WHITE PAPER

The Modern Learner Experience

Why Great Learning UX is Your Competitive Advantage

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Introduction

As the modern world continues to embrace highly digital and increasingly intuitive experiences, learner expectations are sky high. Whether it's in-course, via support, or even in-context learning, staying relevant and engaging to hold user attention is more important than ever.

In our 2023 State of External Enterprise Learning Report, we found that developing a more engaging learner experience is one of the highest priorities for external training organizations, taking a leap from 26% to 61% in the past 12 months alone.[1]
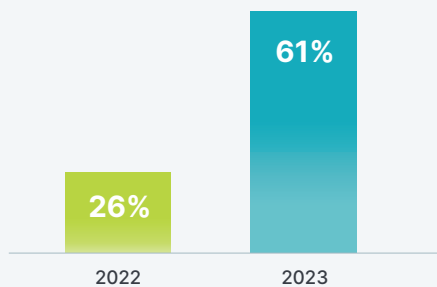
In our 10 years of experience in the training industry, we've seen first-hand the correlation between low engagement and increased customer abandonment - and training businesses are noticing it too. According to The Customer Education Playbook, User Experience (UX) is key to whether individuals feel positively or negatively about their interaction with you as a business. "While good UX delights learners and generates a positive psychological state, bad UX will cause frustration and bring up negative emotions for the learner... Your design needs to be clear and simple to engage learners extremely fast, or your learners will bounce."[2]

Capturing and holding your learners' attention needs to happen quickly. It takes users just a few seconds to decide whether they want to stay on your website or switch to a competitor. Even when individuals say that they love a brand, 32% would still walk away after a single bad experience.[3] In contrast, 72% of customers will tell their friends about a positive experience.[4] Which side of the coin do you want to land on as a business?

For training leaders, the value of a strategic learner experience is in the data. As part of our 2023 State of External Enterprise Learning Report, we asked respondents who indicated they have a content engagement strategy for learner experience to share their outcomes. **We found that those who prioritize Learner Experience (LX) are 25% more likely to see a reduction in lost clients, and claim 12% higher CSAT ratings as a result of their training.**

[1] Thought Industries, State of External Enterprise Learning Report 2023
[2] Kelly, B, Quick, D (2022) The Customer Education Playbook: How Leading Companies Engage, Convert, and Retain Customers.
[3] PWC, The Future of Customer Experience
[4] Salesforce, State of the Connected Customer, Second Edition

What Does Great LX Look Like for Today's Top Training Organizations?

LX can mean something different depending on your organization and its strategic focus. In our 10 years of experience, we've seen an excellent learner experience transform training organizations' impact on customers. Here are three examples of how businesses can see success with LX as their guide.

LX for the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation Means...

Driving Digital Engagement

The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation was eager to move from a linear learning experience to one that was more learner-driven and adaptive. Its previous digital platform left users struggling to find the resources they needed, and administrators couldn't track who was using what. **"Our existing tool wasn't mobile friendly and it wasn't designed with the growing digital needs of users in mind. Thought Industries platform has enabled the foundation to drive better engagement with its customer education and better understand user behavior. In just one program, we immediately increased engagement by 30%."**

MARK KORF
New Product Development

LX for Industrial Training International Means...

Overcoming Bottlenecks

Industrial Training International (ITI), a worldwide training leader for crane, rigging, and lift planning, needed to grow with learner expectations. With the Thought Industries platform, ITI has delivered tangible business results and enabled a comprehensive branded learning portal, which includes VR simulations for construction and industrial cranes, hazard awareness, inspection, and maintenance. **"We're now able to build custom pages and create a branded look for our business customers. Since turning to Ti and giving our business customers access to self-manage their courses, we've doubled our subscribers."**

CHRISTINA LANHAM
Managing Director, UK & Manager of Information Systems

LX for the Linux Foundation Means...

Flexible Delivery

The Linux Foundation was struggling to manage a combination of homegrown and external systems that covered their online and in-person training courses, videos, lab environments, written course content and certification exams. In their own words, they were "living on the ragged edge of disaster." By moving to Thought Industries, they were able to integrate all of these disparate elements into a single platform. **"We can now author, publish and update content, manage sales and e-commerce, and conduct certifications and training for more than 300,000 professionals globally, all from one platform."**

CLYDE SEEPERSAD
SVP Training and Certification

8 Common Learner Experience Blindspots that Drive Away Your Customers

LX is critical, but without a precise strategy in place, it can be easy to come up against pitfalls that impair how your users interact with your training. Here are some of the most common that we've seen:

Death by PowerPoint

When your content library is page after page of static information, this can quickly feel stale to the learner. Consider mixing up your modalities, as engagement is key, especially if learners are being introduced to a topic for the first time.

Slow time to value

Your learners have questions they want answered, or problems they need a solution for. If your courses are long, or your content has too much detail, you're essentially making it harder for them to get the value that they're looking for, and so you run the risk of losing them altogether.

Clunky navigation

If your learners feel lost or can't find what they need, they will quickly abandon the learning process. Consider elements like content tagging, accurate recommendation engines, and the underlying structure of your academy to create a clear path for the learner to follow.

No milestone strategy

What is your ultimate goal? Is the learner intending to achieve a certification, or finish a specific learning path? Without built-in milestones and achievements, they may feel unmotivated, and churn before they reach where they need to go.

Disconnected branding

Each learning experience needs to feel just as much as a part of your brand as anything else on your website. Consider your products and training as a whole, and streamline the design, the language, the branding and the tone.

A boring welcome mat

Ever heard the phrase, you don't get a second chance at a first impression? Many businesses rely on out-of-the-box site building tools, which means they can only ever achieve 75% of their original design vision. If your front page is underwhelming, learners will check out before they have even begun.

Cookie-cutter interface

Your learner's unique preferences are what gets you from "blah" to personalized and engaging immediately. Both the information from your LMS, as well as data gleaned from external sources can be a treasure trove of insight to allow you to personalize and tailor each learner's experience.

A messy checkout experience

The customer purchase journey is a particularly delicate one. If there any obstacles at all, you run the risk of losing your buyer at the final hurdle. From accurate and enticing course previews to streamlined eCommerce functionality, its your job to reduce any friction and get that sale.

The Infrastructure of an Excellent Learner Experience

If we can recognize a poor learner experience, what makes a robust one?

The best training businesses and learning platforms use their technology and infrastructure to achieve customer engagement via learner experience. They retain customers over time and build loyalty and stickiness within their user base. However, most can't achieve what the modern learner now considers to be table stakes; in other words, the new core elements of an excellent LX. Here are three ways businesses can see success with LX as their guide.

1 Intuitive, Elegant Interfaces

Diverse in terms of content modalities, a modern learning platform includes Instructor-led and Virtual Instructor-led training, as well as blended and on-demand learning options. It's easy to use, and also fun — triggering engagement with the help of achievements and gamification. The learner has a single dashboard where they can measure progress and outcomes, and can easily navigate through their specific learning journey with control, and without clutter. Look for a platform that allows unlimited customization options, so you can truly achieve your learning vision.

2 Personalized and Valuable

What does your learner need? To understand this piece of the puzzle, measurement is key. Gather comprehensive analytics on both the user and the content, and then use customization options to put this data into action. For the user, it's tailored offerings that deliver a relevant and engaging learning experience every time. Behind the scenes, you're using data to build a more robust content library overall. An AI-powered recommendation engine is a great example of this, offering adaptive learning paths that highlight relevant content, and meet specific requirements in real-time.

3 Impactful in the Moment

Your ultimate goal is to solve your learner's problem. That means quick and accessible answers, easy to scan and should include micro-content that streamlines the delivery of real solutions. Extensible delivery methods can allow you to put learning in the flow of work, such as in-app or in-context, extending your reach to the exact moment of need. Don't forget to look for a platform that supports proactive outreach to encourage engagement, such as push notifications, updates, and reminders.

How to Build an Excellent Modern Learner Experience

1 Start with an intuitive, elegant interface

Elements of delight and fun
Infrastructure: Learner dashboard for easy navigation and progress tracking

Different modalities of learning
Infrastructure: Content type diversity, including ILT, VILT, & blended learning

Ignite engagement with achievements
Infrastructure: Certifications & badges built into the experience

2 Give your learner what they want

Personalization for the learner
Infrastructure: Comprehensive analytics to optimize for your users over time, plus customization options to tailor for individual needs

Tee up the perfect next installment of valuable learning
Infrastructure: AI-powered recommendation engine for personalized, adaptive learning paths

3 Solve your learner's problem

Quick and accessible answers
Infrastructure: Micro-content that provides real solutions, and course previews for learners to sample before they purchase

Moment-of-need reach
Infrastructure: Extensible delivery methods that put learning into the flow of work, and proactive learner notifications for timely updates and reminders

The Future of Learner Experience

The evolving landscape of learner experience is changing all the time.
Think about how long-form content has transitioned into micro-content…
with nano-content coming up in the rearview mirror fast.

Change can be seen in every direction, but right now there are three emerging
trends that training businesses should be seriously discussing as they consider
their roadmap.

INNOVATION 1

The Role of AI and Machine Learning

AI and Machine Learning have already made strides
in revolutionizing personalized learning experiences.
From the learner's vantage point, an intelligent
recommendation engine that uses machine learning
for individualized content delivery is critical. Without
it, you risk users engaging with the wrong content
and quickly dropping out, or getting lost, frustrated
or bored. This can be augmented with other AI-based
innovation such as Natural Language Processing
(NLP) for interactive and conversational learning —
shown to boost engagement.

Intelligent analytics is your eye in the sky for LX,
providing actionable insights used to optimize
performance and streamline content delivery and
consumption in real-time, based on each individual's
needs. While it's natural to be curious about the
potential of Generative AI and Large Language Models
(LLM) which are the current talk of the town, according
to CTO Thought Industries, Todd Boes, "this trend is
more about creating content than it is about the end
learner experience." And for training stakeholders,
"there's potentially more value when it comes to
the operational efficiency for administrators through
AI tools."

Remember:

**As digital leaders cite privacy
as their top concern,
training leaders need to
carefully balance
hyper-personalization[5]
with ethics and intrusion
potential.**

[5] Qualtrics: State of Digital Experience 2023

INNOVATION 3

The Potential of VR and AR Technology

Virtual and Augmented Reality provide a safe and consistent environment for practical skills development, especially in high-risk industries. Look at a company like BP for example, that offers a virtual production plant to train offshore and rig workers for their oil refineries.[6] BP are not alone. As of 2022, more than half of companies are already implementing virtual reality into their business strategy.[7] 34% say that one of the largest benefits they currently have or plan to enjoy is "a more effective way to develop or train our people."

VR and AR offers the ability to enhance contextual learning and real-world application during training. This boosts outcomes, reduces the time it takes to train and certify, and empowers learners with greater confidence and awareness before they step into a real-world scenario. Learning in the flow of work and in the context of how that knowledge needs to be applied, as well as according to individual learner preferences is a game changer for retention and skills. As a result, we believe the concept of "Learning Everywhere" will soon be a ubiquitous mindset and approach for training and education teams.

INNOVATION 2

A Deeper Use of Virtual Coaching Tools

Ease of use is everything, and training businesses are already looking to virtual tools that can streamline operational efficiency behind the scenes, while providing a better LX for the end user. Consider advanced chatbots and conversation tools that move away from scripted or templated conversations to provide real value in real time.

Bongo is a great example of this, offering AI technology that watches a video uploaded by the learner, detects relevant keywords, and accurately determines whether trainees have hit the mark on an assignment in terms of knowledge retention. It's a quick and simple way for a learner to validate their performance and progress, and for the business — they can free up full-time employees for more strategic work elsewhere.

[6] BP, Workforce training, VR and AR production plant
[7] https://www.pwc.com/us/en/tech-effect/emerging-tech/metaverse-survey.html

Is LX Your Competitive Edge or Achilles Heel?

When it comes to Learner Experience, there's no such thing as getting by. If your LX isn't attracting users to your brand, it's turning them away.

Without investing in a modern learning experience, you run the risk of becoming outdated, then irrelevant, then left behind altogether, as users turn to your competition — those who have leaned into emerging technology and tools.

Unfortunately, once the innovation gap is there, it will quickly become unbridgeable.

The modern learner won't put up with a cookie-cutter experience that offers slow time to value. In contrast, LX is all about giving the learner what they need in the moment, solving their problem while alleviating friction, and designing a personalized experience that is multimodal, dynamic and finds each user at the right time.

Ready to transform your LX into a head-turning strategic asset for your business?

Let's schedule a time to talk >

About Thought Industries

Thought Industries powers the business of learning with the industry's leading enterprise learning platform for customer, partner and professional training. The company was founded in 2014 around the core belief that online learning experiences should be modern, intuitive, engaging, and scalable. Today, the Thought Industries growing team builds and maintains the only learning platform with completely native tools and integrations that drive higher customer engagement, learner proficiency, and retention. Headquartered in Boston, Thought Industries has offices across North America and Europe. For more information, visit thoughtindustries.com and follow the company on LinkedIn and Twitter.

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