Facebook Designs Learning for 'Millearnnial'
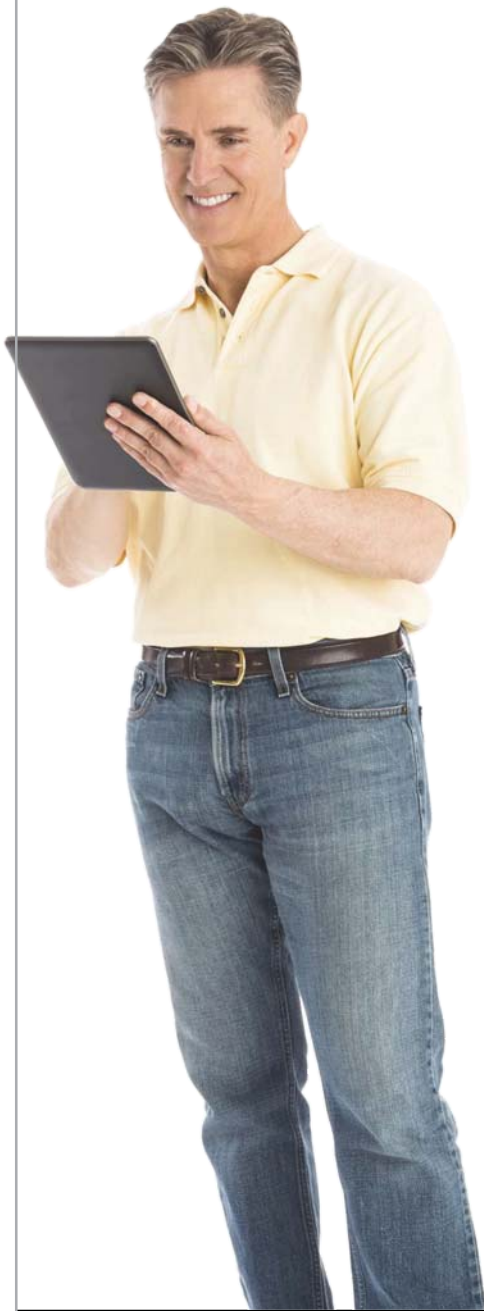
Employees

BY LINDA GALLOWAY

Personally, I'm sick of reading about the special learning styles of Millennials.

Of course, each workforce generation has different work attitudes, values and motivators — shaped by factors such as the economic environment and major life events. But, come on: Millennials don't have special brains that somehow make them learn in ways different from the rest of us.

So when I see an article tying the use of social tools, video, curated content and other "new" learning approaches to Millennial workers, I want to hurl my Olivetti at the wall. (Just kidding, LOL.)

The truth is, corporate learning would be rapidly evolving even without the influx of young employees.

Rapid business change, with demands for faster time to productivity. Increased emphasis on value workers and customer service. Smarter, richer technology experiences at our fingertips. 24x7 connectivity. These influencers impact the learning needs and expectations of all employees — from 25 to 65. They also impact the business's perception of training and development.

The corporate "Millearnnial" audience is composed of technically savvy work-ers of all ages who shun page-turner content, clunky interfaces and irrelevant courses. They've got smartphones in their pockets and, most likely, a computer or tablet at home. They respond

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to consumer-like, media-rich, highly relevant learning experiences. And they want answers and guidance on the spot, just like they can get at home to figure out how to adjust bike brakes or find a hotel for an upcoming trip.

Learning and development organizations are affected by Millearnnials in two primary ways:

1) As learning consumers, Millearnnials are typically used to processing information in small chunks and having a variety of resources to choose from — from videos to discussion forums to Wikipedia.

Regardless of their age, Millearnnials place high priority on ease and convenience; they want information to be readily available on command.

2) Most business leaders share the above traits. Additionally, they likely see marketing and other departments rapidly churn out new Web content, video demos, and sales and service support tools. Therefore, their expectations for training are colored accordingly, to include: speedy, point-of-need delivery; cost efficiency; and high relevancy to business. Their tolerance for lengthy program development, big investments with long-term paybacks, and general lack of business understanding is low.

How L&D departments and their supporting vendors respond to Millearnnial expectations over the next one to three years will likely determine their long-term future.

FACEBOOK: A BRIEF GLIMPSE INTO TRAINING'S FUTURE

Facebook epitomizes today's relentless business change. In 2011 — eight years after its founding as a social networking site for college students — Facebook was one of the most visited websites in the world. When the company went public in May 2012, it was valued at $104 billion, the largest valuation to date for a newly public company. As of January 2014, Facebook had 1.23 billion active users. But the company's phenomenal growth has been accompanied by non-stop change. Shifts in user demographics, adoption by businesses, explosive smartphone usage, and a string of technology acquisitions have opened the door to new markets and revenue streams, while requiring the company to morph at lightning speed to meet ever-changing market expectations. Needless to say, traditional training approaches just don't cut it for a company moving this fast.

A quick look at how Facebook keeps up with training needs and how its learning professionals are adapting training to the company's unique culture offers a preview of what's in store for other companies.

Tom Floyd, global sales training lead for Facebook, has led corporate and sales training initiatives for approximately 15 years, primarily in high-tech Silicon Valley. His responsibilities at Facebook encompass sales skills development, coaching and communications training for the company's complex sales organization.

Keeping up with the ever-evolving online advertising business is a challenge in and of itself. Floyd also must consider other key factors when developing Facebook's training offerings and approaches:

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>> A diverse and distributed workforce. Experience levels vary among the thousand-plus sales professionals located around the world. Some sales reps have years of advertising experience, while others are newer to sales. "Selling in Japan, the world's second-largest advertising market, is different than selling into an emerging market," says Floyd.

>> Multiple vertical teams with very different specialties, ranging from retail

to entertainment to technology. Each requires extensive knowledge and up-to-date information.

>> Time, or lack thereof. "Our employees are very busy. Every minute of training is time that could be spent doing other things, so we have to maximize the value of every training minute," says Floyd.

>> A company culture steeped in collaboration and sharing. "Our mission is to connect the world," says Floyd. "Therefore, social networking is part of our company's DNA."

Floyd is part of a dedicated training team that includes Troy Avidano, the team's LMS administrator, as well as a handful of contractors and several vendor partners to deliver all sales training programs. While the team may be small, its accomplishments push the boundaries of traditional training and technology. According to Floyd and Avidano, the team seeks out vendors who understand the company's culture and its emphasis on innovation and are willing to go the extra mile to adapt their technologies accordingly.

For instance, in March 2014, the team rolled out an online training program for the sales organization. The program incorporates 40 customized learning courses in six areas specific to Facebook solutions. All content was developed internally or customized. Avidano worked with Intellum, the provider of Facebook's corporate LMS, to support a unique approach to the learning. The LMS was enhanced to "serve up" quizzes in advance of courses, to reset the quizzes each time they're taken by a specific employee, and to map quiz questions to Articulate-created learning resources. The result is a program that offers a personalized experience for each employee, regardless of his or her experience.

"As you'd expect, we're a big proponent of tribal learning and capitalizing on our internal subject-matter experts," says Floyd. "We want to do everything we can to help our people learn faster and have fun while doing it."

THE MILLEARNNIAL TRAINING ORGANIZATION

"The major motivators for a learning organization today should be agility, speed and flexibility," says Todd Tauber, vice president for learning and development research at Bersin by Deloitte, Deloitte Consulting LLP. "All employees regardless of age are looking for bite-sized learning offered up in ways that align with their own learning styles.

"The only way a learning organization will be able to keep up is by shifting more toward informal learning, by leveraging internal subject experts, and by depending more on employees to share knowledge and provide peer guidance." Tauber points out that Bersin by Deloitte research shows that social and mobile technologies are factoring significantly into training investment plans.

"We'll likely see a steady stream of innovation — both in terms of technology and in leading practices — over the next two to three years as organizations make this next shift, " says Tauber.

It's interesting to note that Tauber's timeline neatly coincides with the entry of the next workforce generation, yet to be officially named. Regardless of what they're called — 2Kers, Selfies, iGeners, Tweenials — you can be sure that these youngest workers and the technologies they bring to work will further influence the way the rest of us Millearnnials work and want to learn. ⓔ

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> ## —Todd Tauber, Bersin by Deloitte