

Consulting Project

Instructional Design for Multi-Level Marketing

EDUC 5405

Digital Technologies in Adult Education

April 6, 2011

By: Sylvia Buchanan
Student #100436563

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Current state of organization

The organization is a multi-level marketing company that actively seeks new representatives to join them in a partnership. This multi-national corporation provides various levels of support for those starting their own business. However, due to the nature of the industry, in order for these potential partnerships to be highly profitable a necessary component of the business is to continually attract new representatives and/or customers. The training methods currently employed by the company require trainees to participate in long and somewhat tedious webinars, or to attend seminars with hundreds of participants; neither of which adequately prepares trainees to advise consumers on their services. While their corporate webinars are quite extensive, they are often too long, do not provide any interaction with the material, nor is there an adequate assessment of learner knowledge upon completion of the unit. Furthermore, many of the trainees do not have a background in sales or business management nor does their prior knowledge prepare them to explain fluctuating market values, or evaluate similar services available in the marketplace. Additionally many new recruits are not familiar with online learning and their computer skills are generally confined to searching for information and sending and receiving emails.

Reason for designing a particular learning program

There is a need to design a learning program that will not only motivate trainees to complete the optional training, but will also provide them with the confidence and necessary skills to succeed in multi-level marketing. Additionally, many of their new representatives do not have a business background, so their understanding of fluctuating market prices is very limited, making it difficult for those just entering the industry to explain pricing differentials to their clients.

Analysis

The goals of this company are to continually attract new investors interested in developing their own business and/or to sell their products and services to potential clients. With a continuous influx of trainees it is important to have a training program that accommodates the varying learning styles and skills found in this diverse range of people. In order to understand the problems faced by this company it was necessary to conduct a needs assessment, which involved a gap analysis, identifying the cause of the problem, and finally identifying issues requiring priority. The findings from the gap analysis identified several problem areas in this company that cannot be solved by merely sending new representatives off for training. Since the trainees are directly employed by the company and the training modules are optional, there is a definite need to encourage newcomers in the industry to participate in the training program. If these new partners are to gain the confidence and necessary skills to succeed in multi-level marketing they need a more comprehensive and interactive training program. Furthermore, the only requirement to become a partner or representative of the company is to simply pay a fee, which means many newcomers to this industry have no prior knowledge of running their own business, nor are they familiar with the laws, regulations or economic market values that pertain to the services they will be selling. While it is recommended that new reps take the online training program, only one module is mandatory (as regulated by the Ontario Government), so many do not complete the training, resulting in a large number of new representatives with little or no knowledge of the products and services offered by the company. Since a comprehensive training program is already available on the corporate website, the costs to add a supplementary component should be more cost effective than designing an entirely new training program. Once the program is approved it will take several months before the new learning material can be produced and implemented for validity and usability testing.

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Formative evaluations will take place throughout the design process and each step will be signed off or the necessary revisions will be made. As well as the product/industry training, there is also a need for additional modules of instruction to improve trainees' computer skills, as many new recruits have little experience with anything other than basic searches and email applications.

Design

The design phase of this training program began with a look at the literature related to online learning that was supported by sound pedagogical theory. After much research I settled on Gagne's Conditions of Learning Theory for its focus on intellectual skills, as well as Carroll's Minimalism Theory as it is a framework that is directly correlated to instruction, but more specifically supports training materials for computer users.

The first step in the design phase was to determine the goals and instructional objectives of the project while keeping in mind Knowles' theory of adult learning, which suggests that adult learners are self-directed, have a need to know why something is being taught, wish to have their experiences and prior knowledge recognized, and that adults learn best when the topic is of interest or of relevance to their lives. The design will be based on the four key components of an instructional plan; that of the learners, the objectives, the method, and evaluation. These elements form the framework of the design process with additional features added to create a more comprehensive plan for instruction (Morrison, Ross, & Kemp, 2001). The goals and objectives for the training program will be task-oriented with learning activities in the context of tasks to be performed and information conveyed. The learning materials and activities will take into account the various learning styles and computer experience of the students, as well as the multicultural background found amongst new trainees. For those whose computer experience is confined to search engines and email applications a module can be included to give students an overview of

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how web1.0 has evolved from simple searches and email applications, to web 2.0 whose myriad of open source tools will change the way they interact with their computers. Additionally, learners will have a choice as to which learning modules to select based on their current skills and future needs, as well as having the freedom to complete the training at a time and place of their choosing. Moreover for those who wish to further their learning or to simply explore the topics in more depth, external links will be available on all themes covered in the training. The learning outcomes in this training program are to ensure the three main elements of online instruction are embedded within the objectives and learner activities, which will serve to inform students' learning. These elements are to present information such as facts or relevant data, to engage learners in active cognitive processing that will support their development of knowledge, and finally to instruct using activities that promote knowledge acquisition (Koszaka & Ganesan, 2004).

When defining the goals, learning objectives and learner activities for the training program, it was necessary to group them into two sections since they focus on acquiring different types of skills. The first set of objectives was designed to provide the learner with various computer skills and to introduce screencasting and social networking as tools for their personal learning networks. The second sets of objectives have been devised to allow new representatives to attain the necessary industry knowledge of the products and services they will be offering to potential customers.

Therefore the learning objectives have been classified into three types, behavioural, content, and problem-centred. Behavioural objectives are based on specific behaviours that clarify what is to be learned, as well as how it is to be learned and the learner must demonstrate specific behaviours before they can advance to the next level. Conversely, content objectives are written with reference to material that is to be learned rather than identifying specific behaviours. Content

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objectives are generally found in the cognitive domain as information that needs to be acquired.

Lastly we have problem-centred objectives which require the learner to apply their knowledge in order to solve a problem. Determining which type of objective is appropriate can be ascertained by comparing the three domains to the learner's level of complexity (Dean, 2002).

However, the drawbacks associated with learning in these domains should also be taken into account when setting goals and objectives. For instance the problem with behaviourism is that it focuses on one goal which requires an automatic learned response, and if the stimulus for that response is removed the learner may have difficulty providing the correct answer. In the same way the cognitive domain has the potential to provide learners with only one way of accomplishing a task and therefore students may have difficulty applying their knowledge to similar tasks. For instance if the learners are only taught to use Internet Explorer they may have difficulty applying that knowledge for use with Firefox or Safari. Therefore I would recommend also employing some constructivist principles into the program to counteract those potential problems, but also keeping in mind that when a learner must conform to specific criteria such as completing forms and applications creative thinking, as espoused by constructivism may not be appropriate (Mergel, 1998). Nevertheless if each of these domains is incorporated into the learning program correctly students will be presented with a comprehensive learning experience.

Like the objectives, learner activities are also categorized into domains of learning; the cognitive domain for the development of intellectual abilities and problem solving tasks, the psychomotor domain for the development of motor skills that involve following steps to accomplish a specific task, and lastly the affective domain which is concerned with the development of interests, attitudes, values, and appreciations (Ledford, 2000). Activities in each of these domains

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are then sequenced into varying levels of difficulty. While based on Bloom's taxonomy, I have used Anderson, & Krathwohl's taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing, which is a revision of Bloom's original work (Fenrich, 2008). Therefore in this instructional design, training begins with the lowest skill level, which is that of remembering. This requires learners to recall information by listing, naming, or describing the various parts of their computers and computer applications. The level of complexity will increase as the learner is required to retrieve and recognize relevant information from their long-term memory. The second domain focuses on the learners' intellectual skills such as learning to discriminate between information sources on the internet, or to demonstrate the skills achieved by creating documents and sending emails with file attachments. As the tasks get more complex learners will have achieved the skills to apply their knowledge in identifying problems and will have achieved the understanding to correct them. As the training program progresses from basic computer skills to sales and product training, learners will move to higher levels of learning which will require them to analyze and evaluate a client's services and make judgements as to the products and services best suited to a customer's needs. As trainees reach the higher levels of the taxonomy involving analysis, evaluation and creation, they will have accomplished the skills necessary to organize the various elements of their training into a complete structure, which will then allow them to devise a strategy for generating and retaining new business. The third classification of learning is in the affective domain, which is described by Krathwhol, Bloom & Masia as behaviours related to awareness, interest, attention, emotions, attitudes etc. (as cited in Kearsley, 2011). This is an area that is attended to by providing a multi-media learning experience to capture the interest and motivation of learners and it is also dealt with in the large group and one-on-one training seminars, which will not be discussed in detail here.

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Learner objectives and activities have been designed to allow trainees to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to interact confidently with their computers using internet search engines and basic software applications. The initial section of the training program that supports the use of computer applications may be skipped as the sequencing of material is dependent upon learner knowledge. What's more, new recruits also have the option of beginning the training program at any time and can complete it at their own pace. Other considerations that were taken into account while creating learning materials was the online format of the training program. It was important for the objectives and activities to be engaging and appropriate for the medium of instruction. To support the various learning styles inherent in large groups, students will be provided with an online study guide that contains all the material provided in the course.

The instructional strategy necessitates the content to be presented in a multi-modal and multi-media format which will include PDF documents for comparison, short training videos to both motivate and demonstrate procedures and processes, as well as hard to explain material. Podcasts can be used to provide meaning to images, accommodate non-readers, provide multi-lingual support, and teach intellectual skills. Visual material will be utilized to identify products, show relationships, and to assist in teaching attitudes and psychomotor skills. These visuals are also proficient in reducing learning time and increasing recall. Animation is another aid that can show sequential steps, explain difficult concepts, and significantly enhance learning (Fenrich, 2008). To augment those media tools, discussion boards and screencasting will also engage learners while providing a community of knowledge and support as they advance through the training modules. As well, hyperlinks will be imbedded throughout the learning material to increase motivation and to provide learners with examples, additional material and websites containing pertinent information related to particular training modules.

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The following are examples of a few instructional objectives and learner activities.

Outcome: Develop the skills to use basic features of the computer including troubleshooting techniques.				
Task: Interact and become familiar with the basic features of the computer and troubleshoot a problem.				
Objective 1	Objective	Learner Activity	Media Used	Criteria check
Terminal	Teach learners how to use features of the computer. ie. How to use tabs, watch tutorials & follow along on their computer.	Locate and read the key features of an online computer manual to discover the main functions. Access and read the glossary of computer terms. Watch a video tutorial using screencasts of computer features and troubleshooting tips while actively following along.	Interactive text online documents Computer Video Audio Internet e-book	Check document links for functionality. Ensure all screencast are correctly sequenced Imbed sample of key features of a computer manual Check external links to websites for troubleshooting help
Learning	Teach learners to interact with the computer interface without fear of destroying their hard drive. Teach basic troubleshooting techniques.			

Outcome: Develop the skills to create screencasts				
Task: Create a screencast using Jing				
Objective 2	Objective	Learner Activity	Media Used	Criteria check
Terminal	Teach learners how to use screencasting applications.	Download the application for Jing. Create a screencast using all the available features	Techsmith's Jing application Computer Video Tutorial	Check hyperlinks function properly Ensure all learners are able to download Jing
Learning	Teach learners to create a screencast.	Watch a video tutorial on screencasting	Links to external material on the internet e-book	Check video for audio/visual clarity

Outcome: Develop basic word processing skills				
Task: Create a document using Microsoft Word				
Objective 2	Objective	Learner Activity	Media Used	Criteria check
Terminal	Teach learners how to use basic features of word processing	Open MS Word application. Watch a video tutorial on basic functions of program while following along.	MS Word software Audio/Video Text files	Ensure all students have access to MS Word Check audio and video
Learning	Teach learners to create a simple word document.	Examine an embedded file and create a simple document.		Ensure embedded link functions

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Outcome: Learn the key elements of an email platform and understand the limitations in sending various file types				
Task: Send an email with attachments of varying types of files				
Objective 2	Objective	Learner Activity	Media Used	Criteria check
Terminal	Teach learners to navigate various email platforms and locate files.	Open the computer application and find the document previously created.	Hyperlinks Microsoft Office software Computer	Check hyperlinks function properly Ensure all learners have access to Microsoft software
Learning	Teach learners to create an email using some of the features learnt and attach varying files types.	Locate a photo on your hard drive to send. Using any email program, attach the files. Watch a video tutorial.	Video Tutorial Links to external material. Email program Photographs e-book	Check video and audio Ensure photo files are included should learners not have access to an image base.

Since the structure of the course is completely self-regulated and the activities are designed for individual interactive work, learners will be introduced to social networking tools to create a community of knowledge and support. While there is technical support available by phone and email, and the team leaders are generally available for encouragement and assistance, it is important for learners to interact with others who are also working in areas that may be outside of their comfort zone. Moreover, since we no longer live in an individualistic society, social networking is an important aspect of learning that offers students a sense of community in self-directed online programs. Additionally, it also makes participants aware that they are not alone in this new and challenging endeavour.

As stated earlier, this program has been designed to accommodate the different learning styles of the people undertaking the course, so all of the material will be available through audio recordings as well as in e-book format, which will also serve as a just-in-time learning support manual. What I have hoped to bestow on these learners is the idea that discovery learning through web 2.0 is far more powerful than simply presenting the facts.

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The concluding section of the design phase is a discussion entailing how learners will be evaluated. Again, since this is a self-directed form of study, the assessment will follow the same format as instruction and will make use of multiple evaluation instruments to ensure more reliable results. Tests or quizzes will be embedded into the learning material at the end of each training unit and will be arranged in three categories, with the more difficult tests to appear as the learner progresses. The first set are objective tests, which take the form of multiple choice, matching, true and false, and fill in the blanks. These questions will focus on the learner's knowledge, while higher levels of cognitive learning will take the form of problem solving and short answer questions that focus on the application and synthesis of information learned. The last type of assessment will be performance testing, which will be carried out in the field by the team leader once the trainee has completed the online training segments and has been actively working for a minimum of three months. If you click on the 'view demo' button from this link you can experience how some of the testing will be conducted. <http://www.webducate.net/products/dragster/>

Development

Since the company already has an extensive online training program, these new training modules will simply be added to their library of webinars on the company website. The onsite web designers and training personnel will create the material based on extensive notes made throughout the entire process. Additionally, the onsite technical staff will be on hand to support the creative staff should any technical issue arise, and will also maintain the corporate website when necessary. The only part of the program that would require updating would be the federal regulations and links to sites that may be outdated after time, and these tasks could be handled by the support staff. No

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additional training of educators is required as the company's programs are all self-directed and training is not mandatory.

Implementation

The implementation phase will be fairly easy, as it will just be a matter of adding to what is already provided on the corporate website. The training program will be tested with a variety of users, including both higher level partners and new trainees. Installing new software would not be required of users, as it is all open source and would be made available through links in the course material. The availability of the course will be announced on the company website, through international seminars, on the company blog, and via email. Feedback on the program will be gathered through online surveys and any technical issues can be rectified by the help desk via email or telephone.

Evaluation

Formative Evaluation

Assessment of the program will be conducted in three areas, with the first being formative evaluations. This type of assessment should ask the question 'How are we doing?' and requires three types of applications. The first is pre-testing (before), which is quite useful before instruction is fully developed so changes can be easily made, and it is also the most cost effective. The next type of formative evaluation is embedded testing (during). This is done continuously at different stages of the design and can be reviewed by experts in the industry, small group testing or field testing. The results of the trials would then be used to refine instruction. The last area of formative testing involves post-testing (after), which is conducted after the program has been completed. The

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post testing is the most critical because it will inform the designers and stakeholders whether or not the entire program is effective.

Summative Evaluation

The second area of testing is the summative evaluation, which is put into action after the training program has been implemented. This evaluation should ask the question ‘How did we do?’ Summative evaluations are conducted to inform the designer and stakeholders of participation interest, effectiveness of the learning program, and any issues that pertain to course content or user difficulties. For this area of testing I have incorporated the Kirkpatrick Model of evaluation as it correlates perfectly within the business structure, as well as being a simple four step process that will inform as to the degree of success of the training program. The levels of this model are as follows:

Level 1 - Reaction: To what degree participants reacted favourably to the training?

Level 2 - Learning: To what percent has intended knowledge, skills, or attitudes been acquired?

Level 3 - Behaviour: To what percent can participants apply what they have learnt?

Level 4 - Results: To what degree have the targeted outcomes occurred as a result of the training?

Once the results of this evaluation have been analyzed and the stakeholders’ expectations are clear, they can be used to measure learner outcomes (Chapman, 2011).

The final phase of assessment is the confirmative evaluation which is used to examine the effectiveness of the completed training program. This is generally employed at least six months to a year after instruction has been implemented.

Future State of the Organization

As a result of implementing the new training initiatives it is expected that participation in the training program will increase by at least 70%. At implementation this program was orchestrated to cater primarily to new trainees of the company. However, once the results of the confirmative evaluation have been analyzed, and providing participation is as high as expected, it is the intention of the designer to create additional training programs to reflect the ever increasing need for updating computer knowledge and skills. While the initial program of instruction was quite basic and relied heavily on information already contained in the company webinars, there is a need to create new material as the economic and industrial climate changes. By providing ongoing training in a variety of areas, it will not only promote life-long learning amongst its business associates, but will also challenge those associated with the company to keep their knowledge up to date. It is also anticipated that the inclusion of social networking in the instruction will create a more consolidated group of people who at the moment are scattered around the globe. Moreover, by building a social network amongst industry professionals, their knowledge, new innovations, or problems can be shared within the community. It is also imperative that the company support these partnerships through more face to face meetings, seminars and training initiatives. As well, the company should investigate whether their training seminars would not be more effective in smaller groups and perhaps located at community centres within a shorter travel distance for participants.

As the Buddha said, “Teach you? I cannot teach you. Go, experience for yourself.” (Fenrich, 2008).

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