MICROLEARNING: POWERFUL TRAINING TOOL FOR ONBOARDING

ALLENCOMM

CONTENTS

WHAT IS MICROLEARNING?

If you've been around the training industry for any amount of time, you've heard the term microlearning tossed around. Unfortunately, it's a term that also comes with a lot of jargon and never quite enough explanation. So let's take a look at what the concept really means.

Microlearning feeds information to learners through many short courses or modules instead of through a single long and laborious training. For instance, one focus of microlearning is personalization, which allows learners to take the training at their own pace, going through training when they have time or when they need to know a specific piece of information. As a result, learners feel more engaged with the training and see improved job efficiency and performance as well as a piqued interest in learning more and participating in other opportunities for training.

Another focus of microlearning is flexibility. Learners can select and use specific assets that are most pertinent to their current needs on whatever device is most handy, making the training even more relevant to their work. Microlearning supports employees accessing information when they need it most. Because assets are compact, learners are more likely to invest the time needed to use them in an on-the-job context. Further, assets developed to be compatible with a wide variety of devices allow learners to use them when and where it's most helpful. As a result, microlearning makes it possible for learners to gain new knowledge just in time to meet their immediate needs.

Microlearning works well for a variety of modalities to create powerful training experiences for learners. Assets used in microlearning are compact and focus on precise objectives. As such, modalities such as games, videos, and infographics are easy to coordinate with the content. Because these assets are small, production and maintenance are simple and more affordable in general. The purpose of these assets has high potential variation and can be used as components of broader training initiatives, communication tools, or performance

support, among others use. The trick is, of course, to use the best modality possible for each piece of content to make the most effective training. Such varied modalities keep the training experience fresh and increase the learner's engagement with the training.

With all this in mind, don't make the mistake of thinking that microlearning is simply a condensed or cheaper alternative to long-form training. Microlearning content targets specific topics and behaviors and must be developed rigorously to achieve the desired effect. Whether you have a small budget for a simple series of short discussion activities or a larger budget for more complex content like games and interactive videos, microlearning can drive results. Microlearning empowers your employees with the access to and control over the information they want in a 21st-century workplace. When done right, microlearning drives results.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GET STARTED?

1. FIGURE OUT WHO YOUR LEARNERS ARE

When you select a training strategy, start off by considering who your learners are and the context in which their training will take place. Microlearning is an excellent cross-generational strategy, but younger learners or technologically-savvy learners may be more comfortable using gamified microlearning assets than people who do not use electronic devices frequently. Considering the learners' training needs can be tricky. A corporate desk job has different responsibilities than a manufacturing plant job. Creating the right assets for your workforce is vital to the success of the training.

2. ESTABLISH WHAT KIND OF CONTENT WILL BE BEST

Abstract or complicated topics can be quite difficult to grasp, while content that is actionable or that can be broken down into smaller pieces is easily purposed for use in a microlearning strategy.

However, using microlearning for complex content is not hopeless and may simply need a blended solution using a longer format for training to develop foundational knowledge while also creating microlearning modules for targeted, actionable content.

3. DETERMINE WHAT TECHNOLOGIES WILL BE USED

It turns out that not all learning management systems are built with microlearning in mind. These systems are often designed for long-form training. Microlearning's effectiveness depends in part on how easily it can be accessed. If learners can't find what they want quickly, they may not put in much time or effort to access and use such short training pieces. A solution? Use metadata tagging along with an excellent search function to help your learners find what they need. Being able to share the modules or assets via internal social networks or learning portals can provide a way to successfully deploy your training to more employees and get them engaged and excited. Note also that web-based microlearning does require your learners to have access to web-enabled devices while they work, so make sure that the training can work on a wide variety of devices from tablets to PCs. If learners are in a remote location, it is also possible to use a learning application to download the content ahead of time for use at the point of need.
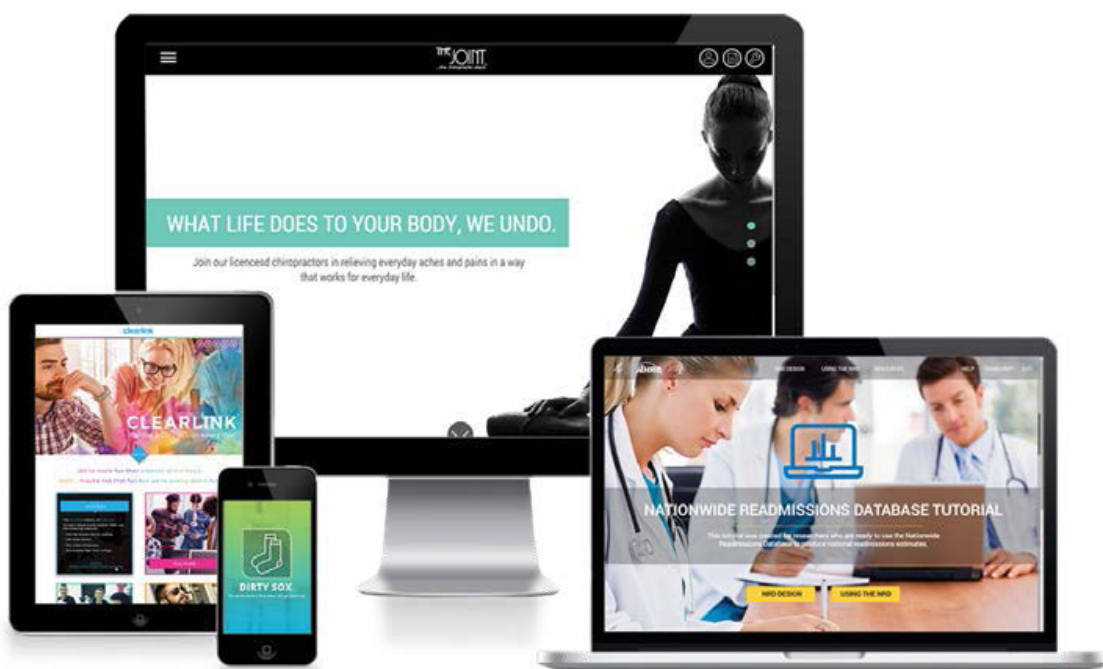
WHAT IS ONBOARDING?

Most people see onboarding as a form of orientation. However, while onboarding starts on the employee's first day, this is a skewed perception of what the onboarding process ought to be. The goal of orientation is to help people figure out where they are and how to do what they need to do—in short, the logistics of their responsibilities. But the goal of onboarding is to immerse employees into the company culture as well as to provide the best information about responsibilities. Helping new personnel acclimate to their roles and to company culture is vital to their overall success with your organization. Unsurprisingly, people like to feel confident and prepared for their jobs. In fact, "69% of employees report that they're more likely to stay with a company if they have a meaningful onboarding experience." [2]

Consider this: since acclimation can take a while, onboarding shouldn't end after the first few weeks on the job. Learning pertinent information and getting up to speed isn't an overnight process, and so your onboarding training should continue to be a resource as employees get familiar with their new jobs.

Continuing onboarding needs to grab your learners' interest, or it will begin to feel like a drag. When you make your onboarding training engaging, you can decrease time-to-proficiency, boost productivity, and enrich your workforce. Encourage your new employees' ambition, drive, and imagination and they will be more likely to use the tools provided to succeed in their roles. OC Tanner suggests that good onboarding doesn't end after the first few days, weeks, or even months. In fact, it can and should continue throughout the first year, with milestone

"Employees get about 90 days to prove themselves in a new job. The faster new hires feel welcome and prepared for their jobs, the faster they will be able to successfully contribute to the firm's mission."[1]

check-ins at thirty, sixty, and ninety days as well as at the end of the year.[2]

Onboarding training can take a variety of forms. Here at AllenComm, we see the need for such training in several areas. While onboarding is great for new employees, you can also use use onboarding-style courses to train existing employees on new compliance policies, rebranding, new systems, or role transitions.

USING MICROLEARNING TO STRENGTHEN YOUR ONBOARDING

New Hire Training

When we think about crafting onboarding programs, new employees are usually the first and most obvious target. After all, companies face a lot of challenges with new employees. Approximately 20% of turnover occurs within the first forty-five days.[2] Within the millennial population, employees generally expect to stay at a job for less than three years,[3] a terrifying statistic when considered alongside the fact that training new employees costs between 25% and 200% of the employee's annual wage.[5]

But there is hope. Research has found that an excellent onboarding experience can cause employees to stay on with a company for at least three years, a dramatic improvement.[2] As mentioned earlier, an extraordinary onboarding experience should be an ongoing process. It may be tempting to give a new employee everything they'll need to know about the company on the first day, but it is more useful to introduce policies and procedures gradually.

The faster new hires feel welcome and prepared for their jobs, the faster they will be able to successfully contribute to the company's mission. Show your new employees

how and why their roles are relevant to the organization and do away with having to observe coworkers to figure out new responsibilities. Microlearning methods can assist in the process by distilling vital job information into small pieces to avoid information overload.

Consider using the concept of time-released onboarding to show your employees that their company cares about them and their progress. This works by breaking up information about company policies to ensure that employees don't miss something important due to information

overload. This whole process not only allows your employees to digest large pieces of information, but also opens the door for management to forge a strong, lasting relationship with their employees. Microlearning can also work to provide

feedback to learners in small chunks rather than stressfully large quantities. Keep in mind that feedback can be so much more than rote commentary! Ideally, such feedback can help new hires to be able to gain a deeper understanding of how to perform their job correctly and also the rationale behind those procedures.

Compliance Training

Have you seen your compliance training greeted with groans, yawns, or distress? It's an unfortunate side-effect of many compliance trainings. However, compliance training represents an opportunity to create a balance between legal regulations and company culture. When it's done right, compliance and culture can (and should!) complement each other. But when a new employee is required to spend entire days reading through policies and sitting through excruciatingly long training courses, it starts to feel like a horror to avoid rather than an opportunity to understand the company. Compliance training entails keeping a careful balance: employees may care more about compliance if they see how it impacts their job or reputation, yet the training must be absolutely clear and consistent about vital policies.

The truth is that these long, arduous trainings intimidate people, and learners often feel short on time. After all, they

probably have several other onboarding trainings to take as well. In such cases, helping them to understand why they need to review policies and procedures will help mitigate that pressure. Don't make your new learners feel like they're being punished because they don't understand the importance of the training.

Compliance training shouldn't just be about presenting information to employees and getting them back to work as quickly as possible. Instead, it ought to help employees think about the issues involved and discover how they can apply the principles to their daily activities.

Microlearning can be an excellent method to use for your compliance program. Rather than send learners vast PDFs to e-sign, you can prioritize key points of information in order to demonstrate the importance of and reasoning behind your corporate policies. Highlight your organization's policies, procedures, and ethics, and also tie in those policies to company culture to show your employees how and why those policies apply to them, but do it in bite-sized pieces.

There are several different strategies you can use to achieve this goal. Well-researched case studies and scenarios can capture your learners' interest, help them

empathize with those affected by the issues at hand, and get them invested in the outcome. Add video into the mix for the extra boost that music and carefully-placed imagery can add to the effect. To combat the short attention spans of the present and better ensure that the crucial policies your employees are supposed to be absorbing are retained, invest in training that draws your learners in.

Brand Training

Social media is everywhere, meaning that employee behavior in person or online can show off the brand positively as an ambassador or negatively as a detractor. Employees who are brand ambassadors stay on with the company longer and are much more likely to win people to the brand. So, developing brand awareness and engagement in your employees is incredibly valuable. But to create strong

brand ambassadors, you need to reach every employee and provide a unified, cohesive message.

The fact is, according to a Gallup poll, only 41% of workers say they strongly agree with the statement "I know what my company stands for and what makes our brand different from our competitors." In addition, employees who were not executives or managers—that is, the employees most likely to interact with customers—showed only 37% agreement. The remaining 63% of employees who do not strongly agree represent an opportunity to create organizational growth, build up customer retention (and with it, profit margins), and develop a higher level of brand alignment both within the company and without.[4]

When it comes to brand training, user experience and course content are equally important. Learners need clear, thorough information about their company's identity and products or services, but they also need to experience and absorb key elements of the brand. But it is difficult to absorb everything at once. That's where microlearning comes in.

If you are planning to create onboarding training for your brand, consider how many people will need to take the training. Is it directed only at new hires? At the entire workforce? Or just toward those who already work with the brand? Regardless,

you may need to scale your training to reach the targeted groups. For those who work with the brand directly, create a content resource library that focuses on providing brand guidelines easily. Accessibility at the point of need allows for accurate and consistently branded materials.

Microlearning can also help you weave brand vision into your employees' day-to-day routines. With smaller pieces of training, brand knowledge can be something that comes up often and sticks

in your employees' memories longer. Deep, personal brand experience allows every employee—from new hires to seasoned pros—to explain the company mission with passion and confidence, which turns everyone at the company into a better brand ambassador.

Systems Training

Here's a scenario: you have just introduced a new system or process into your organization, but for some reason the employees are reticent to use it, preferring instead to operate as they always have. Sound familiar? Well, such difficulty in creating such organizational change is a common occurrence, and the introduction of new systems or processes into your business is always a challenge. Many employees resist change, wanting to keep things as they are, regardless of the usefulness or efficiency of the new system.

When you introduce a new system, you are looking for organizational change. Onboarding employees to use the new technology isn't primarily about the system or process but rather about getting people to change their behavior in regard to the technology. And that's difficult. But you can't ignore it; system change impacts operational process, performance, and the bottom line.

Engaging system onboarding training should focus on interactive learning.[6] This may include task simulations, which are effective at walking employees through the steps they need to follow to do their job. Microlearning is most commonly associated with reinforcement, and for good reason. By increasing the frequency of short training reinforcements, you help your learners retain information and good habits much longer. Gamification or other non-monetary incentives can provide reinforcement as well.[7]

New Role Training

Within the United States' workforce, about twenty-five percent of employees experience a career transition every year.[8] This includes role transitions within the same organization. Yet despite this staggering number of job changes, only twenty-seven percent of companies report using an effective re-boarding program for employees in their new roles.[1] Clearly, the problem has been recognized, but discovering what needs to change can be a challenge.

What's the big deal with starting a new job at the same company? Shouldn't it be easy, since you already know the company culture and processes? It turns out that lots of transitions, especially transitions to leadership positions, fail because the employee was not

"The ultimate failure of onboarding is the withdrawal of potentially good employees. Losing an employee who is a poor fit or not performing well may be a fine outcome, but losing employees because they are confused, feel alienated, or lack confidence indicates inadequate onboarding."[1]

truly prepared for the new responsibilities and mindset.

Using microlearning techniques can help you support your transitioning employees at every point of need. Once again, a continuous onboarding program that integrates relevant pieces of information at the right time is the key to keeping employees in their new roles past the turnover period of the first three months.[9] For instance, if learners are struggling with a task on the job, a microtutorial or video can help them figure out what they need to do.

Conclusion

The beauty of microlearning is not just in its focused nature. When considering what role microlearning should play in your curriculum, you have a lot of flexibility. Micro assets can be used anywhere along the training lifecycle – sometimes as a standalone piece, sometimes to augment a larger piece of training. As a plus, it pairs fantastically with onboarding training to produce effective and engaging training for new personnel.

Those who invest in onboarding report better outcomes with their employees. New talent at companies with great onboarding are twice as likely to reduce time to proficiency. Companies concur that their onboarding programs are an extension of providing a positive candidate experience.[10]

THE ALLENCOMM APPROACH

Our team can quickly assess your organization's onboarding program to determine where opportunities exist to elevate its performance.

We can assess programs of any size or complexity. Whether you have a business-unit-level process or a coordinated global program, we have large in-house teams of L&D designers, consultants, artists, and technologists that have honed their skills in some of the largest companies in the world.

Here is what you can expect when you work with AllenComm to elevate your onboarding program.

1. AUDIT AND ANALYSIS

- Our performance consultants will analyze your current program and determine what you can do to elevate your existing onboarding process.

2. ASSET CREATION

- Our design, creative, and technology teams can create media or technology components to elevate your existing onboarding processes such as custom content, gamification, video, simulations, or a centralized management portal.

3. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- Our expert teams can assess and propose a complete solution that will precisely meet your needs and requirements and ensure the best possible onboarding journey for your organization.

Ready to get started?

REFERENCES

1.   Onboarding New Employees: Maximizing Success, SHRM Foundation, Talya N. Bauer, PhD

https://www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/resources-from-past-initiatives/Documents/Onboarding%20New%20Employees.pdf

2.   An Onboarding Checklist for Success [infographic], O.C. Tanner

https://blog.octanner.com/editor-picks/an-onboarding-checklist-for-success-infographic

3.   The Future Of Work: Job Hopping Is the 'New Normal' for Millennials, Forbes

https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2012/08/14/the-future-of-work-job-hopping-is-the-new-normal-for-millennials/#32c2f8e813b8

4.   Getting Employees to Act on Your Brand Promise, Gallup Poll

https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/159425/getting-employees-act-brand-promise.aspx

5.   4 Missing Elements of Your Onboarding Process, Urban Bound

http://resources.urbanbound.com/4-missing-elements-of-your-onboarding-process-ebook

6.   6 Ways to Take the Bored out of Onboarding, AllenComm

https://www.allencomm.com/blog/2018/01/build-successful-onboarding/

7.   Ed Krow, Does Training Really Change Behavior? The 2 Reasons Training Programs Fail — and What to Do About It

https://trainingindustry.com/blog/performance-management/does-training-really-change-behavior-the-2-reasons-training-programs-fail-and-what-to-do-about-it/

8.   Mary A. Gowan PhD, Chair, SHRM Foundation Research Evidence Committee

https://www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/resources-from-past-initiatives/Documents/Onboarding%20New%20Employees.pdf

9.   Taryn Oesch, Providing Successful, Scaleable Onboarding Using Digital and In-Person Training

https://trainingindustry.com/articles/workforce-development/providing-successful-scaleable-onboarding-using-digital-and-in-person-training/

10. Onboarding Outcomes: Fulfill New Hire Expectations, Human Capital Institute

http://www.hci.org/hr-research/talent-pulse-32-onboarding-outcomes-fulfill-new-hire-expectations