

ADWEEK

Training Millennials in the Workplace? Teach Them the Same Way You Reach Them

Old tactics are kryptonite for today's attention spans

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It's no secret that millennials have short attention spans. *Illustration: The Project Twins*

Understanding changes and preferences in how your audience consumes information is the foundation of good advertising. Yet when it comes to training, most agencies still are adhering to a model that is as outdated as a media plan comprised totally of 30-second spots on three networks.

Think about the typical learning and development module—long, dull e-learning courses that employees plow through one click at a time, a monotony of text pages broken up

with the occasional interactive activity. Now look at the people you are training. More than likely, the majority of them are millennials, a group that has brought a whole new meaning to the concept of short attention spans.

According to a 2012 study commissioned by Time Inc., millennials switch media types 27 times every nonworking hour. Few things hold their focus for long, so they prefer information and communication in small chunks. They are comfortable with jumping around in the information and communication realms and are nonlinear learners.

While we tend to think of these behaviors as culturally driven, academic researchers have determined that this is not only a cultural phenomenon, but is in fact an actual rewiring of millennials' neurological pathways, meaning that millennials do indeed have shorter attention spans than that of previous generations. In other words, they not only prefer small packets of information, but they also need information to be presented in that way.

The smaller-is-better credo applies to delivery methods as well, with mobile devices being the preferred means for this group to access information and communications. Almost 94 percent own cellphones and consistently use them to gather the info they need.

If any of this information comes as a surprise, you may want to find another profession. After all, with millennials representing \$200 billion in purchasing power, knowing how, when and where to engage them is basic information for ad agencies. But for as much as we may know about relevant engagement experiences for millennials, one look at the typical agency training module will tell you that we clearly aren't translating that insight to creating effective learning experiences. In fact, in terms of this audience's expectations, preferences and habits, the existing e-learning standard—dull and desktop based—is about as relevant and engaging to them as transparencies displayed on an overhead projector.

So why don't we take the same approach to teaching millennials that we do to reaching them?

That's the question we asked at Annalect, which provides data-driven marketing strategies.

Going back to what we know about how the millennial mind is wired, at Annalect we redesigned L&D around the concept of micro-learning, which is built around a strategy of smart chaos, a framework that plays to the technology strengths and preferences of millennials.

Smart chaos begins with paring down key information into bite-size lessons of five minutes or less that feature highly interactive content like quizzes and other activities that not only keep learners engaged but also measure comprehension and track learning. Departing from the usual pedantic tone that defines L&D copy, content is infused with a

casual, blog-like vibe and visuals enhanced with audience-appropriate voiceovers. You can even incorporate employee-captured videos and other multimedia on a branded media player to add a distinct brand personality.

Content is deployed through a progressive and social- and mobile-friendly SaaS-based LMS that hosts and deploys micro-learning to the entire organization. Employees can use meta tagging to cross-reference topics and conduct their own searches to aid in their learning. The platform also encourages autonomous learning by making possible e-learning road maps and blended learning paths that put users in greater control of their own training.

We currently have 1,691 learners in 22 departments, 1,600 of whom are active. In the last 30 days, over 175 learners have signed up and 175 lessons have been viewed (127 were completed) by 154 learners.

We are seeing the best possible anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of the micro-learning approach—a greater demand for comprehensive information our longer courses can provide. The quick, fun lessons neutralized the resistance to training and sold the short-attention-span generation on the value of deeper exploration.

So don't cling to how you might have learned. Things have changed. But if you can embrace and tap into that change, your company will stay forever young.

If marketing and learning had a love child, the result would be Julie Veloz, global head of learning and development at Annalect in New York. You can find her on Twitter @julievaloz.

