

Five ways to design elearning materials for millennials

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The millennial generation is shaping the world around us - breaking the moulds that have traditionally determined how one works, socialises and learns. In this article, we look at five ways in which you can design your e-learning course to suit the needs of the millennial learner.



Characteristics of a millennial

The term 'millennial' has become a buzzword in both the e-learning and corporate training spaces. Millennials are tech-savvy, and familiar with social media and other forms of digital communication. As such, they tend to rely on technology for most day-to-day tasks. Millennials spend extended periods of time browsing the web, are accustomed to finding information when they need it, and communicate with friends and colleagues online, rather than face-to-face. While these behaviours might not seem significant, they have had a profound impact in terms of how millennials think and work.

In 2012, the US Chamber of Commerce conducted a [study](#) on millennials in the workplace. It found suggestive evidence that millennials' brains are being rewired through extensive multitasking and constant interaction with technology. Specifically, the study suggests that millennials have been trained to improve their performance through multitasking, by increasing the speed at which the brain processes information. Therefore, millennials are not simply unaffected by multitasking – they actually require it, in order to peak their performance.

A further [study, conducted by Microsoft](#) Corporation in 2013, found that the average person now has an attention span of around eight seconds (which is less than that of a gold fish). This has reduced from 12 seconds, in 2002.

Because millennials tend to think differently, they often portray the following characteristics:

- They are driven and highly motivated
- They have a strong desire to learn
- They expect constant feedback and guidance
- They crave praise and recognition
- They can process information at exceptional speeds

Significance for e-learning

In an overall sense, these traits mean that learner engagement and motivation in online courses becomes even more imperative. The days of holding long seminars with wordy presentation slides are long gone – methods like these are no longer effective. This means that new methods are required, in order to meet the needs of millennial students. Below are five design tips to fine-tune your online course, for optimal learner engagement.

1. Learning motivation

Millennials need to feel a sense of purpose. In other words, they need to understand that what they are learning will be useful to them. Although they may be hungry for information, they are unlikely to pay attention if they cannot see how the knowledge can be applied in their lives. To avoid this, make sure that lessons have a clear learning objective, and that the information is relatable to the learner.

2. Bite-sized microlessons

Because millennials typically have shorter attention spans, it is crucial to make use of ‘microlessons’ and ‘just-in-time’ training materials. This means condensing an hour-long lecture into a shorter 5–15 minute microlesson, for instance. In addition, it entails switching between different modes of instruction – for example, by including videos, animations, podcasts, interactions and more. This will not only serve to keep things fresh, but will also appeal to a wider range of learner preferences. As such, while the lessons may be short, they will be loaded with information that can be absorbed quickly, and applied effectively.

3. Gamification

Most millennials love games. Gamification can be implemented by including features such as rewards, badges and progression tracking. It can also be used to encourage social interaction between learners, through a sense of competition or camaraderie. Overall, it presents countless benefits in terms of motivating and engaging learners.

4. Challenges

Millennials typically dislike being passive recipients and regurgitators of information. Instead, they prefer excitement and challenges that allow them to test their capabilities. To achieve this, one can use interactive branching scenarios or case studies that pique learners’ interests and push them to use their problem-solving skills.

5. Mobile-friendliness

Ideally, an e-learning course should be mobile-friendly. Because millennials are fast-paced and conscious of their time, they often enjoy the freedom of engaging in learning or completing activities on the go, or whenever they have a free minute.

In a nutshell

In a nutshell, millennials tend to have short attention spans, and are easily distracted. However, they are also excellent at multitasking, have a strong desire to learn, and crave recognition and reward. When catering to this audience, it is vital to keep the content short, relevant and meaningful. It is also useful to include tools like gamification, to create a sense of social competition and increase motivation. Additionally, the learning material should include videos, podcasts, interactions and more, to help engage the learners. They should also ideally be accessible via mobile devices.

By following these simple yet vital tips, you can increase learner motivation and activate the high learning potential of millennial cognition.

* The term 'millennial' generally refers to people born between 1980 and 2000. However, a looser definition would include anyone who has grown up with technology, and has had a cell phone since the age of 12. Regardless of which definition is used, it is important to take note of the characteristics of a millennial, and how these affect training and development.

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