follows a learning journey similar to your own.

4 Provoke Thought Through Interactivity

Allowing learners to interact with the content increases attention span whilst facilitating knowledge retention.

Include elements such as sliders, scenarios, click-and-reveal interactions, interesting facts, educational games and learning via questions to stretch attention span.

Practical examples of thought provoking interactions created by Yokufunda Consulting include:

- Use graphics to depict bullet points. We recently had to convey the names of the 12 SADC member states to learners. Instead of just listing the 12 names, we had buttons, numbered from 1 to 12. Next to the numbered buttons, we provided a 3D map of the African continent that excluded the member states. To reveal the country name and its location on the map, learners were required to click on each numbered button.
- Use interactive features that represent the industry. When depicting a process flow for the Oil & Gas industry, make use of a pipeline flow. Learners are then required to click on each of the valves, depicting a step in the process flow, to fill the pipeline.
- Teach terms and associated definitions by means of questions. Depict a definition by means of imagery or a short scenario sketch. Ask the learner to indicate which of the listed terms best represents the image or scenario. Provide feedback accordingly.

"It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge" - Albert Einstein



CARIN NEETHLING
Director / Elearning Specialist
YOKUFUNDA CONSULTING PTY LTD

Passionate about learning and personal development using technology.



BY CAROLE BOWER
Head Of Learning Solutions
LUMESSE

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Having spent many years in the learning industry, I have seen many successful and not so successful custom eLearning content development projects. Less successful projects are typically driven by process shortcuts, mismatched expectations, and unrealistic time or cost constraints. In the real world however, we all want to be flexible, super-positive and accommodate differing needs; for this reason, my tips for successful custom eLearning content development will focus on the four golden rules for success and things to avoid at all costs.

1 Clearly Define The Roles And Set Role Expectations

Get the roles clearly defined and agreed early on. One of the biggest challenges I see is where expectations are misaligned, e.g. around the input needed from a Subject Matter Expert, and the Learning Designer. In this example, both roles are different and need to work together. The Learning Designer creates the architecture for the learning and the SME provides the content that fits within that architecture.

Avoid doing this the other way around, i.e. trying to create the architecture around the content, since this leads to information overload and ultimately boring eLearning.

2 Embrace Specialisms

The ideal project team will have separate specialists working together, pushing innovation and challenging each other on the art of the possible to achieve the best results, especially for larger projects. Separate roles achieve the right balance by working together to represent their area of specialism and to plan, prioritise and, where appropriate, decide on any compromises.

Avoid combining project roles and diluting specialisms, for example, a combined Project Manager/>

2 (Cont) Learning Designer will definitely experience conflicting priorities as they will be trying to balance project constraints, time cost and scope, with creative thinking and the needs of the learner when designing the content.

3 Know How To Save Time Effectively

Yes, time constraints are a 'given' but some shortcuts will lead to extra work and are just not worth it. The architecture is a key starting-point in any digital learning project and so is the definition of the overall concept. Create a structure, a concept, then a short extract in wireframe format, maybe a prototype and then pause to check if it works before moving ahead to create the full programme. Then, and only then, you should consider how to save time with additional resources, reusable models and smart visual approaches.

Avoid allowing time constraints to drive shortcuts at the early stages of a project.

4 Recognise When Learning Is Not Learning And Ask The Audience

A successful custom eLearning development project can only really be deemed as successful if it works for the audience, right? This sounds obvious but the key question to ask is "What will work for the audience?" And this critical question needs to be posed to the intended learners.

Learning is something that happens in response to a particular need. It's personal, it's about making a change, fixing a problem, improving the status quo. It's also something we do to improve, so we have a goal in mind, that is, to be enlightened, to understand the rationale or science behind something.

On that basis, a so-called learning initiative to enlighten the masses may not actually be a learning initiative after all. If the learning has no specific relevance for the recipients, they probably won't learn anything. But that is what a lot of eLearning programmes try to do: They create a course for thousands of users who all have different roles and needs but have no context because the audience group is too broad for things like context-setting scenarios and examples. At Lumesse, we are big advocates of Cathy Moore's Action Mapping approach to ensure our learning content remains focused and relevant for the intended audience. And we create resources and comms too. which is a great approach for mass enlightenment!

Avoid creating one-size-fits-all digital learning solutions for a wide audience. This may look good in terms of Return On Investment savings but the Return On Engagement and real value, the learning, will be lost.



CAROLE BOWER
Head Of Learning Solutions
LUMESSE

Responsible for shaping Lumesse Learning's proposition, Learning Design capability, and the Solutions team.



BY CHIP CLEARY
Vice President, Solutions & Consulting
[CITY & GUILDS KINEO](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

1 Help Learners Take Action

Our goal is almost always to enable our learners to behave more productively in the real world. But all too often, the connection between “what I do in this eLearning course” and “what I do when I go back to my job” doesn’t seem to be very clear. I come take some eLearning and then, later, I go do other things. Maybe I apply what I learned. We leave it to our learners to figure out how to connect the dots. But, then again, maybe that doesn’t work so well, right? And maybe that is one reason why as few as one in six learners actually goes on to systematically change their behavior after taking training.

Consider a simple example. Let’s imagine we want to help new managers come up to speed. It’s great to provide engaging stories and even better to provide learning-by-doing simulations. But if your learners don’t take responsibility to change how they actually behave back on the job, have you really helped? If your learners can’t form a practical plan for how to get started, how long until they forget what they learned?

2 Help Your Learners Take Responsibility Of Their Own Learning

Help your learners first take responsibility and then see concrete steps forward. How? First, help them build their own case for personal change. When you’re helping new people, you can help them see how they can become heroes, or at least avoid being dogs, only if they could better set expectations.

3 Help Learners Cross The Learning-Doing Gap

Help your learners figure out just how to apply knowledge using the new behaviors you are promoting back in the real world. By definition, your learner will be a novice in the approach your eLearning promotes. And being a novice is, well, scary. Have you ever set expectations? How comfortable would it be to fumble around actually trying to use some new model for setting expectations you just learned in training? With a real live other person! Help your learners cross the learning-doing gap by giving them some baby steps. How about if they use this job aid? How about if they run a first experiment by setting expectations for themselves? How about if they try it out with a team member with whom they have a great relationship? Such baby steps give your learners a way to realize little wins in the real world, and what could be better than that to create a pathway for lasting behavior change?



CHIP CLEARY
Vice President, Solutions & Consulting
CITY & GUILDS KINEO

Responsibilities include: 1 developing, driving and implementing new solutions & professional services, 2 consulting with clients, 3 supporting the Kineo design team, & 4 supporting the sales team in understanding client needs & developing solutions.



BY CHRISTOPHER PART
Instructional Designer, Training And
Development Consultant, ELearning Specialist

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

1 Develop Measurable Learning Objectives

Time and careful analysis is critical here. Learning objectives cannot be an afterthought. They cannot be a mere topical list. In my experience, actions such as explain and describe are overused; their vague nature tends to result in superfluous content and a bloated course resulting in cognitive overload and ultimately, an ineffective course. In corporate learning, the goal is the improvement of job performance. Use Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy to analyze what you want learners to do, not merely as a glorified thesaurus to generate action words. Continuously review by asking, "How is this objective going to result in an improvement in job performance?" Per Robert Mager's performance-based learning objectives, attach specific conditions and measurable criteria to your objectives. The more refinement in this stage, the greater probability your content will be effective. As the idiom goes, "Measure twice."

2 Structure Learning Objectives

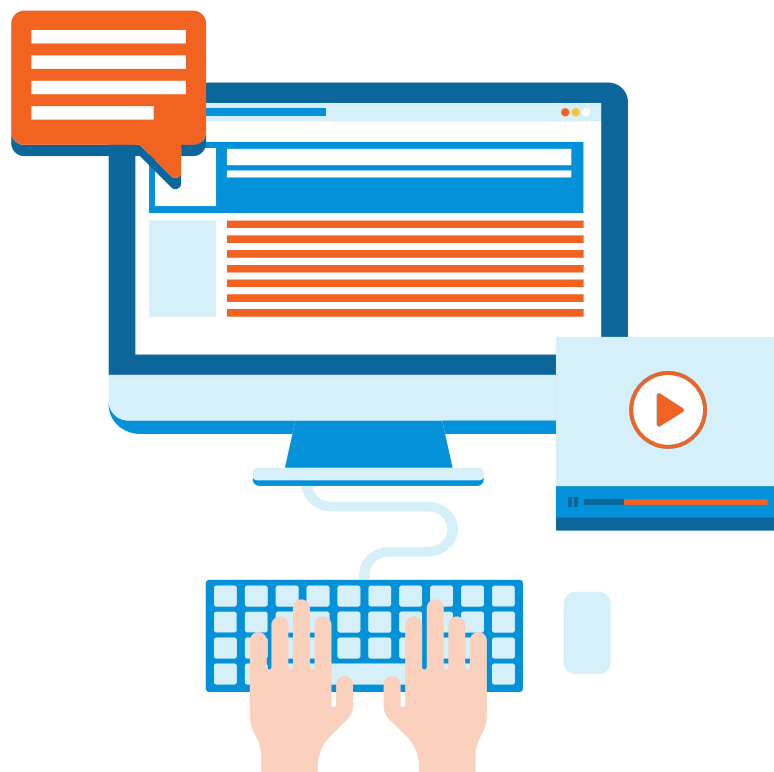
Develop terminal and enabling objectives. Begin with terminal objectives, these are usually at the task level. For example, "Gain customer interest" may be the root of a terminal objective in the sales world. Note that conditions and criteria would still need to be included here. Under a terminal objective ask, "What does the learner need to know or be able to do to accomplish this objective?" In the sales example, it may be necessary for the salesperson to know the customers' values in order to gain his or her interest. Analyze deeper. Develop an enabling objective under an enabling objective. To know what the customer wants, the salesperson might ask effective questions. Do you see a theme emerging? Stringent analysis of learning objectives is a necessary condition for maximizing the effectiveness of eLearning content. In my experience, sequence, structure, and other design elements fall into place after a hierarchy of measurable learning objectives has been achieved.

3 Determine eLearning Or Other Methods

Time, money, and headaches are saved greatly in this area. Prioritize your content. Take time to measure learning objectives on the dimensions of criticality, difficulty, and frequency performed; a quantified picture of weighted objectives is the result of your efforts. I pleasantly recall numerous occasions when I used this quantified picture to easily categorize content as: awareness communication worthy, job aid worthy, demonstration video worthy, simulation worthy, drill-and-practice worthy, coaching worthy, etc. If done correctly, effectively matching objectives with methods can turn you into a hero.

4 Chunk And Scaffold

Remember that bit about the dangers of cognitive overload as it relates to vague learning objectives? Well, cognitive psychology and adult learning theory are the primary drivers here. Cognitive psychology tells us that long-term memory is achieved more effectively when new learning assimilates with existing mental schemas. Build your learners' knowledge as a scaffold. Begin with basic content and connect that to widely accessible experiences. Continue to build more advanced content onto existing content. Do this in small chunks over a larger time span per the tenets of distributed learning. By scaffolding, chunking, and distributing, you follow a template carved by research-based best practice.



CHRISTOPHER PART
Instructional Designer, Training And
Development Consultant, ELearning Specialist



BY DANIEL GIMNESS
ELearning Developer
[DGS DESIGNS](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

1 Storyboard

Make sure your storyboard is signed-off before development. A good analogy I like to use is baking a cake. Your storyboard is your cake recipe or batter. After you put the cake in the oven, if you want to change it, it's possible, though messy and never turns out right. Therefore, development is delayed.

2 Audio

If you need audio in your course, there are free robo-audio or human narrators. If you decide to use a human voice, have an audio script written out before the narrator records the audio. Make sure that the narrator follows the script and doesn't ad-lib! Ad-libbing can cause a real mess if the eLearning developer needs to include synchronized, closed-captioning text in the course.

3 Graphics

If using images or illustrations, make sure they look consistent.

4 QA

If your organization allows it, Google spreadsheet is your friend when it comes to a free, easy way to track QA changes by multiple reviewers in a spreadsheet. Using this, or something similar, will save you time, as developers won't have to search through their emails to find all of the QA changes.

5 Review

When reviewing an eLearning course, there can be up to three rounds of QA reviews. These are Alpha, Beta, and Final. Make sure to allow enough time in the review schedule for the reviewers to be able to review the course and the developers to make the changes. Also, not everyone works on the weekends, so take weekend dates on the calendar into consideration when scheduling.



DANIEL GIMNESS
ELearning Developer
[DGS DESIGNS](#)

As a lead developer and consultant at DGS Designs, Daniel Gimness has 16 years of experience supporting 50+ companies globally in the areas of graphic design, multimedia and eLearning development. Daniel excels at rapid eLearning development; turning course content into eLearning courses quickly and efficiently. He uses the ADDIE model for developing blended learning course solutions for clients.



BY DANIELLE WALLACE
Sr. Instructional Designer - Blended Learning
Enthusiast & Learning Fanatic
BEYOND THE SKY: CUSTOM LEARNING

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Successful custom eLearning development is like a table. The table legs that a learning project “stands on” is an intimate understanding of your audience, client requirements, needs analysis, and business drivers.

1 Effective Project Management

The entire project then rests on the table surface, which is effective Project Management. This blends both the foundational “table stakes” and the learning content into a functioning and effective learning solution.

Project Management is the visible layer that holds all the foundational aspects together; the outputs of the needs analysis, client requirements, the business drivers etc., as well as provides the basis for the learning content to be built upon. Effective Project Management is similar to how a table surface holds the legs together as well as provide a surface for the learning pieces to be held on. It’s seen and experienced by both the clients and the project team.

Like a table surface, good Project Management is seamless and not over engineered. Overly thick layers of bureaucracy and process hinder a project and are not necessary for the learning program to be effective. On the other side, Project Management that is too thin will lead to disarray, confusion, and frustration.

2 Project Management Structure

Learning solutions can rest on top of the table surface, through an effective Project Management structure. The larger and more complex the learning solution, the thicker the table surface needs to be to support all the facets and people involved in the program. >

2

(Cont) Additionally, various components of the training program may hang off the table and the Project Management expertise and clear expectations help ensure nothing slips off. While not the show piece of a learning program, good Project Management ensures the learning solution gets built.

Without proper grounding in the business needs, and without cohesive and clear Project Management expertise, the resulting eLearning that is layered on top will simply fall apart.



DANIELLE WALLACE
Sr. Instructional Designer - Blended Learning
Enthusiast & Learning Fanatic
BEYOND THE SKY: CUSTOM LEARNING

I've been fortunate to hone my skills at Fortune 100 companies through management positions. Clients appreciate the project management, business acumen and stakeholder management I bring to ensure their expectations are exceeded.



BY DORAL ANDERSSON
ELearning Consultant
[E-CONCEPTS, INC.](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

There are so many elements to designing successful, custom eLearning programs. It has been my experience that the absolute most important items are effective communication and understanding of the clients' needs and goals. Even in designing the most engaging, interactive course out there, if the content is off-target of the organization's needs, you will have missed the first critical step in being successful.

1 Understand Your Organization's Needs

Through years of working with a diverse base of clients from all industries, it is apparent that even within an organization, the individual stakeholders usually have a slight to significant variation of the end goal of the eLearning project. This makes it critical to fully discover the organization's needs from the top to the bottom. It is awesome that currently most companies have the buy-in already established for eLearning. There were many years where even in meetings the executives were promoting online learning and managers were resisting or vice versa.

2 Communicate Project Goals

Now, the key is to work with all the levels affected by the training to get their input. After communicating one on one with each stakeholder, then it is recommended to go back to the entire group of the stakeholders to present your full understanding of the entire goals for the eLearning project. If key people are left out or concerns are addressed in a group setting only, you may not get the fullest picture.

3 Start Off With A Well-Planned Curriculum

After completing the process of discovery then present your findings and plan to the group, thereby covering the basis of all levels of user's needs. It does take time to do this but starting off with a well-planned curriculum, if you will, is a critical key to success. Taking the time to do this ensures that you will please most of the stakeholders, thus, making the majority happy.

Happy clients usually become repeat clients!



DORAL ANDERSSON
ELearning Consultant
[E-CONCEPTS, INC.](#)

Seek and consult with organizations to create solutions for educational/training programs through online and on-site programs.



BY **ETHAN EDWARDS**
Chief Knowledge Officer
[ALLEN INTERACTIONS](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Our industry is still plagued with eLearning designs that focus too much on content, that is, what the learner needs to know. I believe eLearning Instructional Design should focus on what the learner needs to do. The interactivity we design for eLearning must require the learner to do something that is cognitively demanding and that leads to improved performance. So how do you create a successful eLearning course that achieves this? The answer is CCAF (Context, Challenge, Activity, Feedback). The CCAF Design Model drives instructional purpose and interactivity for each learning project.

1 The 4 Elements Of CCAF

Context: a meaningful framework and conditions.

Challenge: a stimulus or urgency to act.

Activity: a physical response or gesture in response to the challenge.

Feedback: the reflection back to the learner about the effectiveness of their actions.

What's the importance? Instructional interactivity is what engages the learner's mind to do those things that improve ability and readiness to perform effectively. I believe that this is the key to authentic, scenario-driven eLearning experiences that get people to think differently, act differently, and work differently.

2 Towards Performance Outcomes

Here are 3 tips for you to create eLearning courses that will help you achieve your performance outcomes:

- 1 Enhance the learner's motivation and desire to learn
- 2 Focus the learner on behavior-enhancing tasks
- 3 Create meaningful and memorable learning experiences which transfer to effective job performance

If you can come up with the Context, Challenge, Activity, and Feedback for any topic for your audience, you can design learning experiences that are right for them. And, not just learning experiences, but learning experiences that are meaningful, memorable, motivational, and measurable.



ETHAN EDWARDS
Chief Knowledge Officer
[ALLEN INTERACTIONS](#)

I am passionate about the design of engaging interactive e-learning. My strength as a designer lie in crafting real-world challenges and actions into meaningful contextual frameworks.



BY FREDDIE BATISTA
Director Of ELearning & Business Development
GREAT HEALTHWORKS

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

The very first thing you need to do is figure out if you're an Instructional Designer or an Instructional Developer. Unfortunately, several companies believe that Instructional Designers can do both, but they truly can't. They may know how to use the software but the truth is they're really designers. Once you determine your role, the next thing is to make sure the storyboard is created. This gives you the ability to think outside the box. The designer can give their input into the storyboard such as "adding interactivity" or "assessment", but the true work comes from your development skills and your passion for the art of eLearning. Once you have received the storyboard, make sure the following items are addressed by the designer before the stakeholder signs off:

- 1** Document formatted according to template.
- 2** Grammatically reviewed.
- 3** Objectives listed.
- 4** Graphics included.
- 5** Graphics in correct format.
- 6** Knowledge checks, minimum 3 questions.
- 7** Knowledge checks with answers and feedback for all answers.
- 8** Knowledge checks provided as typed "text" in storyboard format, not as images.
- 9** Assessment, indicate whether SCORM tracking will be necessary.

- 10 Assessment questions with answers and feedback for all answers.
- 11 Assessment provided as typed “text” in storyboard format, not as images.
- 12 Facilitator Guides.
- 13 Narration text clearly identified.
- 14 Separation of content text for narration and text for slide.
- 15 Images for development of module, required images for content message.
- 16 Description of desired images for message conveyance. Screenshots.
- 17 Clear description of where screenshots will be used in the module.
- 18 Audio file, if this storyboard includes a call, or audio interactivity. Clear description for audio file placement. If the audio file requires dividing into sections, provide:
 - a) Section titles, and how it is to be used
 - b) Exact section length, exact start and end point of each.
 - c) Section in minutes or seconds, using window media player.
 - d) Available PowerPoint presentation for topic.

Once the items above have been addressed and checked off, the development can start. Once you have completed your work, make sure a second and third set of eyes quality review your work and, make sure all items within the course, such as layers, timing, buttons etc., function correctly.



FREDDIE BATISTA
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Freddie Diaz Batista is a revolutionary Training and Development Expert with over 20 years of experience in hands-on learning and instructional system design/development. Freddie has pioneered the adaptation of open-source LMS's and eLearning environments for both Corporations and Government Agencies.



BY HANNAH WYSOME
Solutions Consultant At Kineo
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What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Back in the mists of time, my old English language teacher taught me the maxim “Audience, Purpose, Tone” when approaching any piece of creative writing. 20 years later, it’s the foundation of my approach to designing custom eLearning content.

Having adapted these principles to eLearning and adding in a few of my own, here are five top tips for creating memorable, effective learning solutions.

1 Audience: Who Is It For?

You might know why a piece of learning’s been commissioned, but what do you know about the people on the other side of the screen? It’s rare that your eLearning audience is ever homogeneous in terms of learning style and motivation. That’s why creating personas upfront, running focus groups and trialling prototypes with the audience base are crucial parts of the development process. There’s a great, albeit NSFW, line in Under Siege 2 about the danger of assumption, so involve your end-users from the earliest possible point. This feedback loop also helps you build project advocates from within.

2 Purpose: What Is The Learning Need?

At the start of any project, it’s great to identify your aspirational learning objectives. These guide the script development and also give you a firm foundation for evaluation and benchmarking. However, it’s important to critique these objectives, asking yourself, can the eLearning cover all of these within the desired learner time? Is the eLearning going to help a learner achieve that objective on its own? If they can’t, refine your objectives so that the eLearning packs its best punch as part of a wider blend.

3 **Tone: Are You Striking The Right Chord?**

As much as I love a well-crafted sentence, the reality is that our attention span for on-screen reading is pretty poor. Source content can often be too long, too dry and too passive. A great edit can distil the content into its purest form. Tone-of-voice guidelines are usually written from the point of view of how a company talks to their customers, not their staff, which can lead to a sense of detachment. eLearning shouldn't feel top-down, or create a "them and us" culture, so think about how the tone of voice can boost inclusion and support. With feedback text in mind, there's a big difference between "No, that's wrong. Try again", and "Not quite. Think about X,Y and Z before trying again". Small tonal changes can have a big impact.

4 **Journey: It Is Not Just About The Destination**

From a content perspective, the eLearning you've just produced might be the absolute jewel in the crown. You're excited about it and so is your client, but what about your users? Do they know the learning's coming? Do they know what it's for? Do they know how to find it? How many clicks will it take them to open the learning? Can they find it again to refresh their knowledge quickly at point of need? Does it work offline? This overall user experience has a huge bearing on the effectiveness of your eLearning, so ask these questions from the outset.

5 **Application: Is It Day-To-Day Useful?**

So you've completed your office fire safety eLearning, you can identify the label of a CO2 fire extinguisher and you've got your certificate. But, do you know where the fire exits are in your office? Can you get out alive in the event of an emergency? If not, what was the point of the eLearning? For me, eLearning has most impact as a catalyst for action and change. It's a safe environment for practice, but the real learning comes in trying it for real, reflecting, and then refining your approach.



HANNAH WYSOME
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With over 10 years' experience of creating immersive, high-impact onscreen learning solutions for a range of audiences from pre-schoolers to CEOs, Hannah is one of Kineo's most versatile team members. Collaborative, consultative and creative.



BY JANE LUNT
Client Solutions Consultant
WALKGROVE

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

1 Know The Organisation

Even within a single sector, every organisation is different. They have different values. Different learning cultures. Get to know the organisation you're developing for to find out how your eLearning solution will be promoted and used. Are they just dipping their toes into eLearning development? That gives you a great opportunity: they'll look to you for guidance. Are they seasoned customers with a large training catalogue? Then you have the chance to find out what has been successful in the past, and what, if anything, they want to be different this time round. Knowing the organisation is the first step to creating a successful eLearning solution.

2 Understand The Subject

As a training developer, you'll be asked to create eLearning solutions on a wide range of subjects. Unless you're lucky enough to be tasked with working on a topic you specialise in, you'll need to work with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), or if they're not available from the organisation, to source your own. While it's sometimes possible for you to conduct your own research, remember that the information will need to be reviewed by someone from within the organisation who can ensure that it's right for them.

SMEs often have limited time and a wealth of knowledge far broader than you'll need for the eLearning project. This means you need to come prepared for your meetings with them. Be clear about what they need to provide you with and the best way to do so. Prepare templates that are easy to fill in, asking them to identify the key learning points or MoSCoW rate content, and make sure they understand how much can be covered in the training duration. It's all too easy to struggle, because the expert wants the audience to learn more than they have time for. Be firm and set expectations in the first meeting.

Remember: If you don't understand the subject, your learners won't either.

3 Identify The Audience

Just as you need to get to know the organisation, you need to identify the audience. What does your “average” learner look like? What’s their education level? How much experience do they already have? If possible, organise workshops where prospective learners can give you their perspective. This will let you get information straight from the audience, whose feedback can be invaluable. As you learn more about the audience, you’ll better understand what type of training initiative will suit them.

But some audiences you encounter will have very varied roles and prior experience. How can you create content that meets the needs of all learners? Think about how you might be able to “profile” learners. What overlaps are there between groups? Look for commonalities but if there aren’t many, don’t be afraid to create something that has tailored elements suitable for each group. Even if you can’t develop multiple versions of a course or offer “true” profiling, you can use tools such as diagnostic assessments to enable learners to follow their own learning pathway.

4 Find Their Motivation

The best learners are motivated learners, so where possible, work closely with the organisation to discover what makes them “tick”. Some organisations have a strong learning culture, and if that’s the case, the audience may be naturally motivated. But in most cases, learners need to be extrinsically motivated not just to complete the course and get their certificate of achievement, but to really learn. If it’s clear at the start why this training matters, learners will buy in to the solution and will be motivated to complete it. In some cases, a strong narrative that contextualises the training can really motivate. Alternatively, consider techniques such as gamification, which can cater to many interests. Have you got a competitive audience? Think about adding a leader board so that learners or teams can work together to get the highest mark. Do you want to encourage thoroughness? Reward learners for exploring all areas of the training rather than simply skipping through to the quiz. “Lives”, timers and customisable elements, such as avatars, can all motivate learners to succeed.



JANE LUNT
Client Solutions Consultant
[WALKGROVE](#)

Walkgrove is owned and run by L & D professionals. We never allow ourselves to get caught up in technology when designing a solution. And we never forget that the sound theories of instructional design apply and underpin all effective solutions.



BY JANICE BROWN
Owner
[LARMER BROWN CONSULTING](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

The most important consideration with any type of eLearning content development project, whether it's IT simulation or soft skills training, is the scenario you're going to use to engage and train your learners. It needs to reflect how the learner is going to be challenged to learn the subject matter. There are, of course, basic rules that help to ensure success, such as the use of consistent terminology and offering learning "nuggets", or else, bite-sized chunks, that are easy to digest, but I believe the most important of these is making it as easy as possible for the learners to relate to the scenario. You must think about your learners first and foremost when designing the course!

1 Develop Customised Content

A large proportion of the content that we develop at Larmer Brown is system-based, although we have been involved in some major non-system projects. Regardless of what course we are developing, all of our content is customised. We don't offer library or vanilla content because we believe that the more realistic we can make the eLearning for the learner, the easier it will be for them to understand and learn. More importantly, they will find it more engaging.

2 Use Visual Aids

Part of ensuring that content is relevant to the learner is by introducing visual aids to help consolidate their understanding. For example, we could start the lesson by providing a work flow. This helps the learner understand the end-to-end process and therefore their part in the overall process. By understanding what comes before and after their part in a process, they are more likely to appreciate the importance that their part plays.

3 Make It Job Specific

In addition to this, the other key consideration is to develop the content from a job-role perspective, as opposed to generic or cross functional. This particularly applies to system-based learning. A good example of this, which is relatable for any business, would be a Purchase Order process captured as one recording using a login for an administrator or manager. That's your cross functional end-to-end process. However, as the manager approving the PO in this scenario, for example, you don't need to see the overall workflow and understand how it all works, but you only need to know how to approve the PO, that is your part in the process, and not other parts, such as how the administrator raises the PO, or what goods receivable will do once the PO has been approved.

4 Work With Subject Matter Experts

When it comes to getting down to the nitty gritty of developing your eLearning content, for example, capturing and recording the scenario, the bottle-neck is more often than not the Subject Matter Expert or process owner who has the knowledge. In some cases, this knowledge may be easy to transfer in a document or PowerPoint, but there are now very simple and easy to use content development tools designed specifically for SMEs to use to capture their knowledge quickly, with the option to add notes and audio. Once the basic process and contextual information has been recorded by the SME, it is very easy for the Instructional Designer to build the course.

By continuously thinking about the specific needs of the learner and the role they play in the process, you can ensure that the content is relevant, encouraging engagement in order to get the best results. Creating that customised content by job role using realistic scenarios is a challenge but will reap the greatest rewards.

The key to success is good planning, thinking from the perspective of the learner throughout, knowing the tools you're using, understanding the content, and planning it all out.



JANICE BROWN
Owner
LARMER BROWN CONSULTING

Larmer Brown provides a portfolio learning solutions to support every phase of your learning program, system implementation or upgrade.



BY JARED GARRETT
Senior Instructional Designer
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What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

If you're in the world of custom eLearning content development, you're most likely working with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and at least one project owner or stakeholder. That being the case, you are in danger of the ever-dreaded scope creep, as well as the common and equally terrifying "too many cooks in the kitchen" syndrome.

1 Scope Creep

Scope creep happens when expectations and resource demands are not properly managed. This means that it is on you to make sure the project's deadline, as well as any other milestone deadlines, are as clear as they can be. In establishing these deadlines, you have to be clear with your stakeholder and contributor team as to what your part is and what their part is. So, you collaboratively establish your scope and you make it very clear what the ramifications of any scope changes will be. You're essentially scaring your stakeholders into not expanding the scope, because they understand how onerous it is to change the project while it's in flight.

2 The “Too Many Cooks In The Kitchen” Syndrome

The “too many cooks in the kitchen” syndrome happens when your project has multiple SMEs and stakeholders, all of whom have opinions about how the project should turn out. You have to manage this situation by setting a very clear expectation that you will only take action on input from one single source of truth (SSOT), the Subject Matter Expert. This is your SME Prime. The SME Prime will act as a final reviewer of all input that comes in from other stakeholders and SMEs. So, if there are four other SMEs and each of them has their own opinion on how accurate or complete the topic-level content is, you don’t have to decide who’s right. Your SME Prime does that, and then feeds you the properly vetted content. This leaves topic-level decisions in the hands of the experts, and leaves you available to make creative, learner-obsessed decisions about the learning experience.

To sum up, scare people away from scope creep and designate a SME Prime. This keeps your project under control and inside of scope specifications.



JARED GARRETT
Senior Instructional Designer
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I've led teams for over sixteen years in a variety of settings: foreign language teaching, corporate training, e-Learning, curriculum development, learning and training architecture, and team cultivation and building. Wherever I go, I streamline processes, increase productivity, nurture vision, and help raise morale. I love brightening the light in people's eyes.



BY JOE MCCAHILL, M.ED.
Senior Instructional Designer
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What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Learners have increasingly demanding expectations of sophisticated media and slick design, yet clients haven't yielded on their requirements of quick turnaround times. Rapid development software, such as Articulate Storyline, has done wonders for Instructional Design efficiency, but that increased efficiency too often comes at the expense of high-quality aesthetics.

Here are three ways to quickly achieve the elevated design your stakeholders expect.

1 No One Wants To See Your GUI

While it is important to align your design to the client's brand, that doesn't necessarily mean you should use the bright colors of their logo in your GUI. Consider the follow techniques to ensure that your interface isn't competing with the content for the user's attention.

- While default grey may not seem like the most creative design choice, it can be a great basis for an elegant, user-friendly interface.
- Find other opportunities to incorporate the client's brand palette, such as in the font color for the slide title, or as a background color for the HTML page.
- Keep your interface as clean as possible, removing unnecessary elements like superfluous tabs, links, or player controls.
- Consider a skinless interface; they look great and are easier to create than you think.

Remember, your interface should sit quietly in the background while your content takes center stage.

2 Cherry-Pick Your Pics

When you're on a tight deadline and moving at light speed to complete a leadership course, it can be tempting to grab the first image you find of an executive leading a meeting. Even with time constraints, you must put real thought into how you choose and use your images.

- Does your image fit the mood you are trying to create for your content? Is the person leading the meeting confident or shy? Is the crowd engaged or disinterested?
- Should you crop or rescale the image to focus or direct the learner's attention in some way?
- Take advantage of image sets offered by graphics sites such as Shutterstock and Corbis. That image you grabbed of an executive leading the meeting may be part of a larger collection of related images. He or she could also be found having a one-on-one conversation with a peer or talking on his phone in the hall. Use related images to thread the scenes together and create a more engaging story. And if you don't have a subscription to a graphics site yet, get one immediately.
- Use stock video clips to add depth and life to your content. Video clips can work beautifully for section title slides.

Give Your Form A Function.

Once you've carefully selected your images, give thoughtful consideration to their placement.

- If it's a full-bleed image, that is, not a cutout, or an image on a single color background, anchor it to at least one, ideally three, side of your content stage.
- Graphics at bottom right and text at top left is a Western standard, and it works. Stick with that, but deviate for purposeful effect.
- When designing a slide, pause to consider its abstract shape. Every screen has a form to it. From slide to slide, these forms can be used to support or undermine your message. Design your forms accordingly.



JOE MCCA HILL, M.ED.
Senior Instructional Designer
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15 years' experience as an education and technology designer and consultant. Additional notable experience and training in IA & UX design, including mobile and responsive design, and product management.



BY KEVIN BRAKE
Instructional Systems Designer
WORKPLACE SAFETY AND
INSURANCE BOARD

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

When I started in this field all my training solutions were custom. Development teams were big sometimes consisting of: Graphic designer, 3D Animator, Screen Recorder, Video Capture, Video Editor, Audio Capture, Audio Editor, Technical Writer, Script Writer, Storyboarder, Graphical User Interface Developer, Project Manager, Programmers, Webmaster, LMS Admin.

When teams were of this size, we were able to build functions and features on the fly without restrictions. The only real limitation was our drive to deliver the best solution. Today, development is more about how to manipulate an existing box and edit prepackaged products, rather than how to create a unique, out-of-the-box solution, that is, develop unique products. The reason for this shift is the demand to save money and push out more products faster.

So, today's eLearning developers need to figure out how to use a prepackaged tool to create unique products. Here are my tips for successful custom eLearning content development:

1 Learn The Limitations Of Your LMS And Development Tools

Knowing where the limitations of both your Learning Management System and your development tools lie, is of vital importance.

2 Learn How To Use JavaScript

This is a way to expand your content beyond the limitations and restrictions of your LMS and development tools.

3 Learn A Programming Language

Learning a programming language, such as Perl, PHP, ASP or other, will permit you to store variables.

4 Publish To HTML5

If you are using Articulate Storyline 2, publish to HTML5 to avoid issues with the mobile player.

5 Start To Migrate

You should start migrating from traditional Adobe Flash Development towards HTML5.

6 SCORM Complaint Does Not Mean SCORM Reliant

Some of my best and most popular products use my own custom tracking systems.

7 Adapt To Change

You should be able to adapt to change and not limiting yourself to one tool or one way for developing learning solutions. When something does not work, figure out a way that it could work and make an adaptor to solve your training issue. Love your family! Enjoy what you do!



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I have been involved with many major education, business and technology projects. I bring the skills you need to make your next project a success. At my current position, I provide a combination of Instructional Design, eLearning, Application Development and SharePoint Development Services.



BY KIM GILLHAM
Learning Experience Design Consultant
VISUMATION

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Engagement Isn't Always The Coolest Person At The Party

Many leading Instructional Design experts tell us we need to engage with our learners, grab their attention, for the most effective learning transfer. John Keller (2016), built his model of motivational design where 'Attention' sits at the apex. Likewise, Gagne's 9 Events of instruction (1965, cited in UF, 2016), rightly places "Gain attention" as the first thing you need to do when preparing for learning.

How Do We Do This?

We've all come across that cool person at a party who is amazingly well dressed, full of interesting experiences, and more than happy to share them. Sharing often involves standing around and listening to them talk all about their amazing experiences. But the conversation is very one way, and it gets boring pretty quickly, as you can't really connect with someone who is just talking about themselves.

One of the great things about custom content is its flexibility to be designed for engagement. But, like the coolest person at the party, it is often a good-looking, polished interface that's disguising a medium for content delivery. It might be a good-looking store of really amazing information, but that doesn't make it engaging, and certainly isn't the best approach to designing learning.

1 Start By Questioning

Generally, in order to feel engaged, we need to involve the audience in the conversation. We can do this by using effective questioning in order to extract from within about what they already know (Herbert, 2014). Ok, so let's consider this, which approach would you find more engaging? Being told, "Approximately 23% of the global population uses Facebook", or being asked "What percentage of the global population do you think use Facebook?" A. 12%, B. 23%, C. 46%, D. 52% (Statista, 2016). >

(Cont) Client feedback tells me, engaging through deliberately constructed questioning, is more stimulating, which isn't any new discovery though. Ausubel (as cited in ECU, 2014), identified this approach in 1960, and his advance organisers prepare learners thinking to align with the next new concept, and linking statements stimulate recall of previous learning. Questioning is one of the most effective ways of achieving this, often by using a single or multi-answer question approach, scenarios, and similar. The important thing is that your audience is engaged with the activity, not just told "stuff". Further, opportunities for practice (Boud & Posser as cited in AUCT, 2003; Keller, 2016) provide opportunities for the learner to cement their knowledge, and allow for the provision of timely, made-to-measure feedback.

2 Create Opportunities For Practice

The trick here is to recognise opportunities to create these experiences, these simulated synchronous conversations, anytime you find yourself writing a definition, explaining a fact, listing a group or series of points, explaining the difference between two concepts, or you turn the words into a question or scenario. The reality is that this takes more time and effort, but at the end of the day, your audience doesn't want an average course; they want an extraordinary learning experience. And, you can engage learners on every level of Bloom's taxonomy, using an appropriately aligned tool that may be a question, a scenario or any other activity (Frangenheim, 2013, July 17a; 2013, July 17b).

So, go forth and conquer, and be that extraordinary designer. Be the one who creates those most extraordinary experiences for your audience, within which to immerse themselves, and learn.

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KIM GILLHAM
Learning Experience Design Consultant
VISUMATION

As a child, I enjoyed playing teachers, as a Mum I loved making up activity books for my children to learn and play with, and as an adult here I am designing interactive learning experiences for people of all ages and backgrounds.



BY LARRY WADE
Curriculum Development Group Manager
AMATROL, INC

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Amatrol is the leading American company that creates eLearning courses for high schools, community colleges, universities, and industrial training centers focused on Advanced Manufacturing and Industrial Maintenance. Our team of Subject Matter Experts, programmers, and graphic artists has created thousands of hours of eLearning over the years. We hope these tips, based on that experience, will prove valuable to you.

1 Use Multiple Subject Matter Experts

Amatrol's curriculum developers are Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in their field of responsibility. During the writing process, our developers consult with other experts working in the industry to ensure that the curriculum teaches best practices and is not skewed to a specific industry's application of that technology. Integrating real-world applications into the curriculum, garnered from multiple SMEs, makes the topic come alive to learners.

2 Interactions In eLearning Must Have Value

To some eLearning developers, "interaction" mainly means clicking a button to launch a video or animation. Technically, that is an interaction. However, adding true value to the interaction will engage the learner at a much higher level that results in a greater retention and understanding of a subject. For instance, an interaction that has the learner select and then drag-and-drop the appropriate valve into a hydraulic circuit, requires the learner to make a decision, based on a deeper understanding of the topic. If this is then followed with a virtual control panel that can be operated to energize the circuit, the learner would receive immediate feedback regarding their choice.

3 Don't Underestimate The Time Required

Be careful not to underestimate the amount of time required to create an eLearning course. We frequently talk to instructors that started creating an eLearning course, but due to teaching obligations, they never found the time to finish it. We recommend that before you start a project, lay out the entire process identifying all the steps and resources that will be required. An eLearning course typically requires you to create an outline, write content, develop graphics, program interactions, and create assessments. A high-quality, one hour multimedia course may take over 400 hours of work! Lastly, don't forget to anticipate additional time down the road, as the course needs to be updated as industry standards change.

4 Curriculum Must Provide Measureable Outcomes

A successful eLearning course must provide measureable outcomes that align with industry standards, prepare learners for a certification, or provide a foundation for a more advanced course. Before starting a new course, talk to local industries and ask them if new employees are missing specific skills or about positions that cannot be filled due to missing skill sets. Let these needs guide your efforts.

5 The WOW Factor

We've indicated that a successful eLearning course must have relevant content, interactions that provide value, and measurable outcomes, but we would be remiss to ignore that eLearning must have a WOW factor. Amatrol's graphic artists are constantly honing their skills and developing new ones to stay current with today's eLearning expectations of high-end graphics. The best content in the world will go to waste if it doesn't engage and energize the learner. Stunning graphics, 3D animations, and interactive situations can add sizzle to an eLearning course. Let's face it: this generation of learners expects a highly visual learning experience and if your course lacks the WOW factor, the learner will tune out and the teaching opportunity is lost.



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Larry is a Manufacturing Engineer with 20 yrs of experience developing industrial training curriculum. He is currently Amatrol's Marketing Manager. Amatrol creates technical training systems for educational & Industrial training facilities worldwide.



BY LAUREN GRANAHAN
Manager, Organizational Effectiveness
[SWEETRUSH INC.](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

One of my favorite tips for developing exceptional eLearning content is to collaborate with others in the up-front stages when you're designing your solution. Research has shown that group work invariably produces a stronger result, regardless of the project at hand—and so it is with eLearning. Here are five rules I follow when thinking through a learning solution:

1 Write A Creative Brief

Write a creative brief that summarizes the challenge, learning objectives and audience and gives a high-level overview of existing content for everyone to read before your brainstorming session. It is also important that everyone understands the constraints of the project (budget, timeline, technology) in advance.

2 Bring In Teammates With Various Skills And Perspectives

Instructional Designers, creative designers, and technical developers all can lend different points of view and offer very different, innovative ideas to solve a learning challenge. Think also: Is there anyone on your team that represents the learner audience demographic? Definitely invite that person to the party!

3 Draw!

We love to use Lucid Chart to draw and create flowcharts for our learning designs. It's a wonderful tool because you can collaborate in real time in virtual work environments like ours. If you don't have a license for Lucid Chart, the same tasks can be done in Google Docs or Google Slides.

4 Hold At Least An Hour—Maybe More

It's also sometimes useful to have one session, then go away and think independently, and then regroup the next day to settle on a final idea. For a recent project, after our initial session, two of us worked independently to flesh out two very different ideas. Then we used the second session as a “showdown” where we pitched our ideas to the others in the group. The final result was a hybrid of both ideas—elements were adopted that I never would have thought of, if I just designed the solution alone.

5 Remain Open

No idea is a bad one. Maybe it's a little cliché, but it's true. Off-the-wall ideas often generate more moderate, feasible innovations to a project. If you just have time for one session, consider structuring your time as follows:

- At the start of the session, let the ideas fly freely for 10–15 minutes; capture them.
- Use the next 15 or so minutes to focus on two to three contenders.
- Home in on one solution, teasing out the details in the final 30 minutes.

I find that after a session like this, I can grab the baton and take the solution over the finish line. I am so grateful to be surrounded by people with different points of view who allow my solutions to benefit from their uniqueness—and suggest you try it too!



LAUREN GRANAHAN
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As a Solution Architect, Lauren follows her passions every day—applying her skills in instructional design, project management, process improvement, and leadership to help her clients develop their best asset: their people.



BY MAJA KATINIĆ
Learning Architect/Trainer
EWYSE

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

eLearning content development can be compared to any other development of IT output, but not quite, and that's the beauty of it. It requires a complex, thorough, meaningful and creative approach. There are several necessary steps in this process.

1 Develop A Relationship

First, develop an honest and trustworthy relationship with a client and with learners, if possible. This kind of relationship will bring variety of knowledge, skills and attitudes to the table, with everyone having the same objective in mind.

2 Involve Your Client In The Process

Second, teach your client and involve them in the process. We, in eWyse, always invest time and money to visit the client before we start designing and developing. The purpose of our visit is to explain to all stakeholders what we are doing and why, but also to set up design guidelines. This speeds up the process and improves team work.

3 Focus On The Learner

Third, always think about the end-user, the learner. The learner is the one who will enjoy and learn from your course and, in the end, he or she should be happy about the knowledge gained. No matter how cool the design is, a learner will never judge a book by its cover, but rather by its value and usefulness.

4 Avoid Boring “Click Next” Content

Forth, use all the tools and technology you can get, especially if your learners are young. There are so many cool tools, gadgets and features out there, so there are no more excuses for making boring “Click next” content.

5 Get Feedback

Last, but not least, test your output. Do not just check if every button works or if the video is loading. Test the core of the content on everyone you can find, colleagues, other eLearning professionals, friends, even your mom. This will provide an objective feedback from different perspectives, something that you will definitely appreciate.

Don't be afraid to become an eLearning expert or developer. It's a rewarding job. One that makes you constantly learn and grow.



MAJA KATINIĆ
Learning Architect/Trainer
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My responsibilities include helping companies, NGOs and academic sector design and implement technology-based mobile/social learning solutions. As a lead Instructional designer, I manage projects and everyone involved in them. I write and design educational programs, deliver training courses and write blog and articles.



BY MARGARET DEMPSEY
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What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

If we examine why projects struggle, the root cause often boils down to a lack of relationship building or appropriate estimation of effort. These are often the underlying reasons why an eLearning project may be at risk of not meeting its deadline, and sacrificing on quality, ultimately failing to lead to learning outcomes. Here are some tips that address the heart of these problems to create successful eLearning experiences that stick:

1 Recognize The Importance Of Wearing Many Hats

It's not unusual to have clients excited about a concept they have in mind, but lack understanding of why it may not address the learning need. You now have to show them how another approach will lead to better retention of learning outcomes for their diverse audience. Roll up your sleeves because first you will play psychologist to listen and evaluate what it is they like about their idea that may be incorporated. Next, you'll switch to your Instructional Design analysis hat to ask questions and determine what intervention will be the best fit. Lastly, you will play consultant as you offer recommendations and examples of how they can attain measurable results. Remember, clients will be more likely to embrace a solution if they see the benefits.

2 Leverage The Power Of Prototyping: Visualization And Accessibility With Purpose Is Key

Clients often come across trends they think they should adopt. However, the discovery process may reveal factors that make these requests unrealistic. These may range from tight deployment deadlines, changing Learning Management Systems, "wow-factor" requests that will not impact learning to an infrastructure that isn't ready to support the desired technology. For example, limited Wi-Fi access in buildings, regions, or hourly employees who would need devices or dedicated computer access. In these cases, it is helpful to develop prototypes that show how the learning goals are attainable through methods that align with budget, timeline, and technology constraints. The power of prototyping is that it gives the client a choice >

(Cont) regarding what is most important to them: the deadline, the quality, or the cost, before it begins to affect the full scope of project development.

4 Realize That Relationship Building Can Make Or Break A Successful Partnership And Project

It's common practice to have an agreement regarding process and what constitutes an acceptable "revision" at each phase to help projects stay on track. However, the synergy between external partners and internal project teams is also critical as motivated, empowered individuals who feel their contributions are valued will produce a better product. When this synergy falls apart, the blame games start. If you've had a successful relationship with another department within the organization or a similar company, invite them to act as champions who can share their positive experiences during, or prior to the onboarding process. Work toward creating a culture where communication and collaboration is encouraged, roles and tasks are clearly defined, concerns are heard, and wins are shared. A positive relationship also assists with the change management process. I've seen significant differences in the reception of change request implications. For example, the training may not be delivered on time when the relationship is well-established. Ultimately, a positive working relationship better equips SMEs and clients to prioritize "Nice to have" vs. "Need to have" changes, and recognize when change requests may be out of scope.

5 Be Realistic And Get Buy-In From All Players

I once worked with a Project Manager who assigned roles to complete their tasks in two weeks. Can you see a flaw in this approach? Not all tasks are created equal as some require more time than others. Certain reviewers, such as legal, may need more time to provide their expertise, and it's never advisable to shorten the timeline for steps like testing to compensate for lost time at the end of the project. A better approach is to track the time it takes to complete each task across your project portfolio. This will not only give you estimates for each task, but show how these estimates may change based on complexity. Using such a benchmark will help you create an accurate project schedule you can put in front of all the players to attain buy-in and block their schedules for task completion.



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BY MARIE S. LEWANDOWSKI M.ED
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PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY THE OFFICE
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What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Blind students are taking Astronomy fully online. The course, written to universal accessibility standards, is full every term. Storytelling, braille, audio, captioned videos and materials from NASA bring the course to life. Astronomy is comprised of mathematical equations that are plotted on tactile maps and sent to students. The uniqueness of the course, in addition to its universal inclusion, results in an interesting and fun class.

1 Thorough Research Analysis

Creation of customized content for academic coursework or corporate training initiatives provides a unique and exciting window of opportunity for reinvention, branding and individuality. Branding gives your content product a positive and unique identity that can scale and align to future eLearning development.

The core of custom eLearning content development begins with a solid body of research on your given course content topic. Leave no research stone unturned: This includes gathering data about your eLearning content, which includes learner feedback, evaluation, and assessments. Data can drive the design of your course material by revealing key topics for additional instruction and identify learning gaps. The core of rich and engaging content is weaving qualitative and quantitative data to design assessment and knowledge retention.

Work in tandem with your Subject Matter Expert to provide content, review and edit. The Subject Matter Expert is a valuable consultant for beta testing prior to a preview release to learners. Librarians are valuable because of their access to specialized inquiries. It is also important to review off-the-shelf and commercial products of your content subject to compare and contrast.

2 Thorough Audience Analysis

Conduct a thorough analysis of your audience; this will drive the course content research and development. Gather past evaluations, assessments and interview your learners, find out what they need and why. Who is the learner or customer you are serving? What specific information do they need? What do you want the learner to do with the information? Will you be teaching this student one time or will they be returning for additional courses?

There are three types of audience analysis:

- Demographic: gender, age range, marital status, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status
- Psychographic: values, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs
- Situational: characteristics related to the learning environment

3 Learning Outcomes & Objectives

Clarify the overarching learning outcome into a clear statement that describes the learning goals. Learners need clear instructions. Learning objectives are comprised of three parts:

- Statement of what students will be able to do when they have completed instruction.
- The conditions under which the student will perform the task.
- The criteria for evaluating student performance

It is beneficial to use tools to help write succinct learning outcomes, by referring back to Bloom's Taxonomy, ADDIE, Wiggins and McTighe, SAM, the Sub Approximation model.

- Knowledge Level: Recognize or recall learned information. Verbs: list, record, define, memorize, recognize
- Comprehension Level: Restate or interpret information in their own words. Verbs: explain, describe, report, and translate
- Application Level: Use or apply the learned information. Verbs: apply, solve, perform, and demonstrate
- Analysis Level: Examine the learned information critically. Verbs: calculate, distinguish, critique, categorize
- Synthesis Level: Create new models using the learned information. Verbs: plan, build, create, and design
- Evaluation Level: Assess or judge the value of learned information. Verbs: review, justify, assess, and defend

4 Creative Writing, Storytelling, Gamification

No one wants to be bored with tedious and uninteresting content. Inspire your learners with creative writing, by weaving storytelling into each learning module and use short videos to emphasize points. Use comedy and humor to make the learning objectives memorable. Research historical and current themes even if you are creating content for safety training, corporate policies or a math course. Build and write several games into the course to keep students motivated and engaged, and provide assessment data. In the gamification 2020 report, Gartner predicts that “gamification, combined with other emerging trends and technologies will have a significant impact on innovation, employee performance design, higher education globalization, customer engagement platforms, personal development”.

5 Flexible Content Mobile Learning

Businesses are offering mobile employee training, and universities enterprise Learning Management Systems which can be viewed on mobile. Map out where the eLearning content fits into the larger organizational structure. Keep your content flexible and scaffolded so that it can be outlined and reorganized to responsive learning. Content will have to be succinct with assessment and evaluation and universal design for accessibility.

In conclusion, conduct a thorough research analysis of your topic and learners. Use creative writing and storytelling to make your course compelling and inspirational. Take a close look at the outcomes and objectives, making sure they are clear and measurable. Have content ready for responsive and mobile learning environments. Take these steps to create a custom and successful eLearning brand.



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BY MARINA ARSHAVSKIY
Senior Instructional Designer
YOUR ELEARNING WORLD

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Unlike classroom-based training, eLearning has one big limitation: Instructors and learners are separated, often by time, distance or a combination of both. Designing custom eLearning content under these circumstances is a challenge.

Ultimately, being effective is all about the learning objectives that you need to achieve. Here are some best practices that you can use to help you customize your content and make your eLearning courses more effective.

1 Understand Learning Objectives

Before you start, understand what it is that the course needs to accomplish. Is it to on-board new hires? Do you want to enhance on-the-job performance? Are learners being helped to remember and recall new policies and procedures? Everything you do from this point onwards, in terms of building your eLearning content, must focus on achieving those objectives.

The client, or the course sponsor, is the one who will help you set those objectives. A detailed discussion with the relevant party is likely your first order of business.

2 Understand Who Your Audience Is

You could do this by interviewing or polling prospective learners, or by questioning/interviewing the course sponsors. A deeper understanding of your audience will help you frame your content in a way that will be highly engaging and effective for them. For instance, new hires may need content that walks them through the basics, whereas enhancing skills of seasoned staff might need more advanced, hands-on type of content.

3 Match Knowledge Gaps With Learning Objectives

In order to customize the content you are developing, you need to make sure you are delivering content that is truly useful, and not just spinning out material that learners are already familiar with. Once you nail down your learning objectives, take time to ascertain gaps between current skills or knowledge levels, and the desired outcomes. Then, focus on bridging those gaps with appropriate content, exercises and quizzes.

4 Contextualize Your Learning Objectives

Regardless of how well you think you know who your audience is, and what it is they are looking to learn, it is absolutely crucial to contextualize the objective to specific cognitive outcomes. Use Bloom's Taxonomy to help you accomplish this. For instance, if hands-on application (Applying) is the desired level of cognition, then produce content that will help your learners enhance on-the-job performance, as opposed to producing content that helps with recalling (Remembering) a series of processes or procedures.

5 Match Assessments To Learning Objectives

Make sure the assessment techniques used to customize your content match the learning objectives. In the above example, where job performance improvement is the objective, using fill-in-the-blanks (FIBs), or Multiple Choice questions (MCQs), might not be a good idea. Instead, use of case studies and role playing exercises might better help assess learning absorption and polish job-related skills.

6 Match Delivery Strategies To Learning Objectives

Each learning objective can best be served by a specific content delivery approach. Selecting how you deliver the content will determine your effectiveness at accomplishing your learning objectives. For instance, scenario-based delivery might be excellent for compliance training, while a simulation might be a better strategy for shop-floor skills enhancement.

Following these tips and best practices, will ensure that your eLearning content is customized to deliver exactly what your learners need.



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Marina Arshavskiy is the owner of Your eLearning World, an eLearning company committed to helping organizations become more effective by creating groundbreaking, result-oriented learning solutions. Marina has consulted extensively with private organizations and government entities, both in the United States and abroad.



BY MARTIN BROWN
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LEARNING MAKERS PTY LTD

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

These days, I have been exclusively working on Information Technology Systems training. The biggest challenge I have faced so far is designing processes that can withstand last-minute changes. The following two principles and five tips are based on my experience in meeting the “change challenge” for software and systems training. I’m sure that all eLearning designers have faced similar issues at times, so I hope this helps.

1 Design As If You Had To Make Last Minute Changes

Better still, design as if you knew someone else is going to make those changes. I learnt this lesson while working in the technical publications team of a major software vendor. The vendor released a new version of their products every year, at the same time with no exceptions. So, new feature development had to be completed months ahead of the release date to leave time for testing, bug fixing, updating documentation and translating into twelve languages.

Development continued after the “freeze” date, but “in theory”. Those features that were not ready in time were slated for the following year’s release. I say “in theory” because the commercial reality is that when the ‘killer’ feature is ready for testing a week after the upcoming release, it’s not going to wait for another twelve months to get to the market. So, the testers, the technical publications team and the translators were suddenly doing night shifts until the day the product was shipped.

As a matter of fact, my role in the technical publications team was to create how-to videos to help onboard users to understand new features. So, when the new feature arrives late, it may just mean one more how-to video. On the other hand, if the new feature spawns a new button on the Home tab of the ribbon, over 50% of the screenshots need to be recaptured. If the translation has commenced, then the rework effort is multiplied by twelve.>

(Cont) Over the years, I have been faced with the trauma of dealing with ridiculously late changes in almost every software or systems eLearning project. Here is my strategy distilled into three tips:

- 1** Educate, and then keep reminding stakeholders about the impact of late changes to the software, systems or subject matter on training or eLearning content. Be assertive, but respectful, and always remember that this “soft” approach will never work on its own.
- 2** Create templates, and then build them out into self-contained development toolkits. Include pre-configured assets in hidden slides and embedded instructions for developers. Configure all relevant project preferences and settings in the template.
- 3** Write and maintain a documentation package that includes a design strategy or rationale, development processes, style guides and guidelines for reviewers.

2 Make Everything As Simple As It Can Be, But Not Simpler

This has been taken from a famous quote of Albert Einstein transforming it into a call to action; “Everything should be as simple as it can be, but not simpler”.

While developing software demos using slide-based screen recording, I used to labour over getting the demo to look exactly like the real system. I’d fret about the cursor shape changing from a pointer to a hand at just the right moment in its path. I’d make sure to emulate the behaviour of screen items changing state, as the cursor rolled over them, and this placed a significant burden on the development effort.

One day, I decided to see what would happen if I just put the video out there without any simulated reality tricks. I used only a pointer cursor, even where it should have been a hand. I let the cursor roll over objects without any special effects. Then, I sent the video out for review hoping that not too many reviewers would notice the lack of reality. I wasn’t quite sure how many they would be but I knew that if I could get away with this minimalist approach, I could then save a lot of development time.

To my amazement, I received no feedback about wrong cursor shapes or missing rollover effects. Reviewers may have noticed but they clearly didn’t think it was important. It’s been more than ten years since that experiment and I’ve continued with this strategy ever since. I’ve created hundreds of videos and I haven’t yet received any feedback about discrepancies in cursor behaviour. Not even one comment. Now, I can say that my design is “as simple as it can be”, and my audience has confirmed that it is “no simpler”.>

(Cont) Here are my action tips for making things as simple as they can be, but no simpler:

- Analyse your design regularly and always look for ways to simplify the design.
- Don't be scared to experiment on real users. It is the best way to test your assumptions and validate your design strategy. You might be surprised by what they think is important and what is not.



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Transitioning from a career in electronic engineering to technical writing and then to eLearning development, Martin now specialises in creating online training solutions for onboarding users to software and systems.



BY MATTHEW MASON
Award Winning Instructional Designer
SUPERB LEARNING

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

The three most effective tips for successful custom eLearning content development align with the first three principles of our Superb methodology.

1 Using Stories To Deliver Content

Once upon a time, stories were used to teach. They were used to deliver powerful meaning and messages. They were fables, bedtime stories and fairy tales. Stories were told around a campfire or more recently, read in books or watched in an engaging animation or film. In today's learning environment, eLearning often becomes a massive data dump. We are ignoring the value and impact of a good story. Learners are exposed to massive amounts of disengaging content that they can't connect to. They end up unable to see why and how the content applies to them or their jobs.

Stories have the ability to “encapsulate, into one compact package, information, knowledge, context and emotion” (Norman, 1993). That is why you will remember your favourite bedtime story as a child yet struggle to remember what you did at work on Monday. When you use stories as part of your training:

- It grabs and retains learners' attention
- The learning becomes fun as opposed to meeting a list of objectives
- It establishes the content flow, provides context and engages your learners

Because stories communicate best practices and behaviours in a specific context, learners will have a better chance of understanding what you are trying to teach and how they can use that knowledge appropriately. A story contains elements that appeal both to your head and heart, and that's why they work.

So, when developing your eLearning content, use stories, case studies or scenarios and allow opportunities for your learners to practise what you are teaching. Give them options to choose from, allowing them >

(Cont) to see the consequences of their choices. Provide them with the learning as part of the feedback, after they have engaged with the story.

2 Be User Focused

“The medium is the message” (Marshall McLuhan). In other words, how it’s said is just as important as what is said. The way you deliver your message when training will affect and impact how your participants will learn.

Being user focused means making your participants your number one priority because they are the reason you are there. You can do this by:

- Using appropriate design elements to engage and motivate. Adopt user experience design principles that support and enhance the cognitive and affective processes of learning.
- Considering the different experiences and levels of skills and knowledge. Content should not be one size fits all.
- Providing opportunities for users to access content through different means, and be able to pull the content they need, rather than having the content pushed at them.

The focus should also be on the users’ need to be social creatures. By providing the social interaction and opportunity to discuss and learn from each other. By providing social interaction it encompasses attention, memory and motivation. By prioritising your participants experience, you:

- Make your participant feel valued
- Create an engaging and effective experience
- Put your participant in the driver seat
- Create a personalised connection to your content
- Make it easier for your participants to implement what they learned

3 Focus On Performance

Learning and development occurs to develop an individual's skills and knowledge to do something. All learning should be focused with this end goal in mind, focused on the performance that the individual requires. If training isn't directly linked to a change or improvement in performance or to solve a performance-related problem, why bother? Having a performance focus means:

- Training is directly related to the outcomes you need
- Participants will have the confidence to practice the skills they have learnt
- Expectations that performance improvement is required from the participants
- Greater ability to be able to measure performance changes and improvement
- Participants will be able to perform their job role more effectively and efficiently

But let's not forget the financial benefits of focusing on performance. A performance-focused training approach will result in a greater impact on other areas, all of which have a positive impact on the bottom line of the business.

By targeting specific performance outcomes, rather than teaching broadly applicable skills and knowledge that the participant must then figure out how to apply on the job, the training will be more cost-effective and have a greater return on investment. So what do you do to improve your performance focus?

- Make your learning objectives directly related to performance improvement requirements
- Develop practical interactions in the eLearning that your participants can use
- Change the focus from completion to performance
- Define performance measurements that can be assessed back in the workplace

Applying these three tips can help to create successful eLearning content development.



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SUPERB LEARNING

Instructional design specialist working with business to develop quality training resources that result in better training, better outcomes & better returns. I create innovative & engaging online resources, based on good learning experience design.



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What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

While there are dozens of tips I could provide about developing an eLearning course using popular eLearning software, such as Adobe Captivate or Articulate Storyline, I think the most effective tips lie elsewhere.

Deeply Understand The Need

The number one tip I'd like to offer is to deeply understand the need that your eLearning course should address. As content developers, we are often given a project by our superiors or a client, and never really ask why. We then sit down with Subject Matter Experts to understand their content and start to ideate about what possible solutions we could create to illustrate it. Our first thoughts often include jumping right to buzzwords, like microlearning and gamification, to enhance the content and make it more engaging. We are very good at making training interactive, but this tunnel vision often leaves us missing the boat when it's all said and done. From analysis to the final evaluation, our stakeholders and users should be more involved to ensure we cover all of their needs, and to determine that what we are building is the right solution.

Here are my tips to ensure we deeply understand the need:

1 Determining Why

Sitting down with stakeholders is never easy, but it is essential to find out why this project is necessary. Schedule a meeting and get all of your stakeholders to invest some time upfront. This kickoff meeting is crucial to capture their needs as well as determining your project scope. Ask questions like: Why do you believe people need this training? What will happen if the project doesn't get done on time? Can we trade better quality for a bigger budget? Asking these questions will help to establish what is most important to them and help shape a lot of your decisions moving forward.

2 Clearing The Air

After your initial kickoff meeting, send an email to stakeholders listing all of your assumptions about the project. Confirming everything you discussed will help to clear any incorrect assumptions and provide you with documentation about the scope of the project. The only way to fail is to be too vague. Without clarity upfront, the project will end in frustrations and edits.

3 In-Depth Analysis

Here at Cognosante, we use design thinking methods to conduct our analysis. It has helped shape our content development through deep ethnographic research and innovative solutions. You may use any number of different methods to conduct your own analysis, but sit down with your users and see what their day-to-day life looks like, and how this training will fit in. This method will help to determine the true need behind your project and how your users will interact with it on a daily basis.

4 The Paper Prototype

Once you have established your need and have all the content for the project, the next step is what we call the paper prototype. The paper prototype uses large white pieces of paper where you storyboard your designs using hand drawings. It is important to use hand drawings because it allows users to have an immediate reaction to the concepts rather than the visuals. This process provides real feedback to your solutions and helps determine if your users' needs are being met and is also the step where stakeholders can provide their input and have significant buy-in to the project.

5 Pilot Early And Often

Piloting early and often is essential. We want users to have exposure to the project as often as we can. Engage stakeholders for their feedback during big changes and at the end of completed sections. This engagement will ensure you are staying within scope and mitigate last-minute changes that you may not expect. Having users touch the project through each stage ensures they are getting what they need.

You have the tools available to make great projects. Spend the time with your stakeholders, and users, to make the project both meaningful and engaging.



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BY NICHOLAS AVINO
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What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

1 You Are A Producer

Each eLearning course you create will have new demands and responsibilities. As a custom content developer, the more production tools you have the more polished your learning experiences will be. Piecing together your story and assets is like creating a movie. Your talent as an editor and producer will go a long way in telling the story and tackling the unique challenges of each project. No matter what multimedia assets you use, they all share the same need for you, as a good producer, to fit the pieces together in a planned and prepared way.

2 Learn How To Extract Information: Dig, Listen, Learn

Master your client's content. Learn their language and help them learn yours. In any creative project there may be questions the client doesn't know how to ask or in some cases they don't know what they want until they see it. One of your initial tasks is to help the project contributors realize their own vision and build on that. An engaging and memorable learner experience is rooted in the story, and the story is rooted in the script. A good script is rooted in the thoughtful investigation of information so learn how to ask the right questions and you will be off to a great start.

3 Prevent Open-Ended Editing

Client-provided feedback and input are the most essential parts of any project. However, because it is a custom project, the tendency is high to enter an open-ended editing process. No matter how many feedback sources you have, it is very important that you set clear review windows and close them once all feedback has been compiled. Otherwise, the creative collaborations that make our projects so great could end up setting the timeline back if it's not properly managed. Set your schedule and create mutually helpful review guidelines that everyone sticks to.

4 Play Games

How can you stay inspired for creative and sensible design? How can you continue to create fresh and captivating graphics? Play games. This can help you stay up to date and trigger a lot of dormant ideas for user flow, clever storytelling, and gameplay learning. In actuality, playing games is simply what works for me, you will have to find your own muse. Since we, as a company, do in-house film-making as well as eLearning, we find a lot of inspiration from the big screen as well. Movies, television, and world class gaming is our competition now, not from a business standpoint, but from the standpoint of competing for the user's attention and desire to engage.



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I am the co-founder of Origami Rocket® - a full service digital design studio specializing in every stage of custom eLearning production. Whether your course is ready for development or is still an idea sketched on a napkin, we can help you craft your content for launch. eLearning // Interactive Films // Animation



BY PATTI QUINN
Director Of Consulting Operations
MICHAELS & ASSOCIATES

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Before leaping into your next custom eLearning project, here are six solid tips to keep in mind:

1 Ensure Quality Content

If you find yourself more impressed with quantity over quality in your training materials, or you're captivated by the latest trends in technology, you need to stop what you're doing and step away from the computer right now. Offering loads of outdated or unorganized training content will never do the trick, even when presented in a snazzy new way. Instead, focus your efforts by targeting the audience, topics and learning objectives, and you'll develop eLearning that is aligned with your training goals.

2 Acknowledge Their Knowledge

Provide the proper pre-requisite training to appropriate members of your audience to ensure everyone starts off on the right foot. Embrace familiarity and keep things simple. Divide eLearning into manageable chunks for the learners and make it easy to access and support. Once you have the training content mastered, build the courseware using the tools and networks your audience already knows. Learners should know how to walk before they can soar.

3 Make It Personal

Because one size does not fit all, whenever possible, tell stories, build connections, trigger positive associations to create compelling training content that is varied and interactive. Scenarios accelerate learning, promote critical thinking and improve retention. To get the most of your eLearning, find ways to incorporate complimentary content using other delivery platforms. Don't be afraid to break habits, patterns and ruts. Include as many senses and avenues for learning as possible. Pair your eLearning course with a companion workbook, classroom training, discussion forum, peer-learning or job shadowing. Consider what learning styles your audience has and offer a blended training program that meets their needs.

4 Always Plan Ahead

Don't touch anything until you know where it's been, or where it's going. For example, is the content you're developing likely to change next week, month, or year? Information that frequently changes is typically not a good candidate for eLearning. Yet it can often live outside the course, as a document or website, and accessed in the eLearning via a link, making future updates easier to do. Well-designed eLearning is much more efficient to develop, implement and manage for the long term.

5 Expand Your Perspective

Think about the course as it relates to the bigger picture: your development team, key stakeholders, learners and organization. To do this, you'll need to wear lots of hats:

- **Cruise Director:** Ensure all of the right people are onboard.
- **Builder:** Create plans and accommodate the right training infrastructure.
- **Analyst:** Collect and evaluate strategies, data, training content, results, etc.
- **Investor:** Acquire the right financial resources for the project's scope.
- **Promoter:** Encourage communication efforts and market new training initiatives.
- **Tour Guide:** Facilitate transition of training cycles.
- **Super Hero:** Provide help where and when it's needed.
- **Mentor:** Support trainees back on the job and reinforce new skills.
- **Coach:** Encourage learners to participate and guide their own learning.
- **Researcher:** Collect learner participation data, progress, scores and other training results.
- **Catalyst:** Take action on the outcomes that measure success.

6 Provide Training Support

Before an emergency arises, break glass. Sound the alarm. Now. Don't wait for learners to ask for help. Be proactive. As soon as the eLearning launches, have a designated team for back-up and support at the ready. You may be intimately familiar with your training program, but your learners won't be. Do your best to be attentive. Learners will likely need ongoing feedback after training as they apply their new skills. Evaluate results, acknowledge team efforts and reward each learner's new level of comprehension.

Remember, when developing custom eLearning, failure is always an option. Learn to be flexible. If the training fails, then tweak it. Re-evaluate the strategy and don't be afraid to change it up.



PATTI QUINN
Director Of Consulting Operations
MICHAELS & ASSOCIATES

With more than 20 years of experience in assisting and managing custom training design and development. Patti loves to collaborate with others to devise smart, creative breakthroughs and generate solutions that enable the greatest potential for learners. Her passion is to help others grow more confident and effective at their jobs by developing a gold-standard of training all employees deserve.



BY PRIYANKA SAXENA MALHOTRA
Learning Consultant And Trainer
EXULT CORPORATION

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

When customers invest in custom or bespoke eLearning they expect it to be remarkably distinct from off-the-shelf learning content. The customization should be evident in the content treatment approach, solution framework, visual design, as well as relevance of learning for the target audience. Over the years, experience on varied projects and different customers have led me to believe that focusing on the following points leads to successful custom eLearning development.

1 Listen To Your Customer

Can't really emphasize this enough! Engage in discussions with project sponsors and stakeholders to understand the need for training. Don't just go with the explicit reasons! Dig deep and probe to understand the underlying need for the training. Establish how it will change the learner skills or behaviors and what should be its business impact. Responses to these questions should then reflect directly in the solution design. As consultants, we should be able to guide the customers to opt for the most appropriate solution.

2 Understand The Audience's Preferences

Spend some time of the design phase talking to end users, and where it's not possible, float questionnaires to understand the profile of the target audience, such as their geographies, cultural preferences, organization's work and learning culture, whether it is conservative or modern workforce, the breakup of audience groups, that is Gen X, Y, and Millennials, their overall comfort with new trends in eLearning. Reflect this understanding in content presentation and engagement strategies.

3 Involve Different Learning Groups And Stakeholders During Early Phases Of Development

In hindsight, I find the best projects are the ones that have involved and committed stakeholders. Interact early in the project to set expectations about involvement required from Subject Matter Experts and key stakeholders, and communicate regularly during development to avoid surprises. There is wealth of knowledge locked in their minds that can be unlocked in course of regular discussions! It definitely adds value to the training and creates a truly custom content. Parallely, involve various development teams, such as visual design, usability, programming, and QA during course design to facilitate successful and efficient custom development.

4 Design Solutions That Will Promote Best User Adoption

Analyze the work culture and user preferences to understand which kind of eLearning will best deliver the desired business impact. The evolving trends provide Instructional Designers with a wide range of options, such as iPDFs, videos, interactive videos, business simulations, micro modules on mobiles, and game-based learning to choose from, instead of traditional WBTs.

5 Make Learning A Seamless Experience For The Learners

A good custom design should be transparent to the learner. All the Instructional Design theories, models, and course development templates that we implement during course design and development should help creating an engaging learning framework that is invisible to the learner. The learner should focus only on content and the learning experience.

6 Make The Learning Relevant

Invest time in talking to Subject Matter Experts and Role Experts to gather real life examples, experiences, and mistakes and build them into the training content to make the training engaging and relevant for the learners. It helps making the theoretical content come alive for the learners.



BY RAHUL AGARWAL
Sr. Principal Consultant
G-CUBE SOLUTIONS

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Training and learning are not always activities most learners look forward to, even in the cooperative scenario. But this is changing fast as modern learners realize the immense importance of learning regarding their careers. Custom eLearning courses can be built with strategies and interactivities to provide relief, challenge the learners, assimilate and apply more in the area of their work.

1 When Less Is More - Minimalistic Text

To ensure that text does not create tedium, on-screen text should be crisp, to-the-point and minimalistic. A useful instructional tool that is used to create impactful OST is layering. The main objective of layering is to keep on-screen text to a bare minimum. Different layers are formed which present information to the learner in a gradual momentum. While the main points outlining a concept are given on screen, the learner can click on a button or link on screen and read a detailed document to deepen understanding. Another way by which OST can be minimized is with the help of audio. Audio accompaniment can give out details of a concept, while OST remains minimalistic. For the benefit of a learner, the audio-transcripts can be shared separately. Narrative approach should then align keeping in mind preferred styles of learning and providing options to cater to them all. Different narrative styles can be adopted as per the preferences of the learners.

2 Chunking The Text

Chunking is a clever instructional tool when creating text content for eLearning. It creates space for one idea at a time, giving the learner the time to understand and then, go ahead. Ideally each paragraph should convey a single thought or idea. Similarly, long and complex sentences should be avoided. The transition from one “chunk” to another should be smooth. Small introductions can be given before introducing a new topic. In-line knowledge checks or questions can also be used to make sure learner is ready to go onto the next topic. This is also instrumental in increasing learner’s involvement in the course.

3 Engage With Interactions

Interactivities can be built with stories and scenarios in custom eLearning courses. They kindle learner's imagination and force them to think in practical terms. There are various ways that a story or scenario can be built. Different mediums like text, graphics or audio-visuals can be used to build interactivities, as well as a combination of any or all of the above. The learner can be made part of the story and can be given authority to take decisions. Alternatively, learners can also write their responses in an open text field. Feedback should be descriptive, instead of a simple "correct" or "incorrect". A useful feedback should include how and why the response was correct or incorrect. A scenario can be given and the learner can take quick decisions as appropriate in a given scenario. The beginning of a story can be given and the learner can take it forward. Branching stories can be created to make stories more interesting.

4 Graphical Element Of eLearning

Graphics or diagrams can be utilized to explain a process or procedure. As the learner moves the mouse through different parts of the diagram, they can move or pop up and come alive for the learner. Instead of simple text explanations, explanations can be given through animations and audio. Simple tools can be provided to give out links or see details.

5 Virtual Exercises

Changing perspectives is important for corporate learners to help understand problems or issues faced by their clients, customers or peers. They can thus be better prepared to handle and solve problems effectively. The learner can be asked to act out a scene, for instance, make a call to virtual customer-support executive, with responses from a standard call script. Learners can pin-point where the virtual executive is giving good response and where there is evident lack of clarity. Similarly, a learner can be asked to assemble a product using only the literature provided by the company. This helps them to assess how product documents work and identify the need for support, wherever required.



RAHUL AGARWAL
Sr. Principal Consultant
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Rahul is a passionate HR professional with 16 years of experience in the training and consulting field. At his core, he feels deeply about enabling peak performance in organizations and people through high impact learning & change.



BY SHUCHI ARORA
Director - Content Development
ZEUS LEARNING

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Imagine if you were to open a restaurant. You pick the perfect location and the best interior designer who helps you build a fully equipped kitchen and a beautiful seating area. You have just built your dream restaurant. But wait a minute, it's close to opening night and you don't have a chef. You settle for someone who may not be your ideal choice and that reflects in the taste of the food. If the food is not a hit, your restaurant will not be successful.

Similarly, a learner will not be helped by an off-the-shelf learning solution, no matter how good it may be, unless it caters to an existing learning need. A custom eLearning solution is the answer in such situations. In order for the solution to be successful, there are three areas that should be considered.

1 What Is The Goal Of The Custom eLearning Solution?

Ask the client by when they need the eLearning module, analyze the level of learning that the module should include and get a sense of the client budget. It is important to have a well-defined timeline at the start of development. It should be realistic, leaving some room for changes. The level of learning is dependent on the target audience and the client budget.

Since all these are dependent on one another, it's good to understand if the client has identified any of these. The course can be designed and developed keeping these three factors in mind.

2 What Does The “Priority Triangle”, Timeline, Level Of Learning, And Client Budget, Look Like?

Ask the client by when they need the eLearning module, analyze the level of learning that the module should include and get a sense of the client budget. >

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(Cont) It is important to have a well-defined timeline at the start of development. It should be realistic, leaving some room for changes. The level of learning is dependent on the target audience and the client budget.

Since all these are dependent on one another, it's good to understand if the client has identified any of these. The course can be designed and developed keeping these three factors in mind.

3

What Defines The eLearning Solution?

a. Instructional Design Strategy

Select an Instructional Design strategy that will work with the target audience. Learners should be able to recognize why they are going through the course and how it affects them directly.

- Plan brainstorming sessions. They bring ideas and creativity to help design a solution that meets all requirements.
- Identify the learning objectives and present them to the user. Learning objectives define what is to be learned and how well it is to be performed. You could align each learning objective with a level of Bloom's Taxonomy. This helps assess the learner by creating knowledge checks.
- Have an interesting start. Grab the user's attention using a technique that would best suit the target audience. For example, include storytelling, presenting a problem, doing something the incorrect way etc.
- Use real world examples. Take it a step further by creating custom scenarios that the target audience would encounter, for relating it to a learning objective and for initiating prior knowledge.
- Include informal assessments of understanding, such as thinking questions, simple prompts, to provide frequent checks for understanding and ensure that the learners do not become too passive.
- Include a summative assessment to determine the level of learning that has taken place. Present the learner's progress with the help of easy to understand reports and make provision for additional practice, if required.

b. Content

If raw content has been shared by the client, then it's best to sort through it and organize it, by chunking out the content, or creating a content outline; whatever works. This will help keep the focus on the useful content and also guide you if you need to consult the SME for any clarification or additional content. The Instructional Designer can use this content to create the storyboard using the selected Instructional Design strategy.

If no raw content is provided, a SME can work together with the Instructional Designer to create the content material.

c. UX And UI Design

A great user experience, UX design, delivers the best learning experience and can make the solution stand out among others. Lack of an immersive UX design can even make a content-rich solution unsuccessful. Use the best design principles to select a design that is intuitive, simplifies the content presentation and improves the learning outcomes. Design the solution to be responsive to support multiple devices, if that is a requirement.

The user interface, UI design, specifies the look and feel of each screen. Make sure that it is consistent across all screens and gives the user a sense of where they are.

d. Storyboarding

A complete storyboard should include text, placeholder multimedia, content layout, the navigational flow of the course and detailed notes describing the functionality. Don't spend too much time trying to make the storyboard look aesthetically good. Remember that a storyboard is successful if it aligns with the selected Instructional Design strategy and meets the defined learning objectives. Also, the notes should help the development team understand the functionality clearly.

Once a storyboard is authored, it should be reviewed by a peer, SME, and a language editor before going into development.

e. Development And QA

The development process uses technology that helps build an effective solution and is device agnostic, if required. The entire development process can be optimized by using reusable templates, if any.

Testing is not just a phase but a process that should be followed throughout. Testing may be divided into three levels: Module Testing, Specification Testing and Application Testing. Each of these should be performed at every stage of delivery, alpha, beta, and gold.

f. Evaluation

Before the market-release, it may be helpful to include a focus group feedback phase. This feedback will help understand the effectiveness of the course and find gaps, if any. This evaluation can help put the finishing touches and make the solution more successful for the target audience.



SHUCHI ARORA
Director - Content Development
ZEUS LEARNING

As the Director, Content Development at Zeus Learning, Shuchi has successfully led various teams and handled multiple projects, delivering quality results with great consistency. Her innate ability to multitask with ease and keep her cool in crunch situations is a constant source of inspiration for all team members.



BY STEPHEN VICTOR
Learning Strategist At Obsidian Learning
OBSIDIAN LEARNING

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Custom eLearning, as opposed to generic, “off the shelf” type of eLearning, is developed for a particular client to meet their specific needs. Custom eLearning development is one of Obsidian’s specialties, and we’ve been doing it for quite some time.

In fact, since 1998, we have developed hundreds of interactive eLearning programs for Fortune 500 firms and other organizations. Our proven methods, grounded in cognitive research and adult learning theory, reduce time to competency for staff by delivering the right learning, in the right way, at the right time. So, how do we do all that?

One important factor is our standard project lifecycle. We say “standard” because no custom project is exactly like another. Clients have different workflows, preferences and needs, so flexibility is key. However, every project typically includes at least the following activities:

- Kickoff
- Course design, review, and approval
- Storyboard development, review, and approval
- Course production and testing
- Review and approval of final build
- Deployment

But nearly everybody follows some kind of process to get their projects done, right? At Obsidian, we understand that the real secret to successful completion of an eLearning project is more than a process or a set of prescriptive rules. It’s the personal journey we take with our clients.

When we work with a client, we partner with them to jointly identify performance issues and design innovative, meaningful solutions to address those issues. There are usually more iterations in the design phase than in the development phase, because we believe that the upfront work makes a huge difference. We think about the project design phase as part of a communication project, so we spend a good amount of time identifying the audience, main messages, goals, preferences, etc. Here are a few tips that capture the essence of our custom eLearning development philosophy:

1 Engage The Client

At Obsidian we always strive for a warm, collaborative working relationship. We build partnerships with SMEs and stakeholders, ensuring that all actors know they are part of the team. We value SME input, and accept as a universal truth that the relationship established with a SME can make or break a project. Stakeholders are equally important to project success. Try to analyze project needs from the stakeholder perspective: What pressures are they under? How can you help them be successful?

2 Know The Client

Really get to know your client. What is their industry? How does your client contribute to that industry? Who needs to be trained, and why? What are the performance gaps? Is it really a training problem, or is it something else? How can we measure success? Both through informal conversation and formal analysis, we build a picture that provides us with a clear understanding of our clients and their needs.

3 Keep Your Promises

Set clear goals and expectations from the beginning. Make a schedule clearly outlining deliverables, reviews, and final sign-offs. Establish a solid working relationship in which both you and your clients agree on what you'll do and when you'll do it. More importantly, be open, communicate, and keep your word. Account for changes, roadblocks, and obstacles because they will always be part of any project. Be firm, but flexible, when setting deadlines.

4 Have Fun!

We find the greatest joy in our work when we are fully engaged in the creative process. We work together in an old house in Houston, where we share ideas, design and build great interactions, and just have fun. Often, lucky clients get invited over for meetings, cookies, and puzzles. You may not be in Houston, or even like cookies, but you can certainly do your part to make it fun for your team.



STEPHEN VICTOR Learning Strategist At Obsidian Learning OBSIDIAN LEARNING

Steve designs and supports strategy and learning through technology recommendations, engaging learning interventions, solution design documents, and technical white papers. He holds a PhD in Instructional Design from Capella University.



BY SUSAN WINES
ELearning Specialist
LEARNING SOLUTIONS BUSINESS OF
THOMSON REUTERS (TAX & ACCOUNTING) INC.

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

When creating a custom eLearning course, your client is not just the decision-maker or the negotiator. Ultimately, the participants are the clients. Will the participants pick up the phone and give you feedback? No. Their feedback will go up the ranks to their supervisors, managers, curriculum coordinators, and finally to your liaison team.

Feedback is a neutral word. You want positive feedback; we all do. Negative feedback is intrinsically valuable because it drives focus, resolution, and success. After resolving those feedback issues, ask yourself what you learned. Perhaps all of your future eLearning courses will be more enriching. Perhaps your operational processes are improved for all clients. In the eyes of your client, your ability to improvise or innovate quickly makes you a valuable partner. That's a win-win.

Support your client at every stage, especially their designers and Subject Matter Experts. They are as essential to the vision and content as you are. Listen, learn, and enjoy mutual respect. Who is loading your custom courses into their company's LMS catalog? Who is their resource who knows all about SCORM, AICC, Tin Can API, and xAPI? Who is confirming that each course is available? Your client. You can even build a relationship with the accounting staff by confirming that your invoices meet their needs and are easy to process.

You can't do it alone; empower your team to provide customer care, too. The knowledge gained by empathy will build exceptional eLearning courses. By satisfying all of your clients, you will retain your client for many projects in the future.

Five Tips To Build A Long-Term Relationship With Custom Clients

1 Ask For Five Samples Of Content

With one sample, they will likely choose the easiest one that they can access to share with you. With a wider sampling, you may find content that requires different handling. You need to be sure that you can create what they want, without any surprises, while accurately estimate your time to meet deadlines and making a profit.

2 Pamper Your Subject Matter Experts

Their expertise is needed, not their knowledge of formatting, style guides, or grammar.

3 Avoid The Lead-In Phrase: “I Think”

“I think” should be avoided because it can be interpreted as judgmental or contentious. Try “I believe”, when introducing a suggested change.

4 Design Smart Goals

This involves any goal (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based) that you can share with your client. Their deadlines may be very tight for delivery, which requires them to coordinate and share their status quite often. Sharing the progress will reassure them that they can reach their goals, too.

5 Don't Oversell

Even if you are confident. Otherwise, your spectacular results will become the baseline. Give your team a chance to exceed.



SUSAN WINES

ELearning Specialist

LEARNING SOLUTIONS BUSINESS OF
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Experienced in all phases of creating e-learning courses, I find authors (subject matter experts), apply instructional design principles to course content, improve course-making processes, train internal teams worldwide in authoring tools, troubleshoot, publish, and then engage in social media representing our brand. I don't do it all alone--we work as a team.



BY TANYA HAUTH
Instructional Designer, ELearning
Developer And Voice Over Talent
[HAUTH CONSULTING](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

Creating custom eLearning content can be intensely interesting or insanely frustrating. Armed with the right tools, information, and SMEs, creating custom content can be a great thing. You can stretch your creativity and learn new things. Or you can crash and burn, churning out a course that no one likes or uses. How do you tilt the odds in favor of succeeding? Keep reading.

1 Know What Success Looks Like

Ask your SMEs and stakeholders: “What is the ideal outcome? What does success look like to them after the course is launched?” If everyone is not on the same page with a clear vision of where the project is going, you won’t get anywhere anytime soon.

2 Actively Use The 80/20 Rule

Despite what your SME may say, learners don’t really need to know absolutely every tiny detail about the content. Really, they don’t. What learners need to know is how to do their job. Every piece of content must prove its value and purpose in order to be included. Cull the extras and include them as downloadable resources. If the learner simply must know what is on every single page of the software manual, let them download and read it later.

3 Use A Mind Map To Organize Content

A mind map visually arranges the information. It allows you to see how everything fits together and quickly identifies extra bits of information that may not belong. As a bonus, it can serve as a potential content map in the course.

4 Use Visuals To Convey Information

People consume information with their eyes. Clear, well-designed graphics representing meaningful content are a beautiful thing. Infographics are quick hits of content that work well in a lot of situations. Short videos make the content come to life. When done well and used appropriately, all of these visuals break up the course and make content more palatable and digestible.

5 Create Engaging Scenarios

Everyone loves a good story. Present realistic scenarios that show actual applications of the content, both good and bad. Encourage critical thinking, exploration, and decision making regarding the content. People tend to remember stories long after specific facts and figures have faded away.

6 Respect The Adult Learner

Explain what's in it for them. Don't lock navigation. Show how the content fits together and how it can be used in a real-world situation. Above all else, don't waste the learner's time. Just like you, they are busy and have a lot to do. Make sure the content is worth their while. Your odds of succeeding just went way up.



TANYA HAUTH
Instructional Designer, ELearning
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I am an Instructional Designer, eLearning Developer, Project Manager, and Professional Voice Over talent with over 20 years of experience. A seasoned instructional designer, I have designed and developed eLearning and instructor-led courses for pharmaceutical, banking, telecommunications, education, and biotechnology firms, as well as several federal agencies and humanitarian organizations.



BY TERESA POTTER
Senior Instructional Designer,
[TERESA POTTER CONSULTING, LLC](#)

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

In all of my experiences, I've found Project Management principles and the backwards design framework are the most essential tools in any environment to help guide the development of custom eLearning materials.

1 Start With Learning Objectives And Design Backwards

I am a firm believer in the backwards design approach. This model asks you to first clearly describe what a learner should know or be able to do at the end of your training. Having clear learning objectives in mind, gives you a specific target to aim for. Then, when you inevitably encounter challenges implementing a design, you can always adjust or find a new route to those same goals.

Often, when we are working with Subject Matter Experts at the very beginning of a custom eLearning project, we naturally get ideas for ways that we can deliver the material. This is our creative wheels in motion and it's definitely not something to ignore. Where this gets us into trouble is when we start working on planning or building out those specific ideas, rather than first establishing clear and measurable learning objectives.

Subject Matter Experts themselves can also get caught up in all the fun things that we can help them create. I have been in many meetings where the client I was working with was excited or nervous about a particular idea or feature, and it derailed the entire meeting. Backwards design can help us manage these situations by refocusing the conversations on the learning objectives and what is essential to meet those goals. It can also help relieve anxiety that anyone might have about necessary skills or resources, but are really beyond the scope of what is essential to help learners complete the learning objectives.

Having a goal in mind leaves you open to having many ways to meet those learning objectives. It also allows us to be more flexible with our designs and gives us more options when working to fit time or budget constraints.

2 Don't Skip The Design Documents

It's so tempting to jump right into the tech tools before creating design documents. This is especially true when working on new and exciting custom eLearning projects. However, this greatly increases the amount of time required for design, leading to exploding costs and more development time.

Have you ever been halfway through an eLearning module and had a great idea that would make the entire module so much better? If you have already done a first pass at half the design work, then you have to choose to either abandon the idea, because you don't have the time to redo everything you've already done, or rework everything you've already done. This is a really frustrating situation, and I have been there too.

I understand that sometimes we need to actually play with the tools to figure out how we are going to segment the information between slides or to test out an interaction we have in our head. I'm not saying that you shouldn't do some mockups and testing, but you should limit this as much as possible. Instead, you should do high-level design documents, make some mockups and test functionality, and then update the design documents before you start building out the entire project. Iterate as much as needed, and lean on Agile Project Management processes to help manage this. Just don't skip the design documents.

3 Describe A Real-World Application, Then Figure Out How To Build It

Often, eLearning designers start brainstorming how they can meet instructional goals with the tools and technological approaches they use every day. The problem with this is they will be mentally limited to only what they have experience with in recent projects, or constrained by their current skills with any given tool. Even the most talented eLearning developer can have their creativity stuck inside the box when approaching a design project this way. We can look to backwards design again here to help us find new approaches.

To find your goals for authentic activities and applications, think of how this information or activity is shared or practiced in the real world. Spend time imagining or observing how these skills are used in the workplace to give yourself a thorough understanding of what the application actually looks like. Then, try to design a way to mimic that in the eLearning environment.

This approach will naturally lead you to try new things in the same software you use every day. It will also send you on a search for new tools to design your vision. This is, honestly, how I have stumbled into some of the coolest tools and functionalities I've found, simply because I was determined to make something, and went looking for a way to make it happen.



TERESA POTTER
Senior Instructional Designer,
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I am a senior instructional designer who helps K12 and Higher Education institutions explore if online learning can help them expand their market reach and better serve their students. I then help them design and implement innovative online learning programs to deliver their unique educational offerings through technology.



BY TERRI LOGIUDICE

Sr. Instructional Designer / Manager At Alliance
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ALLIANCE DATA CARD SERVICES
- KNOW MORE SELL MORE

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

1 Enter Your Learners' World

Entering your learners' world and understanding what they do or are expected to do after they complete your training, will help you develop the appropriate strategy and content.

2 Take All Learning Styles Into Consideration When Developing Content

- For visual learners, show movement on screen every 3-5 seconds. Use visuals to reinforce the concept or idea.
- For auditory learners, include audio into your content. Use images of people having conversations to act out a role play scenario.
- For kinesthetic learners, make your content engaging and interactive.

3 Is Bite-Sized Right-Sized?

Gone are the days of wordy PowerPoint presentations. Learners want just in time, informative and engaging nuggets of learning. Bite-sized nuggets make learning more manageable. It could be a video, eLearning module or online article. We are always learning.

4 Gamify

Who doesn't love to play games! Gamification is popular with all generations and learning styles. Make your content so engaging that it makes learning fun and they want to come back for more.

5 Be Creative When It Comes To Knowledge Checks

True or False, and Multiple Choice questions are fine but a little too easy. Think of other creative ways to test your learners' knowledge. Maybe a drag-and-drop question, or a matching question with images. Why not a scavenger hunt!

6 Use Branching Scenarios

Creating branching scenarios is a great way to get your learners think. The way they answer will send them on a different path. Branching scenarios will let your learners practice their skills in realistic scenarios. With today's rapid development tools, it takes no time at all!

7 Use Whiteboard Animation

There is something about seeing that hand draw images and text on a whiteboard. It engages the learner and they love it.



TERRI LOGIUDICE

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Diversified Learning & Development professional with over 30 years experience in the Financial Services, Hospitality and Marketing & Loyalty industries. Skills include training analysis, management, project management, instructional design, storyboarding, facilitation, and eLearning development.



BY TINA GRIFFIN
Manager Elearning Solutions
KINEO PACIFIC

What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

There are lots of exciting and interesting technologies, tools and techniques out there. So which ones work best?

1 Keep User Experience Front Of Mind

Often, I see designers swayed by marketing or SMEs that they lose sight of their users. I think of designers as interpreters, interpreting and converting SME speak to user speak. Remember that users, not SMEs, need to learn, enjoy and perform. You're a learning experience designer! Get users involved in focus groups and design workshops. Visit users in their place of work, see what they do and how they use their tools. It can be helpful for SMEs to hear what users really think.

2 Start With The Outcome And Work Back To The Activity

I love Cathy Moore's action-mapping approach. It means that the need drives the design, rather than the idea or content, and everything is linked to business outcomes. Just because we want a game or interactivity, doesn't mean it's the best approach for the outcome. Likewise, 10 pages of content might not actually be that useful to your learner activities. Link outcomes to business objectives to keep aligned and ensure success.

3 Variety Is The Spice Of Life

Like anyone getting lots of the same thing, learners get bored, so keep surprising them. Consider changing your templates, mixing a short game within some content, or vary the media used. Remember there are many ways to present your idea. Mix it up and force yourself to think differently.

4 Create A Desire And Emotion

It's said in our high media age we have 8 seconds to engage users. Learners are no different. Engaging intellectually and emotionally needs to happen up front. Find a hook, fear, shock, humour, self-realisation, whatever will impact your learners. We want to create an emotion as well as hook the learner in with WHY they need to learn, so they compel themselves to complete. That might be a short video or animated sequence, an audio track, a story, a headline, something that links to the content and speaks to the learners.

5 Innovate

With so many new and exciting ways to create learning, why stick to one? Why not explore virtual reality, interactive video or micro-nuggets? How could you incorporate an app or adaptive learning path? Don't be lethargic about new ideas. Find ways to create prototypes and experiment.

6 Design And Then Sprinkle Star Dust From Above

OK, you've done your design. But does it sparkle? Will learners enjoy the experience? Design is a process. Taking time to stand back and look at your plan allows you to improve it. Star dust is that little idea that will make it great. Maybe it's better pictures, a small animation, making a screen interactive or changing the way learners interact. It might be simplifying the interface or adding a button or resource. Look at it, considering the look, the feel, the emotion and the goals.

7 Tailor To The User

Well, at least let them think it's tailored. Relevance is at the heart of success creating the most efficient way through content that provides the right context for what learners do and see in their job. Tailoring doesn't have to be a big thing. It might be giving people a choice to follow a business unit pathway, even if much of the content is generic. It might be swapping photos or scenarios, it might be allowing learners to skip content where outcomes are not relevant or using pre-assessments to eliminate learning in areas of competence. Finally, it might be completely separately branded modules. Whichever way you do it, make sure it will make sense to learners and is relevant to their jobs.

8 Think Long And Hard About The 20 And 70

Too often, we focus on the 10 of the 70/20/10. That's easy for us. But considering how we can create effective coaching and experiential activities will deliver much stronger results. Whether that's a practical activity, a systems-based activity or something involving real work and feedback, look for ways to anchor your learning in every day work. Having that full engagement will create a powerful transfer moment. Think carefully about how to best support managers, and don't assume that a manager will automatically know the subject matter. Consider additional coaching support, provide checklists and guidance, perhaps short video clips that demonstrate best practice on soft skills. Providing guidance gives scaffolding to the manager and great visibility for learners.

9 Collaborate Extensively

The best projects work when the designer, SME, graphic artist and developer, work very closely together, iteratively building. It's about respecting each other's area of expertise, each person crafting their aspect to fit beautifully together with the other parts. Think about some key relationships.

- SME & Designer: Ensure the SME provided content not so complete that to change it creates friction; but not so loose that the Designer has to make things up.
- Designer & Developer: Ensure the designer creates a product that is feasible, and within budget.
- Graphic artist & Designer: Ensure the visual design supports the instructional model; that the media and design can be achieved within the budget; but that we're not lured into beautiful design if it's not what a client wants or goes against the design approach.



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Since 1998, I've worked across a range of clients and industries, using a wide mix of tools and technologies to create innovative and engaging blended learning experiences. I'm passionate about great design and thrive on finding creative solutions.



BY VICTORIA SCHMIDT
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What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

When developing custom eLearning content, there are many things to consider. Each customer will hopefully provide their standards and goals for the course. The content that the customer outlines will probably only cover about 70% of their actual content needs. And the only constant in custom content development is change. So, be prepared to be flexible. How do you account for that? At CyberTrain, we have developed a process where we help our clients analyze their goals in developing custom eLearning content for a successful training project that includes flexibility while remaining within the project guidelines.

1 Determine The End Game

When a client comes to you and says “I need you to develop custom content for a course”, you need to help the client determine their ultimate goal for creating this custom content. If it’s a totally new course, you will follow your standard courseware development process. But if it is providing additional custom content that ties information specific to this client to a larger, more generic course, then you need to review the “generic” course, as well as the goals to achieve in the custom content to be created. Often, I have clients that think they need a totally new course. But, after spending a little time with them we find that they could actually just use some “standard” or “out-of-the-box” courseware with some insertions of custom content to further explain how to specifically do things according to their processes, needs, etc. It might be as simple as inserting a video that starts out something like this: “Here, at ABC company, we follow this process for doing XYZ task”. That approach has saved a lot of time and money for our clients and they appreciate it.

2 Identify The Pain Points

Work with your customer and find out what their real pain points are for the topic. This may help you uncover information that is related to the true goal of adding this custom content that the client might not have articulated to you yet. Typically, when you are adding custom content, there is something that the client is trying to achieve, improve or fix. Depending on what it is, you might need to focus on creating content that teaches a new skill versus enhancing and building on existing skills, or overcoming bad habits and >

3 Verify, Verify, Verify

With custom content development, you are creating something new. There is a lot of room for misunderstanding or veering off in the wrong direction. So, when creating custom content, always check in with the client at regular intervals and go over what you have so far. And get agreement to the review in writing. It's easier to change course earlier in the development cycle, so that's where you want to catch any changes in direction. It may sound silly, but you'd be surprised how often I've come in to "fix" something that another company started and they never formally reviewed or even checked in with the client until near the end of development.

4 Additional Tips On Custom Content For Training On New Systems

- 1 Participate in system design meetings. Only you can prevent someone saying "this is no big deal to add to the training", when it is actually a problem.
- 2 Flexibility on your part is key to custom content development, because things will change.
- 3 Ensure that you have good archives of the custom content. It may be necessary for you to return to an older version if the customer changes their mind or a planned customization doesn't work out.
- 4 Make an effort to have a GREAT relationship with the developers. Communicate often so that you can get information quickly and hear about changes that might impact your work.
- 5 Require documentation. If they have to go through the process of documenting changes, they'll be more inclined to think carefully about these changes.
- 6 Keep a good sense of humor. Custom training development can be stressful on both the customer and you! Remember it also gives you an opportunity to be creative, so enjoy!



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Victoria is the President of CyberTrain, Inc., a leader in developing highly interactive eLearning & Instructor-led courses as well as implementing IT Service Management systems. Ms. Schmidt has presented at numerous World Wide Remedy User Group Conferences, the BMC Engage & Kinetic Request conferences, and the Help Desk institute.





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What are the most effective tips for Successful Custom eLearning Content Development?

There are a lot of things that can make or break your eLearning course. If you don't have a background in Instructional Systems Design, consider outsourcing, or at least have an ISD consultant review your lesson plan. Creating a bad course is really easy, but developing an effective and engaging eLearning course requires someone who has been trained in the entire ISD process. Training your people is too important and too costly to leave to novices. With that said, here are 5 tips to keep in mind for creating successful custom eLearning content:

1 Objectives, Objectives, Objectives

The assessments have to test the learning objectives, and the content needs to teach the objectives. This is fundamental, but you'd be surprised by how many courses I come across that don't do this. I don't care how awesome your media is or how engaging your interactive elements are. If you don't tie your objectives to the training and the assessments, you have nothing. Actually, it can be worse than nothing since you would be training your people incorrectly.

While you're at it, make sure before you begin development that you have good objectives in the first place. Objectives are the key element of any course. They should be easy to understand, easy to observe, and easy to measure. If they aren't, they need to be fixed. Your client should sign off on the objectives, and you should go over them with your SME, before storyboarding.

2 Allow SMEs To Give You Content, But Not Build The Course

One of the biggest mistakes I see course developers making is giving too much control to the SMEs. While they are vital in providing the content-specific knowledge your course requires, oftentimes SMEs have their own opinion on how to design the course, or like to add extraneous information that go outside the scope of the training focus or objectives.

While I always listen to SME suggestions, it's important for the Instructional Designer to design the course. If a SME determines that a process has changed or has a credible challenge to the focus of the course, you need to go back to the design phase and discuss revising the objectives with the key stakeholders before moving on to the content.

3 Focus On The Learning Process, Not The Teaching Process

Typically, if someone without a good ISD background is asked to create an eLearning course, they will often take the information from a previously existing course, such as a lesson plan from an instructor-led training, and simply cram them into boring, linear storyboards. Content, content, practice questions, test. Repeat. This is how you teach, but not necessarily the best way for people to learn.

eLearning courses should be designed better. Create engaging problem-solving scenarios with the content you have. Use multimedia and gaming elements to enhance, but not overwhelm your course, so people will actually look forward to training. The goal is to facilitate learning, and that won't happen without engagement.



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