SAP Litmos

5 Essential marketing skills every L&D practitioner needs

THE BEST RUN **SAP**

Skills L&D Can Learn from Marketing

Sometimes marketing gets a bad rap. It can be perceived as a bit pushy or aggressive, maybe even manipulative. But it's no wonder really. Potential buyers are barraged with seemingly non-stop ads – emails, texts, calls, commercials, and countless other communications – all trying to get recipients to buy something or at the very least, to stop and look or listen.

So, perhaps marketing doesn't always deserve the harsh reputation. At the end of the day, marketing communications are created to be unique and memorable enough to get people to take notice – and that's not such a bad thing. The best marketing strives to be creative, compelling, and coercive (but usually not conniving).

There's a saying: "Marketing is a contest for people's attention." Seems irrefutably accurate, doesn't it? When phrased that way, isn't L&D fighting the same battle? After all, both marketing and training departments aim to:

1. **Engage and drive interest** with a potentially distracted, detached audience.

2. **Inspire a change in behavior,** whether that's buying something or embracing the LMS.

It's nice to imagine an alternate universe where your learners love training and get jazzed about courses without any encouragement whatsoever. However, that's not very realistic. Most people need some prodding to take on extra work – even when that work is good for us. There's a reason gyms have professional trainers, for example; most of us try harder when someone is pushing us a bit.

The same holds true for your learning programs. If you really want to get into your learners' heads and compel them to do something, you've got to utilize marketing tactics. Think of a few tried-and-true marketing techniques: repetition, consistency, cleverness, allure, influence, peer pressure, etc. The same way marketers hammer their target audiences with regular, multi-channel messages, you can take a similar tack to make training more attractive, interesting, and essential for your employees.

Skill 1: Streamline your systems

Marketing is an exceedingly data-driven function. Successful marketing teams track everything from website activity to lead sources to sales-ready leads to marketing-generated sales. Often, doing so requires integrating multiple systems such as marketing automation, CRM, web analytics, and possibly others. Good quality data is also critical to measuring key touchpoints – and getting it all in one place is just the beginning; it lays the groundwork for strategic analysis.

Training departments may have some catching up to do. According to a recent SAP Litmos poll, nearly 40 percent of L&D departments have at least five different systems in place.

Siloed data makes everything in the training department harder, especially analytics. But by amalgamating your systems, or at the very least getting them to talk to one

another using tools like APIs, you're taking the first step in gleaning critical information about your learners, what they do, and how they consume information.

This is critical to your success because you can't make improvements if you don't know what's happening. The data and insights that stem from an integrated learning ecosystem will be integral to making meaningful changes that drive employee performance and track toward business goals.

How many systems do your users interact with?

System	Percentage
1	**11%**
2	**14%**
3	**22%**
4	**16%**
5	**37%**
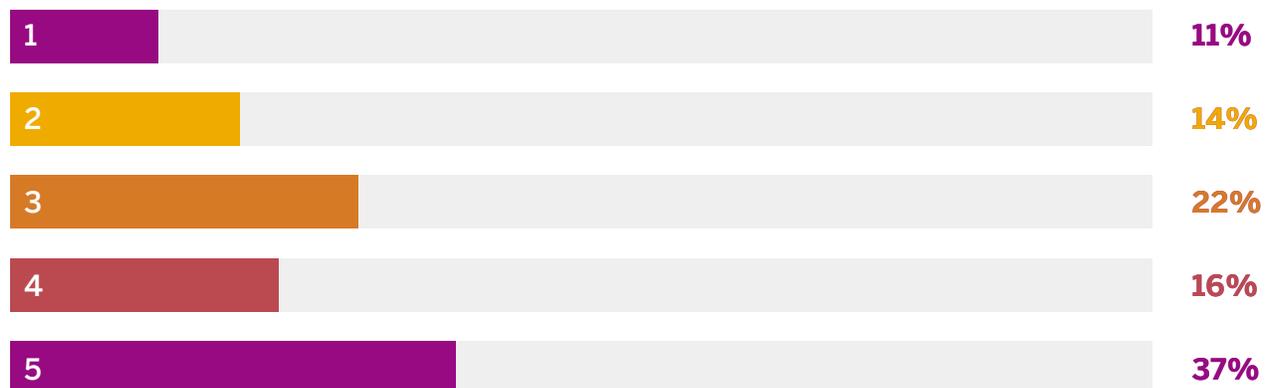
Skill 2: Deal with data dilemmas

If you've successfully managed to unify your systems or maybe even replaced them with a more comprehensive solution, one of the first things you'll notice is the amount of data you have. It's probably a lot. But please don't get overwhelmed.

The lesson we borrow from marketing in this case is data segmentation, which cuts your data down into manageable chunks. Just as marketers profile their audiences so that they can target relevant content to different groups, you too can profile learners. As you dig into your data, you can break your user types into segments based on department, function/role, title, location/geography, or whatever categories support your mission.

You can take it a step further and sort people based on competencies, goals, expressed interests, or other segments that help you target people with the most beneficial training. Marketers talk about "pain points," which for L&D may translate into "learning gaps." Identify what those are, so that you can create and deliver more personalized, engaging, and effective learning.

Skill 3: Contend with content marketing

One of the top goals for L&D is to drive better engagement. However, it doesn't happen without significant effort. Learners will not seek and appreciate the fruits of your labor unless those "fruits" are individually engaging and unless they receive timely interventions reminding them to engage.

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Marketing would think of these assets and interventions as content marketing. This practice uses an array of tactics to get prospects to interact with eBooks, guides, blog articles, infographics, webinars, social media posts, images, videos, and the list goes on. When people engage with content, they become increasingly interested in and informed about whatever that company is selling.

In L&D terms, content marketing means promoting your eLearning courses, modules, learning paths, etc. It can even mean pushing messages about training and the assets you use to drive awareness of the program or even the value of the LMS itself.

Here are some tips from a savvy marketer's handbook:

Make it easy on the eyes
No matter how much you want people to engage with learning, they won't be intrigued unless the interventions and the learning content itself look good. Text-only messages and overly copy-heavy training probably won't hook today's learners.

Insist on visually-rich content
We live in an image and video-obsessed world. Your learning programs can't escape this reality. But if creating image-rich content seems daunting, opt for off-the-shelf, video-based, professionally created courses. It will save you a ton of time and effort. Get creative on the cheap: Cool content no longer requires big budgets. With smartphones, apps, and other relatively inexpensive technologies, there are plenty of ways to make graphics, images, animations, videos, etc. that entice learners without costing much more than time.

Diverge from digital
Notice that marketers don't limit themselves to strictly digital content. They use snail mail, billboards, posters, flyers, and even ads on the sides of city buses, if that's what it takes! It all still needs to look pretty, but there's no reason why you shouldn't utilize these time-tested tactics to get your message out.

Repurpose with purpose
Producing content isn't always about something new. Marketers might create five different sub-assets from the content of one eBook (blogs, infographics, webinars, social posts, etc.). What existing content do you have that could be broken into smaller parts to draw people into what you're promoting?

Skill 4: Optimize for ongoing improvement

Marketers are known to be great trackers of results; they test and measure everything, especially as top executives expect to see data on how marketing dollars translate into leads and closed sales. One of the ways that marketers take steps to improve results is through the process of optimization.
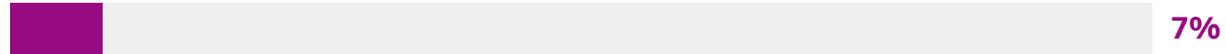
Yes, every training program is monitored & measured

38%
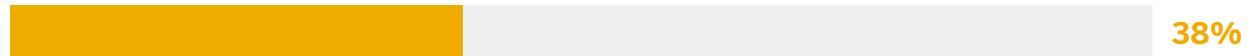
Sometimes, depends on the importances of the training

55%

Rarely

7%

Optimization, in marketing terminology, means continuously, iteratively tweaking tactics and campaigns to improve results and maximize desired outcomes.

How does L&D fare in regard to optimizing learning programs? Interestingly, recent SAP Litmos webinar attendees reported that 38 percent of them monitor and measure every training program, and more than half of them analyze results some of the time.

That's not too terribly bad, but it certainly leaves room for improvement for companies that aren't doing ample tracking. After all, how do you know how well you're doing without data measurement and iterative changes? How do you know if your training is successful if you just load it in your LMS and never look at results other than completion rates?

Start by Benchmarking

Optimization begins with benchmarking. This means knowing your baseline of current measurements. Without this foundational understanding of the current state of play, it's impossible to track how much you evolve and improve. Depending on which LMS you use, you should be able to report on completion rates rather easily. If

you don't have Google Analytics on your LMS, it's highly recommended that you install it. This will give you other data points that you'll need to benchmark and to identify red flag indicators such as:

Bounce rates of above 55 percent on any of your pages. A bounce, according to Google, means that someone landed on the page and took no further action. Surely there was something you wanted them to do on that page and they weren't compelled to do it once they landed there.

Extremely short dwell time on pages. This isn't the worst thing if the page doesn't require any action, but if it does, you have to wonder why they didn't hang around to take that action or explore further.

Notably long dwell times on pages. This can indicate that learners are getting stuck. Not always, but it's something to analyze if it seems off. Maybe they can't find what they need. Maybe they struggled to advance past a particular part of a course.

Once you've collected some data as part of your benchmarking project, it's time to consider introducing A/B testing wherever you can. Note that the key to successful A/B testing is only tweaking one thing at a time – otherwise, you won't know what drew the different result.

Some elements to consider changing for A/B tests:

| Layouts of your LMS homepage | Layouts of course pages | Copy / headlines on pages | Colors of buttons or call-to-action links | Shapes of buttons or call-to-action symbols |

This all helps you gain a better understanding of what's working, so you can do more of that and less of what's not. Optimization is best achieved through a constant cycle of five clear steps: devise, deliver, iterate, review, and restructure. Once you start, you just keep repeating the cycle for continual improvements – no matter how small.

Optimization cycle of delivery

01 Devise

02 Deliver
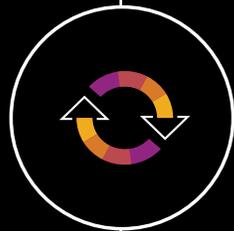
03 Iterate

04 Review
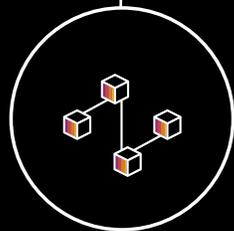
05 Restructure

Skill 5: Consider customer experience

In the past several years, improving customer experience (CX) has emerged as a top goal for marketing. To broadly define the term: it's your customers' holistic perception of all their interactions with your business or brand. Marketers must consider CX from multiple vantage points – in everything from how easy it is to navigate the website to how often customers receive communications to whether campaigns seamlessly flow, pulling prospects through the pre-sale phases toward a purchase.

To translate that into L&D speak, your "customers" are your learners, which most often means employees, but it could also mean contractors, freelancers, or partners, if you're using the LMS to deliver training to the extended enterprise. It could also mean your actual customers, if you offer customer training. Regardless of who your learners are, offering a great "customer experience" means smoothly guiding learners through each phase of their journey to produce predefined, desired outcomes – marketing's equivalent to producing hot leads.

How many systems do your users interact with?
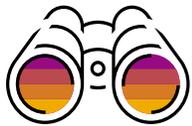
See through learners' eyes
Seeing the world from your learners' viewpoint can help you better structure your offerings around the actual experiences that your program presents. The best way to do this is to experience it yourself – if the system is a challenge to access and cumbersome to navigate; if instructions are hard to understand and follow; if a course is visually dull or confusing, you know you have some fixing to do. Don't guess what they're experiencing! Try everything out for yourself.

Design for different delivery preferences
Not everyone likes to learn in the same way. Some learners love the energy of live, instructor-led training, while others enjoy video-based training at their pace. Some like sitting in front of a desktop machine and others like learning on-the-go via a mobile device. It's not scalable to offer each individual their own preferred training at every learning opportunity, but you can include various "channels" to move people along their journey in the most pleasant way possible.

Request and respond to feedback
When you encourage feedback from learners, it improves their experience by demonstrating that they have a voice in shaping training processes and programs. Most people respond favorably to being asked for opinions, especially when it ultimately gets played out in action by the asker. In other words, if you ask for input, be sure to communicate how you're putting it to good use to improve the learning experience.

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