Analysing eLearning requirements: simplifying analysis of complex data

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Introduction

The analysis phase of eLearning has often been seen as a necessary evil, which organisations have to pay for, with few tangible benefits. Poor analysis can lead to unbalanced, ill-defined content, which does not suit the needs of a varied audience and which significantly reduces the engagement and subsequent learning.

However, the analysis phase has far more to offer when using an Information Mapping approach. While a traditional analysis of the audience is needed in terms of numbers, roles and requirements; Information Mapping helps the designer to divide complex content appropriately for the organisations' stakeholders, to provide bite-sized chunks of information and which meet clear objectives.

This approach creates direct, clear, well organised and balanced content, which is easier to storyboard, develop and satisfy stakeholder's needs.

What is the process for effective analysis of information?

Firstly, we need to define the purpose of each section of the eLearning. The designer must then define what the user should be able to do as a result of completing the content. This provides clarity on why each piece of eLearning is being produced and what the modules' objectives are for the content that it covers.

Secondly, the designer categorises the information or raw content into six information types; concepts, principles, structures, processes, procedures and facts.

These 6 information types help the designer to group similar items and organise them into an order and sequence. This is achieved by applying Information Mapping standards consistently, whereby items are chunked by relevance and given a label. The chunk is then assessed by the developer as to whether the detail is easily accessible by the different stakeholders and whether it lends itself to an integrated graphic like a table, chart or graphic. This enables the designer to assess whether the balance of content is right to achieve the learning objectives or whether the modules are too conceptual or too detailed.

This approach helps designers to identify the importance of content and categorise it for use i.e. is it essential, helpful or peripheral. It also gives designers an indication of how to manage, use and develop the content in the design phase, as an aid to writing clear storyboards, with relevant questions to check understanding and competence.

What are the benefits?

Some of the key benefits of utilising this approach for analysing the requirements for eLearning are that it:

- Allows organisations to commission different sections of the build process, as and when the analysis produces the relevant output.
- Provides a consistent approach to different phases within a programme.
- Helps speed up the other design and development phases as Information Mapping provides an indication to the developer of how the content could be used.

Further benefits for stakeholders include:

- Accessible, bite-sized information.
- A clear structure to how content is presented.
- Specific content required by the user is easy to find and, thus, can be used for both initial learning and referral.
- A consistent approach delivers consistent layouts, even where multiple designers are involved.
- Simplified language.
- Exchangeable and reusable content.
- ELearning modules that are balanced in terms of the amount of a particular information type that is being used.

Conclusion

The Information Mapping approach to analysis provides value to an organisation in developing their eLearning content by providing an accurate assessment of the format of the content, ensuring that the eLearning produced has a clear purpose, is well organised, and engages the right people in the right way.

It can also be applied to developing training, and is especially useful in the documentation process, ensuring guides and job aides are well written.

It is a good process for instructional designers and trainers who produce the content and for an organisations' stakeholders who access the content. This all helps the organisation to reduce error rates, improve reading time and learning retention, reduce referrals and achieve a higher level of compliance and production.

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Information Mapping

Information Mapping is an international, research-based method used to analyse, organise and present, clear and user-focused information. Information Mapping's primary focus is on documentation for high-consequence and compliance-based industries. A document designer follows a systematic set of principles and procedures to make data or raw information easier to write, and easier for readers to navigate and understand.

Please visit the official Information Mapping website for more detail on the Information Mapping method and examples of it in practice.

www.informationmapping.com

About SkillSet Ltd.

SkillSet have been designing, developing and delivering training programmes since 1991, so it's fair to say that we know a thing or two about training! We provide a full range of training services, including training needs analysis, design and delivery of blended training programmes, learning management systems and post 'go-live' support. We also work with several software vendors to help them improve end-user adoption within their client bases. We provide software and solutions to enable our customers to rapidly create documentation, eLearning and support materials.

SkillSet is headquartered in the UK but we also have offices in the Czech Republic and a global network of long-term associates. We work with clients worldwide and have delivered training in more than 50 countries and in many different languages.

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