Six steps in making compliance eLearning easier?

Are you excited by the introduction of GDPR next year or do you have a sense of dread in learning a revised set of rights and accountabilities? If like me you have a short attention span for legal matters and dry text, but need to fully understand the implications and requirements of a law or regulation for your business, then you could be putting yourself through another painful experience.

It need not be like that. Most people want to know what they should or shouldn't do, who does what in the organisation, the steps they need to perform to meet their business's policy and possibly some points of interest to give the whole thing a flicker of colour. Above all, of course, most people only really care that they have passed the test that says, 'I know how to be compliant'. After that, they put the learning to the back of their mind, not to resurface until an issue arises, or the annual review comes around.

Much of the challenge of implementing compliance can be addressed by embedding it within business operations. However, the challenge of learning the details can be made a great deal simpler by focussing precisely on the immediate needs of the learner needs, and allowing them to access additional content for more information when they need it.

We've identified six steps that allow this, using eLearning:

Step 1 - Provide the procedure

In my experience, people in processing roles are less concerned with understanding the totality of what they need to do than with their ability to execute. This is especially true where compliance is concerned. Giving them a step-by-step process early in the eLearning helps by:

- Getting them to start to think how something like GDPR affects them in terms of effort. People like to do things that are easy and quick.
- Getting them to consider how they can build it into their model for working effectively alongside other processes that they need to complete.
- Creating a gap in their understanding that facilitates a request for more information. This might be due to fear of making an error, challenging what they thought was correct (or for GDPR what is different from last time) or generating that need to know how things fit together.

Staff sometimes fear that, without the appropriate context, a process might be misapplied. Of course, that could also happen as a result of a loss of concentration. What we are aiming for is staff to develop a deeper understanding of the process on a deeper level.

When using eLearning, we can describe procedures as step-by-step guides or a table that uses the premise of 'if/then' (if this happens, then do this). If the compliance procedure is online, it is also possible to use screen capturing technology to allow the individual to view the steps and embed this learning into their understanding of the process. To test the learning, we can ask the learner to recreate or construct the right approach.

Step 2 - Give them the reasons why (Principles)

By making the materials personal we are more likely to engage the learner. The question becomes, 'what if I don't do it?' This is a natural human response when change is introduced. Indeed, and this is especially true when considering compliance, changing people's behaviour is often the hardest task. Change the behaviour and the rest will follow.

Key principles of their behaviour include:

- Something they must or should do
- Something they must not do, or should avoid
- The consequences of their actions, especially to them. There could be legal or organisational implications.

In eLearning, it is important for behaviour to attract the learner's attention. Devices for achieving this include pop-ups, advice icons and warnings. Principles can also be showcased through stories and examples, and can be tested with scenarios.

Step 3 – Confirm where their responsibility starts and ends (Structure)

A concern for some learners can be that they might suffer the consequences of something that is not fully within their control. As a result, there may be strong a desire for learners to know how things are organised, who does what, and, most importantly, when and to whom can they defer tasks and issues. This desire can be useful in increasing learners' engagement and in prolonging attention spans.

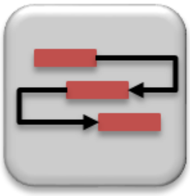
By providing a structure for the process and the organisation we can:

- Define who else is involved in the process, and what they look after
- Specify the timelines or deadlines that need to be met within various parts of the process
- Describe the methods and tools to be used to meet the requirements of the process.

If we are delivering the education through eLearning, we can provide this kind of structure using:

- Tables describing organisational information, such as roles and responsibilities
- An interactive timeline, showing key milestones and deadlines
- An inventory with icons showing the tools required to complete the task.

We can test learners' knowledge by asking questions about roles and the responsibilities they have. We can also ask questions about specific tasks and their associated deadlines and timelines.



Step 4 – Outline what they contribute overall (Process)

Once the wider responsibilities are understood, learners become more interested in where they fit within the context of the overall process. Their motivation is to understand their contribution and the importance of their role within the context of what needs to be achieved. This requires an understanding what other people and departments do. It also requires an understanding of the stage in the process at which the learner is likely to be required to fulfil their role.

A well-defined process enables learners to:

- Pinpoint the cause and effect of their contribution and those of others
- Understand what is required, from the people and departments involved, to ensure that their activity is effective
- Be decisive within the task, pushing back to other areas or accelerating action to close off their own responsibility.

In eLearning, the methods used to education about a process can include:

- Flowcharts
- Swim lane diagrams that show the process through roles and responsibilities, projects or stages
- Realistic examples
- Story-telling and testing, using varied examples to correlate tasks to stages.

Step 5 – Confirm where this fits within the legal requirement (concept)

Traditional approaches to education often focus first on describing what something is, in the hope that each learner can subsequently assimilate the overall concepts and deduce the implications for their own role. This approach can leave open questions too broad in scope to have meaning directly for learners. As a result, the approach can often fail to engage. By leaving the concepts to the end, learners may be left grasping for meaning, instead of being led to it. In addition, the concepts which underpin specific requirements are likely to remain relatively unchanged, even as the details of the processes evolve over time. This makes them a valuable resource for learners.

Applying the concepts of a compliance requirement allows learners to:

- Create neurological links between what they know and what is new or has changed.
- Contextualise their responsibilities and contribution within the concepts of the wider law or regulation.
- Provide specific, widely understood terminology to the activities they perform. For example, as an individual, a learner may need to send a customer a confirmation of their complaint. This means that the learner is meeting the customer's 'right to access' information that is written about them.
- Learn at a deeper level, and apply the concept to a range of situations that they may face in the future.

To share concepts within eLearning we can:

- Provide a video explanation
- Use an interactive diagram to outline points within the wider concept
- Create a glossary of terms
- Ask the learner to critique items of importance.

In testing a learner's understanding of concepts, we can ask questions about what to do under specific circumstances, or highlight what could happen, using a scenario.

Step 6 – Confirm why it is valid (Facts)

The final part of presenting compliance-based eLearning is to provide confirmation that everything that has been covered is valid, real and has an impact. The provision of facts is a way of doing this. Though tend to be less important in the scale of learning requirement. In eLearning, it's important to recognise the role that facts should play in eLearning. In particular, it's important not to allow them to diminish the value of compliance assessments. Answers to questions about facts rely on memory and recall, rather than deeper understanding. After all, in other aspects of life, facts may be little more than interesting trivia.

In eLearning, facts can:

- Help anchor some behavioural requirements, by providing reminders of the impact of not performing a task, for example
- Provide breaks in the content, helping learners retain interest.
- Offer reassurance to learners that the materials are grounded in reality.

In eLearning, we may present facts as:

- Random pop-up items
- A quick quiz to maintain energy and change the learning dynamic

- Infographics, charts, graphs and tables, with the premise that a picture paints a thousand words.

As far as possible, facts should not be used as part of formal assessments. As we have mentioned, facts typically test only the learner's ability to recall information. However, it can be useful to add a few such questions at the start of an assessment to help learners achieve the appropriate frame of mind for the remainder of the test.

The approach we've described reverses the layout of most compliance eLearning. The traditional approach tends to start from the big picture overview (which is less relatable and more about training people to perform) and only later moves towards a more user-centric approach (which by its very nature is more about learning for the individual).

So, in order to make compliance training easier for your employees and engage them immediately in the requirements why not provide the procedure first, then give them the reasons for adopting the right behaviours. Follow this with a structure of where their responsibility starts and ends and then outline what they contribute in the overall process. You can then confirm where their learning, acquired from the first four stages, fits within the wider context of the legal requirement. Lastly, facts and examples add a final layer of validity to your business compliance.

Making neural connections between what we know and need to know is learning and this is more likely to happen when the content is directly relatable to us.

It's time to revise your thinking and improve your compliance by placing the individual's requirements central to your learning process. 2018 is just around the corner and more rules and regulation are on their way.