



Smart Ways to Personalize an LMS

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INTRODUCTION



Personalization could be the buzzword of 2017. People today want to be able to customize everything from the music on their digital playlists to the toppings on their tacos. Not surprisingly, this trend extends to corporate learning management systems. Learning and development (L&D) professionals are discovering that employees are more eager to engage with the company's LMS when its features are personalized to account for their individual needs.

The desire for LMS customization is not confined to individuals. There are sound business motives for the practice, which is why a growing number of companies are opting to personalize their learning management systems. Sometimes it is a random happenstance, such as when a firm is managing a suite of learning technologies that connect back to its LMS: When the different systems are integrated, the result is a personalized hybrid. More often, however, customizing the LMS is a deliberate, strategic decision.

Why should you personalize your LMS?

There are numerous reasons. Gone are the days of the one-size-fits-all LMS. Like snowflakes, each learner, as well as every organization, is different. By personalizing the look and feel of their learning management systems, firms are discovering that they can better serve a diverse audience of learners, as well as their own unique business needs.

LMS personalization is driven by a variety of factors; most of these focus on making the system more approachable so users will engage with it. This is especially important when a company unveils a new learning management system. There is always a learning curve. The more the LMS is configured with relatable language and recognizable visual imagery, the easier the transition is for hourly workers, as well as senior executives.

Of course, entry-level employees and senior executives differ widely in terms of what they demand from the LMS. New workers may need to access it for onboarding and job training. For them, it is imperative that the system be friendly and easy to navigate. The LMS should help this audience ramp up quickly, and should be a place they return to regularly in order to reap the bounty of resources stored within the system.

Upper-level management has different priorities. They require information in the form of actionable, easy-to-read reports. LMS personalization allows the system to expertly organize data points and spit out detailed analytics about course completion rates for individuals, specific departments, or the entire workforce. This information then can inform important business decisions.

There is also a monetary factor to consider when thinking about LMS personalization. Stakeholders may be surprised to learn that they can monetize their web properties, processes, and data through various integration scenarios. A common example would be to implement SSO (single sign-on) with other web properties. An example of a way to monetize data is having the LMS feed user certifications to a human resource information system. Another is having the production system provide the LMS with skill requirements needed for specific dates. In the latter example, the production system provides the requirements, and the personalized LMS dashboard allows management to plan training and certifications to meet the production requirement.

Adobe view: Importance of personalization

Personalization has become the center of almost every experience. Personalization in a learning context means providing “just-for-me” experiences to employees. These may include personalized dashboards, course recommendations based on skill aspirations, and customized language and delivery type.

Personalized revision notes: Technology should allow employees to revisit the learning material through personalized bookmarks and revision notes. Notes are taken in real time and span across multiple modules. These notes act like microlearning bytes that learners can save and review at a later time.

Personalized recommendations: While learning sources are plenty, employee time is a scarce commodity. Technology should be able to personalize the learning recommendations employees want to receive from the LMS based on the must-have skills required for them to do well in their current job, or new skills they may require for an aspirational role they are targeting within the team or in another function.

Personalized language and delivery type: Learners should be able to personalize their experiences by selecting their language of choice and preferred delivery type based on the learning style that works best for them—eLearning, instructor-led training, or virtual classroom.

Learn more about Adobe's LMS, Adobe Captivate Prime, [here](#). You can also join the conversation on social media with the hashtags #Adobe and #AdobeCaptivatePrime.

Finally, LMS personalization has a direct and positive impact on employee job satisfaction. Reports generated by the LMS offer unbiased and data-driven assessments of individuals' skills and strengths. Armed with this knowledge, management can map out customized plans for staff development and enrichment. This fuels company loyalty, improves workplace morale, and ultimately makes employees more marketable.

Indeed, there is a plethora of reasons to personalize your learning management system. The question is not "Why should you personalize your LMS?" Rather, it is "Why wouldn't you?"

Smart ways to personalize an LMS

There are dozens of ways an organization can personalize its learning management system. Some areas that are particularly ripe for customization include:

- Learner dashboards
- Content delivery
- Recommendations
- Revision notes
- Search results

This paper will examine these topics in greater detail.

Learner dashboards

When a learner logs in to an LMS, the first thing he or she usually sees is a screen featuring a dashboard. Experts note that the dashboard is a straightforward tool that should be used sparingly. It can be personalized with information targeted specifically to the user; however, resist the temptation to clutter it with extraneous bells and whistles.

Instead of offering a companywide or global view, the dashboard should prioritize the individual learner and encapsulate information vital to that user. In a nutshell, the dashboard should outline where employees currently are and provide a road map for future growth. Some examples of appropriate information to highlight on the learner dashboard are: specific competencies that learners have gained, certifications they have earned, courses they have completed, and gamification badges they have acquired. There could also be a section listing recommended content for them to consume.



While key information should be immediately accessible on the learner dashboard screen, it should be simple for users to drill down into secondary information relevant to their needs, such as their progress or quiz scores in a particular module. It should also be easy for users to navigate directly to specific courses.

Adding a personalized calendar may be helpful when training is date-driven, such as when a compliance requirement or an important assignment must be completed within a certain timeframe. In such cases, users or instructors should be able to mark the task after it is successfully addressed, and it should display as a success in their dashboards. The system could accomplish this by moving the task to “history” and awarding a badge.

Speaking of badges, a growing number of companies are adding gamification elements, such as leaderboards, to their LMSs. This practice is somewhat controversial. While research shows that leaderboards can stimulate employee engagement, competition may at the same time prove demotivating to employees consistently ranked near the bottom. In response, many firms are reconfiguring their leaderboards to leverage regional or team dynamics, or removing the competitive factor and inserting simple progress bars so individual learners can visually track their development as they successfully master personal goals.

Content delivery

L&D professionals have a multitude of options when it comes to presenting training material. An LMS can personalize the delivery of content, thus improving the likelihood that employees will engage with it.

There are numerous ways to personalize content delivery. The learning management system can offer content in a choice of languages, which is helpful when the workforce is global. Additionally, the LMS can support delivery of different types of content, such as eLearning, instructor-led training, and virtual classroom training.

In order to accommodate workers’ diverse learning preferences, most training executives today strive for a blended learning environment, with content available on the LMS in an assortment of formats. These may include:

- Written word (e.g., PDFs, blogs)
- Audio (podcasts, recordings)
- Video (MP4)
- Collaborative (labs, discussion boards, chats)
- Interactive (labs, games, quizzes, polls)
- Third-party eLearning content

Another aspect to consider when personalizing content delivery is the type of device(s) that the content will be viewed on. While SCORM-based learning management systems require learning content to be hosted in a web browser and consumed in-house, other specifications such as xAPI can effectively transfer learning content to mobile devices like tablets and smartphones. This offers a host of personalization options.

Finally, microlearning is having a huge impact on content delivery in the L&D industry. Pundits expect to see LMSs extend functionality by introducing a structure for “dripped” (timed-release) content, and for spaced repetition and practice. A growing body of research indicates that this approach may lead to even better learning outcomes.

Recommendations

Career growth is very important to many workers and is often cited by Millennials as a key factor motivating them to accept a position with a particular company. However, few learners actually take the initiative to parse what is usually an extensive database of potential courses available to them on the corporate LMS. Those who elect to do so are often overwhelmed or confused when it comes to selecting classes that would be most beneficial to their careers.

A good LMS lays the groundwork to help employees accelerate their careers by curating a personalized curriculum of recommended courses, based on factors such as the learner’s current skills and the qualifications required to take the next step toward a job they aspire to. Instead of all users following the same learning path, the LMS provides prescriptive feedback and recommendations so that learners are exposed to exactly what they need.

Ideally, such recommendations should appear on the learner dashboard. They should be customized to reflect an employee’s current role, providing guidance toward mastery of must-have skills for success in that particular job. They might also highlight the new skills needed for a future position elsewhere within the company. It may seem obvious, but recommendations and learning paths should never be static. They should change according to business needs and industry trends.

The benefits of providing learning path recommendations to employees are clear; however, there are advantages for the company as well. By pinpointing and matching courses specifically applicable to an employee’s needs, the organization can grow and enhance the skills of its entire workforce. Establishing a critical learning path for each employee enables firms to achieve the required competencies in a shorter time and in a more focused manner. The process also offers an easy and cost-effective way to nurture and retain valuable talent. For L&D leaders looking at the big picture, the company reaps a better ROI when employees are consuming exactly what they need instead of wasting hours on training that may be irrelevant. And, of course, leaders who can directly link learning to improved performance have leverage with the C-suite when the discussion involves a potential increase to the training budget.

Revision notes

Some learning management systems allow learners to bookmark and create revision notes. This offers value and benefits to both individual learners and the company.

Bookmarks and revision notes provide learners with history and reference in relation to a topic. Bookmarks allow them to tag concepts they want to focus on more deeply or revisit in the future. Revision notes, which they can jot down in real time and which can span multiple modules, enhance retention. Learners can save the microlearning bytes for review or to serve as reminders.

Experts point out that anything that enables learners to return to a spot in the content, or highlight those things they know will be relevant in the future, will increase engagement and improve the likelihood that learners will reengage with the content at a later date. Given the rapid pace of business today, this is a critical advantage.

There are other ways in which bookmarks and revision notes in the LMS can benefit the company. By carefully scrutinizing them, the organization can better understand what resonates (or fails to resonate) with users. Management can also gain insights into how learners arrive at conclusions. While some of the information harnessed may be off point, the L&D team will learn a great deal about the overall learner experience and can use the findings to alter or improve the content.

This is especially true when the LMS allows users to curate and comment on the content. The evaluation process encourages critical thinking among learners. The ability to remark on what they think about the material makes them feel that their voices are being heard. For this reason, it is vitally important for L&D teams to read and ultimately implement some of the suggestions garnered from feedback.

Search results

An LMS typically houses a vast amount of content. L&D professionals cannot expect users to hunt in multiple places to uncover information contained within it. The data must be well organized, and users must be able to easily find what they are looking for. If the LMS search engine is not robust enough to return quick, relevant results, it becomes worthless in their eyes.

As a culture, we have all come to expect Google-like speed and accuracy when searching for information. If the LMS does not perform in a similar manner, it is easy to guess where the learners will turn. A powerful and comprehensive search function should allow users to initiate LMS searches spanning learning objects, catalogs, skills, tags, personal notes, and discussions.


Like many other aspects of the LMS, the search function can be personalized. Companies can vary search results based upon users' profiles. When doing this, some considerations to factor into the equation could be an employee's title, the department they work in and the manager overseeing them, how long they have been vested with the company, and the geographical region and culture where they live.

There are ways to sharpen the search function in a lackluster LMS. Some firms have instituted enterprise-wide search platforms to index all data sources as part of their knowledge management initiatives. The enterprise search tools can crawl and surface all learning content, thus improving the search function.

However, the best way to assure a seamless LMS search function is to address it early on. The way the data is entered has a huge impact on its functionality. During the initial setup, it is important for the L&D team to partner with others in the company who are well trained in taxonomies and the organization of information. In larger companies, they may be specialists from library or knowledge management groups. In smaller companies, they might include individuals who know company history, are well versed in the lingo of the business, and are intimately familiar with how employees hunt for and find things. During pilot testing of an LMS platform, carefully observe how people are searching the system. This process can be very enlightening and may reveal holes in how content is organized or tagged.

CONCLUSION

The last thing an organization wants to do is invest a considerable sum into a learning management system only to have employees grumble about it or, even worse, shy away from using it. Personalizing the LMS will make it friendlier and more approachable, thus improving the odds that employees will engage with it. In addition, personalization often returns bona fide business benefits to the company. It's evident that personalization of the LMS is a win-win situation for everyone.



The advertisement banner features a yellow background on the left and a black background on the right. On the yellow background, the Adobe logo is in the top left corner. Below it, the text "HAPPY TAPPY" is written in large, bold, black letters. Underneath, a smaller line of text reads "The jig you break into when your LMS experience is all good." Below that, "Adobe Captivate Prime" is written in bold, followed by "LMS experience. Redefined." To the right of the text is a cartoon illustration of two white sneakers with yellow laces, appearing to be in motion. On the black background, the text "Request a demo of Adobe LMS" is written in yellow, followed by a yellow right-pointing arrow.

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