HOW
MICROLEARNING
ADDRESSES THE UPSKILLING NEEDS
OF THE MODERN EMPLOYEE

The Ideal Delivery Tool for Learners and L&D Leaders

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The business world is evolving at a record pace.

At the same time, organizations are evolving their business and learning strategy to remain agile and competitive during a time when working and learning from home are becoming essential. Central to this transformation is the need to address skills gaps and prepare for the coming years ahead.

The adoption of new technologies, automation, and growing job role complexities are forcing companies to adopt a re-training mindset to keep employees effective and productive. In a post-COVID-19 world, the need has become even more urgent. In the wake of digital transformation and during a time of global talent shortages, upskilling is becoming a winning solution for dealing with a precarious future.

91%
OF COMPANIES SAY UPSKILLING HAS BOOSTED PRODUCTIVITY[1]

69%
OF ORGANIZATIONS ARE BUILDING MORE SKILLS NOW THAN PRE-COVID-19[2]

DID YOU KNOW THAT 60% OF EMPLOYEES BELIEVE THEIR CURRENT SKILL SET WILL BE OUTDATED IN THE NEXT 3 – 5 YEARS?[3]

THE URGENT NEED FOR UPSKILLING

Many employees are in dire need of learning new technologies to remain competitive in their specific job roles. The same pressure is felt by new employees, including Gen Z workers and millennials who expect to require reskilling throughout their entire careers. In fact, when searching for a new job, Gen Z prioritizes growth opportunities and professional development as the number one factor when it comes to choosing an employer. It's not a secret that the new workforce generation expects more flexibility in their long-term careers. They're looking for transferable skills that can support their personal and professional growth and development. In other words, they're eager to upskill and are ready for their organization to provide it.

Let's look at a few of the areas where upskilling can drive ROI for an organization and help to manage disruption in the coming years.

As jobs are transformed by the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we need to reskill more than 1 billion people by 2030, quotes the WEF.

And, across G20 countries, failing to meet the skills demand of the new technological era could put at risk $11.5 trillion in potential GDP growth over the next decade, according to Accenture estimates.

Cost of Talent Acquisition

When you lose an employee, you're losing money. The average cost to hire can be nearly $5,000 per employee. Simultaneously, the time to fill a position can be anywhere from 28 – 39 days[4]. As you can see, there is a significant loss of time and expenses when it comes to filling a new position. Retention and reskilling can make a huge impact on your bottom line and reduce the potential for employee attrition.

While there may be a number of factors that contribute to an employee's decision to leave, two come to mind:

1. **They aren't adequately trained to do their jobs effectively**
2. **They don't feel comfortable with how they're being managed and treated**

When you deliver effective upskilling training, you're supporting your employees in their personal and professional careers. You're demonstrating a commitment to providing an inclusive workplace, with managers who are great communicators, collaborators, and listeners. In many cases, upskilling provides employees with transferable skills and critical technical skills that enrich and nurture an employee's skill set. Not only will upskilling help to support your team through adoption of new technology or operations, it can support them in their careers. The overall effect of embracing a positive culture is a higher level of job satisfaction and employee morale.

74% OF EMPLOYEES THINK MANAGERS NEED UPSKILLING[5]

MICROLEARNING AND THE SCIENCE OF LEARNING

When building a learner-centered learning and training program, it's important to begin with a design thinking approach. Creating highly engaging learning experiences requires a deep understanding of the way that your employees prefer to learn. As well, you need to understand the roadblocks that can distract or delay a learner's progress through course content. Microlearning is a modality that is specifically designed to address attention and learners with busy schedules.

Studies into the science of learning suggests that adult learners need to transfer information from working memory to long-term, memory where it can be stored and later retrieved. They have limited memory capacity and can be overwhelmed by tasks that are cognitively too demanding. In other words, information overload[10].

Reduce the Cost of Forgetting

When you consider the cost to hire and train new employees, factor in the expenses associated with having to re-train learning material that should already have been learned. Microlearning addresses the science of learning by subverting the forgetting curve. By chunking content into manageable modules, learners are more likely to remain engaged with the material; more likely to remain invested in the process; and more likely to retain what they have learned. When instructional designers accept that mastery of new concepts happens in fits and starts[11], we can conclude that learning programs themselves need to be designed around this principle to better align with learner habits.

THE FORGETTING CURVE
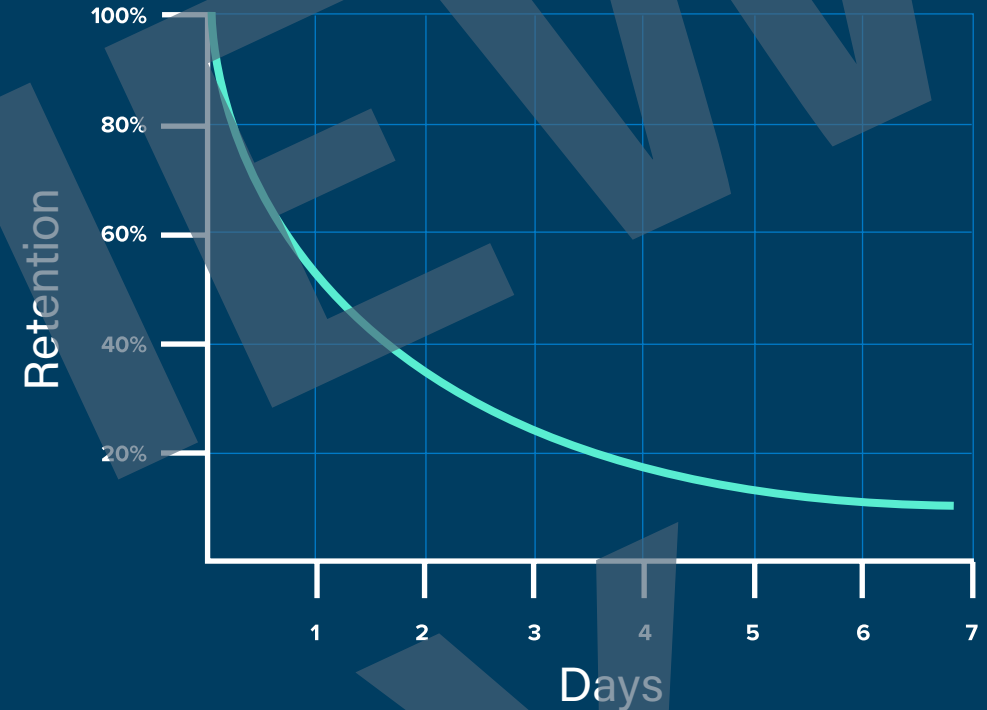
70%
OF THE MATERIAL LEARNED BY EMPLOYEES IS FORGOTTEN WITHIN **24 HOURS**

90%
OF IT WITHIN ONE WEEK[12]

Addressing the Needs of Learners

Learning should feel easy. It should feel less like a monumental task, and more like an exciting experience that opens the learner up to new ideas and concepts. Learners should be able to understand how learning can add value to their jobs, lives and potential. When true knowledge transfer occurs, learners never ask "what's in it for me." They simply feel empowered, enriched, and engaged.

Microlearning leverages innovative learning technologies such as learning management systems (LMS) and a variety of other highly engaging tools. Let's take a look at a few examples of the different types of engagement modalities that can leverage microlearning to propel learners through their journey.

Games and gamification

The key to engaging with learners is often to find exciting and fun ways to make otherwise boring material. When you encourage learners to play a game in order to learn key concepts or lessons, you're accessing the competitive and playful side of learning. Give your learners something to do; something to risk and lose; something to interact with. Allow them to fail safely and then ultimately succeed. Interactivity and stakes are what makes games so addictive. Why not leverage this understanding of cognitive development to transfer knowledge while this is going on?

Videos and animations

According to Forrester Research, employees are 75% more likely to watch a video than read text. Armed with this knowledge, instructional designers can build video into microlearning modules to provide a one-two punch of information transfer: short and fun, video over text. Narrative, storytelling videos that demonstrate authentic workplace scenarios and people are extremely effective at building soft skills and changing behavior. Explainer, motion graphic videos or live action videos can add life to otherwise static and boring content.

Virtual reality and augmented reality

There are many examples of how VR and AR can be used to supercharge learning with immersive experiences, but we'll examine a few that leverage microlearning. When you consider that employees may require immediate information, just-in-time learning is key to helping them do their job tasks efficiently. AR can be used to display product information or convey live instructions so learners can integrate knowledge while on the job. VR is a great way to deliver highly engaging learning experiences where employees can practice and repeat for optimal retention. When delivered through microlearning, employees can go through a quick VR experience which doesn't require a huge time commitment.

ACCORDING TO FORRESTER RESEARCH, EMPLOYEES ARE **75%** MORE LIKELY TO WATCH A VIDEO THAN READ TEXT.

Scalable Delivery

Microlearning is a viable and scalable learning solution. Modules can reside in your company's LMS, or else be sent out as emails or newsletters. Because they're modular, they can be delivered in a variety of modalities to provide learning where and when it's required. For example, if a module is built around a video learning piece, then they can be shared and distributed on video platforms and even on television screens located in the workplace.

Continuous Upskilling and a Culture of Learning

Once an upskilling program is in place, your employees will likely be more open to future learning opportunities. By supporting a culture of learning, employees understand that learning programs aren't simply a one-and-done solution. Microlearning supports a culture of continuous learning where learners are excited to develop personal and professional skills, while also sharing their knowledge with peers and new hires.

Enhance Delivery with Artificial Intelligence

Organizing your many microlearning modules is key to ensuring that learners can find, access, and participate in learning activities. It can be a challenge for learners to sift through a lengthy list of available resources on an LMS, which can easily lead to attrition and a lack of interest. Artificial intelligence can be used in a number of ways to help connect learners with content. For example, chat bots or intelligent assistants can allow learners to search through an LMS using a conversational approach. They can easily begin by typing in "how can I..." or "how should I..." and a chatbot can be developed with a number of relevant responses that direct learners to the appropriate material.

The Design and Delivery of Microlearning

A main design driver was the need to address COVID-19 related closures, which required the program to be led virtually instead of via ILT. Learners for this program were warehouse employees who had limited time to complete training and often had English as a second language. The new program would need to keep the microlearning modules approachable and accessible for learners and ensure they "fit" into the environment they worked in, day-to-day. This meant that delivery modes needed to be flexible, such as accessing modules on the LMS, delivered via email or shown on various screens in fulfillment centers.

Warehouse workers were encouraged to share with their managers their understanding of the training material and detail how they could demonstrate behavior on the job. Managers would be able to witness the application of learning, observe behavior shifts, and provide feedback to employees including a followup review of key learnings.

The company's L&D understood that behavior-based change is often challenging because if the learner does not apply the new skills/knowledge back on the job immediately, the likelihood of lasting behavior change is greatly diminished. This is especially true in a fast-paced environment. The L&D team needed to reach learners who might not see the immediate "why" behind the training/ behavior change, complicated by COVID-related issues.