



Introduction

What is blended learning

Blended learning is a relatively new concept, which is why it can be difficult to know which approach best suits your company's needs. This eBook provides Learning & Development (L&D) professionals across industries with many insider tips and best practices to help you get started.

Over the next few pages, you'll discover how blended learning addresses common challenges that come with training employees in today's fast-paced world. We'll introduce you to four powerful blended learning models that have proven effective at major companies in the industry. We'll also provide some practical tips to produce top-quality online training content to ensure the success of your blended learning program.

Why blended learning

Blended learning is an effective learning solution because it gives you the best of both worlds: conventional (classroom) training along with the convenience and agility of online learning (e-learning).

Some topics, like soft skills, sales roleplays, or learning to deal with difficult customer interactions, are very suitable for traditional face-to-face training sessions.

However, many topics, like product knowledge, support procedures, and reporting processes, can be very effectively taught online. These are topics that are likely to evolve frequently, so it's crucial for any organization to be able to quickly update this type of training content. Learners should also be able to easily access this content anytime, including on their mobile devices.

As part of a blended learning strategy, e-learning gives companies the power to keep up with the fast pace of their business. It's a far more flexible, cost-effective, and time-saving solution for today's rapidly changing market conditions.

Chapter 2

Setting goals and identifying needs

Setting training goals and identifying needs

When developing a blended learning solution, the first thing you should do is define your goals and identify your learners' needs. Within many organizations, a very common goal is to provide flexible, easy-to-update training resources. This type of goal keeps the fast pace of business in mind.

However, the training goals you set depend on your target learners and their needs. For example, a sales representative may need up-to-date product information to be able to sell more effectively, while a customer support agent might need to know how to deal with challenges that customers face after purchasing a product.

As a result, your training content should always be catered to the needs of the specific learner.

How to set goals

When it comes to setting goals, it helps to start asking yourself these three questions:

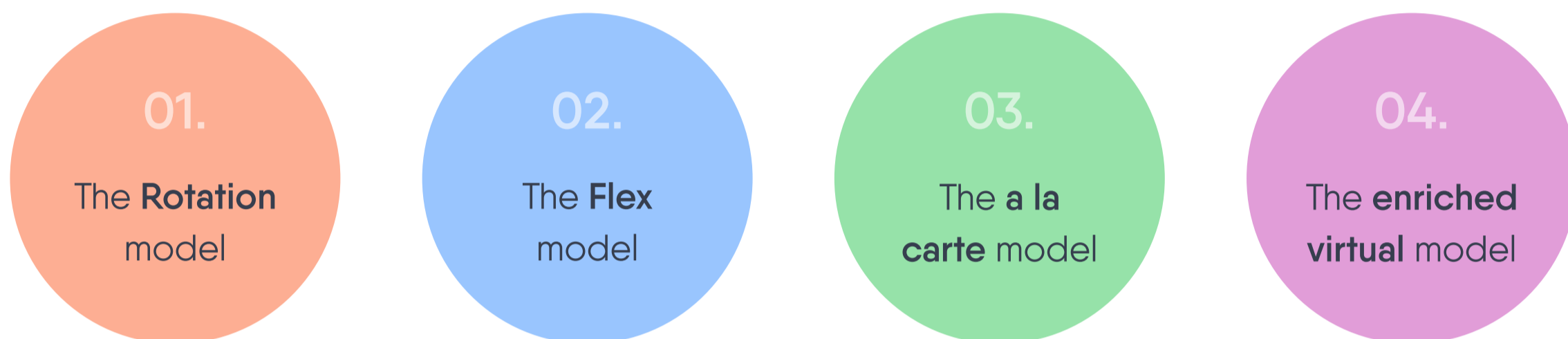
- What is my company trying to achieve with blended learning?
- What are my company's reasons for adopting a blended learning model?
- What resources are at my disposal?

Factors like budget, deadlines, product launch dates will all influence the type of blended learning environment you create. Asking the questions above will shed light on your company's motivations and needs, as well as what you're able to fulfil. Only then can you gather the learning assets that will help you reach your goals.

Chapter 3

The four models of blended learning

Once you've set specific goals and determined what your learners need, consider one of the four models of blended learning to apply. We'll discuss each in the following sections. These models have consistently proven effective at major companies around the world:



The rotation model

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What is it?

Like all blended learning models, the rotation model includes both face-to-face training and e-learning. But specifically, this model has trainees rotate between multiple types of training sessions – one of which takes place online. For example, a learner may complete a module online and then take part in an offline group activity with other trainees. Whether the rotation happens on a fixed schedule or at the trainer's request depends on the program.

What are the benefits?

The rotation model is a new way for trainers to organize workflows. It helps trainers do more with less by reducing the number of trainees attending classroom training sessions. Trainees can self-train using online modules, allowing the classroom experience to serve as an opportunity to enhance their learning experience instead. This is an ideal solution for fast-paced upskilling needs – like product training – and is well-suited for project-specific learning.

Who is the target audience?

The rotation model is ideal for groups of trainees with varying skill levels. More experienced employees are generally capable of learning on their own, while newer employees are likely to benefit from more face-to-face interaction with trainers.

Integration

To integrate this model, you can create online activities that enable learners to explore a topic on their own and then have them dig deeper into the subject through a face-to-face training session. You can use the face-to-face sessions to cover tricky questions or assess learners' knowledge and retention.

Possible challenges

Trainers may need to develop new skills, like the ability to identify the right candidates for face-to-face interaction versus online learning. Your company will need an effective and powerful Learning Management System (LMS) to help match each learner with the right online content and to generate exhaustive result reports for trainers and managers.

The online learning content should also be well-designed and clear enough for trainees to master on their own. Trainees should also have access to trainers or their more experienced peers in case they have any questions about the content.

The flex model

What is it?

The flex model allows trainees to participate in classroom activities based on their needs. This model focuses mainly on online learning, giving learners greater control over their learning. Trainers assist and support the employees on a flexible, on-demand basis as the employees work through the online learning content.

What are the benefits?

Assessments with automated feedback empower trainees to reflect on and revise their thinking. At the same time, data from objective online assessments empowers trainers to improve their training resources.

Moreover, trainees are engaged in making decisions every day about their learning path and can work at the pace that's right for them. Not to mention that they'll have continuous access to training content, allowing them to retrieve knowledge on demand.

Who is the target audience?

The flex model is ideal for trainees who progress at either a faster or slower rate than they would in a traditional training setting. Under this model, a trainer can give more personalized assistance to trainees. Ultimately, it ensures all learners get the support they need at a level that suits them best.

Integration

To incorporate this approach, your company can offer one-on-one assistance or regularly scheduled group sessions for learners who require more support. You can also encourage learners to collaborate with each other and share their experience with each other. This promotes a social, peer-to-peer learning experience among individuals with similar levels of knowledge and experience.

Possible challenges

Under the flex model, trainees must learn to prioritize their training needs for themselves. Employees may be accustomed to a more rigid, predefined training schedule, but the flex model requires them to make autonomous decisions about what they are doing each day. Furthermore, each employee must have an internet connected device to access their content, whether it's a desktop, laptop, tablet, or smartphone. This may be easier in companies that have already embraced a "bring your own device" (BYOD) culture.

The a la carte model

What is it?

The a la carte model lets learners take an online training course in addition to compulsory offline courses. This model provides them with greater flexibility than conventional, pre-scheduled training sessions.

What are the benefits?

For subjects that involve frequent changes, like new product and sales training, the a la carte model gives trainers an easy way to provide updates. Companies may choose to onboard all their sales or support staff with classroom training, and then continue providing regular online training afterwards to help keep their knowledge up to date.

Who is the target audience?

This model is ideal for training any employee who deals with frequent changes and updates on the job.

Integration

To use this model, make sure the online content builds on what employees already know. You don't have to repeat the information employees already learned in their onboarding. The online content can focus purely on additional information. We recommend using an authoring tool to create e-learning content that your employees can access anytime.

Possible challenges

Trainees must take responsibility for keeping their knowledge up to date by continually viewing and applying their e-learning content. This may mean acquiring new habits, which take time to develop.

The enriched virtual model

What is it?

The enriched virtual model places the emphasis on online training from day one and uses face-to-face training as a supplement in certain cases. Trainees learn on the job using online content and can meet with trainers to discuss problems or go through the content in more detail.

What are the benefits?

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, organizations around the world have had to move their learning strategies and entire business operations online. Subsequently, e-learning took center stage as the norm, with companies having to shut their face-to-face training programs down.

For this reason alone, the enriched virtual model isn't just a benefit but also a necessity. Knowing how to deliver effective training primarily online will continue to become an important practice even after the pandemic fades away.

But even as companies slowly make their way back to the office, the enriched virtual model remains an ideal solution for training large groups of employees, especially those spread across multiple locations. It's challenging and expensive to organize face-to-face training for these employees, so using e-learning as the standard would make for a cost-effective and flexible solution.

Who is the target audience?

This model is ideal for training large groups of learners – like sales staff, support staff, and field reps – who are spread across multiple locations and unable to attend in-person training sessions.

It can also be highly effective for leadership training. Those who aspire to take on leadership roles, including ambitious managers, tend to be more willing to take responsibility for their own development. This makes it easier for them to engage in asynchronous, online learning. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, however, this model is relevant to anyone subject to work-from-home mandates.

Integration

To integrate the enriched virtual model, you'll need an easy-to-use Learning Management System (LMS) to house all the learning content. The LMS should always be instantly accessible to learners on demand. Moreover, it should ideally facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge sharing so that learners aren't completely left on their own in their learning journeys

Possible challenges

Because of the primarily online nature of this model, it will require learners to have access to an internet-connected device, like a desktop, laptop, smartphone, or tablet.

Chapter 4

Best practices for creating e-learning courses

The success of your blended learning strategy greatly depends on the quality of your e-learning content. Whether your company is new to online learning or looking to improve your existing online material, consider the following best practices when creating e-learning:

1. Use learning objectives

In an online learning environment, it's crucial that your employees immediately understand the purpose of taking your course. That's where learning objectives come in.

Learning objectives refer to the new skills and knowledge you want your employees to acquire after having taken your course. We recommend always clearly specifying the learning objectives at the start of any online training resource.

Formulate relevant learning objectives by thinking from your employees' perspective. For example, if you're training your sales staff on a new product or service, your objective should be to give them everything they need to know to be able to sell the new product.

Setting learning objectives can also help you create a more effective course. By knowing exactly what you want your learners to gain from your course, you're more likely to approach the content creation process with a clear vision. This makes it easier to determine how you'll break your course up into sections, what order to arrange them in, and what content each section will include.

2. Use a variety of content types

It's not enough to create learning materials if they're not engaging. One way to keep your learners engaged is to offer a variety of content types. Including visual elements like videos and images can give learners a break from having to read through long bodies of text. Quizzes offer an interactive way for learners to draw from their newly acquired knowledge on the spot.

But it's not just about adding as many visuals as possible. There's a strategy to keep in mind. For this, we recommend checking out our cheat sheet on creating the perfect course where we offer tips on using visuals effectively.

User-friendly authoring tools make it easy for you to include these visual and interactive elements when designing your course. A tool like Easygenerator also offers several ready-to-use course templates for you to customize, saving you time in the content creation process.

3. Keep content brief

Attention spans online are short, which is why your content should be quick and easy to digest. This practice is also known as microlearning, where each piece of content is a short burst of specific information that learners can consume in just a few minutes. Because of its nature, microlearning is an ideal way to train your sales and support staff on new product features or changes.

But not all content can be condensed into microlearning. Still, even if you're creating a long course, it's important to keep your content brief and easy to consume. Breaking your content up into shorter sections and writing in short, simple sentences are some tips to keep in mind.

4. Write effectively

You don't have to be a professional writer to write effective learning material. We've compiled eight tips for you to apply:

- Write with your audience in mind.
- Have a clear goal of the message you want to send.
- Mention key points at the top of a section or paragraph.
- Write in short, simple sentences (20 words max.)
- Use words that make it easy for learners to search for your content.
- Apply an active – not passive – voice.
- Include images and videos.
- Ask someone to proofread your writing before publishing.

5. Make room for feedback

Because learners will engage with your content in an online and asynchronous setting, make sure they can easily get feedback on their progress. An authoring tool like Easygenerator allows you to provide instant feedback to your learners as they work through the content.

It's also important to provide constructive feedback, whether a learner does poorly or well. Always focus your feedback on why it's important and relevant for them to master this content.

At the same time, you should also invite learners to provide feedback on their learning experience. Consider using a Net Promoter Score (NPS): having your learners rate how likely they'd be to recommend the course to their peers. This is a quick and measurable way for you to assess whether your learners find the content effective and relevant.

Ultimately, it allows you to make strategic improvements to your content and ensure your company is getting a better return on investment.

Conclusion

Get started with blended learning using Easygenerator

Organizations benefit immensely by equipping their subject matter experts with a user-friendly authoring tool like Easygenerator to share their expertise with teammates. This is a quick way to get your company's blended learning program off the ground so that your company can enjoy all the benefits of this powerful training method while staying cost-effective.



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