

IF LEARNING WAS A CONSUMER PRODUCT



In today's time and attention-challenged world, learning leaders are seeking myriad ways to market training to employees, to engage their hearts and minds, and to develop a deep connection that leads to sustained behavior change. Hmm... this sounds a lot like the same challenges facing consumer product brands. Perhaps L&D should turn to P&G (and other companies) for strategies to reach their own customers.

Those who market products to end-user consumers have cracked the code on connecting for mutual benefit. These three specific approaches may have direct application to the training and learning environment.

CREATE COMMUNITY

Some of the most successful consumer brands are highly effective at creating and managing online communities. These social networks are generally part of an overall customer relationship strategy and are designed to support marketing, grow sales and drive SEO.

Learning functions can realize similar goals by more proactively and deliberately connecting people with each other and with the learning "product." Creating user communities leverages social media, a structure that people are familiar with and use in the non-work parts of their lives. It can generate enthusiasm and energy by amplifying positive messages. It can also offer help, support struggling learners and diffuse negative or ambivalent feelings in the same way product marketers address customer issues or complaints.

As a result, many learning organizations are beginning to experiment with

identifying a "product manager" for each initiative. They're realizing value from having one person who thinks deeply about the learning "product" 24/7 and owns the customer (learner) relationships. This level of intimacy demonstrates organizational commitment, enhances user engagement and provides a wealth of information about ongoing opportunities and improvements.

MANAGE THE LIFECYCLE

No learning initiative operates in isolation. It's generally part of a broader ecosystem of knowledge and skills required for ever-increasing levels of capacity and contribution. Product-oriented companies understand this. If customers are purchasing this item today, it's likely they'll need this other item tomorrow. This understanding can be profound. In fact, Target's exceptional predictive analytics made news several years ago when it identified a customer's pregnancy before others in her life knew about it.

The L&D function can certainly anticipate key events in the employment lifecycle and proactively support workers through key transitions. For instance, if the organization knows that employees typically resign after two years, what interventions could be offered at the 18-month point?

PERSONALIZE COMMUNICATION

Whereas learning and training departments tend to communicate with broad audiences, consumer product companies have figured out how to target their audiences down to the individuals and personalize communication accordingly. They push product and

informational notifications based upon their understanding of the needs of the individual, or that target audience of one. And even when these communications are sent to large audiences, they have a "just for me" quality about them.

The L&D community might benefit from a similar approach. For instance, upon completion of a workshop, post-session emails or texts to the individual could build upon what's been learned with supplemental reading or suggestions about complementary webinars. Upon logging into the intranet or LMS, learners could receive personalized recommendations. And when an opportunity arises for learners to put new skills into practice, contextual reminders could be used to support application.

CONSUMER PRODUCT COMPANIES PERSONALIZE COMMUNICATION.

As the L&D function becomes increasingly vital to organizational success, the pressure to deliver results will only become greater. Lifting a page from the consumer products playbook may be just the strategy to elevate performance – not just for the function but for every employee it touches. 🔄

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