

TRANSCRIPT: Podcast episode 24: Implementing social media platform for learning

This is the transcript for E-Learning Academy podcast episode 24, which is available on

iTunes at: <http://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewPodcast?id=388852745>

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Transcript

This is episode 24 – Implementing social media for learning

Hi and welcome to the show. Last episode we talked about things to think about when choosing a social media platform for formal and informal learning.

Today is the second of the 3 podcast series of social media platforms. We'll be exploring tips for implementing a social media platform.

There are many different kinds of social media platforms. Some have a very specific use, such as a stand-alone discussion forum. Some are highly connective and can push information to users, depending upon their chosen interests. Some support the management of formal learning curricula. Others support complex roles and workflows. In the case of project-based work, the platform may not be recognised as a learning platform at all. However, using the definition of informal and work-based learning, they are. One example is Salesforce.com.

Generally speaking, there are three stages to platform implementation:

Stage 1: Design and configure the platform to support what people will be doing. This is about selecting the features and functions that will appear on the platform. It's about the placement of functionality on screen, navigation and naming conventions. We can all relate to how we feel when we visit a really useable website and a website that looks like a dog's breakfast. The skill required to configure a really useable platform is essentially that of a website designer.

One way to manage the early designing of the platform is to create a wireframe. A wireframe is essentially a drawn representation of how the users see the platform working and linking. It is useful to engage users at this time, as they will usually have a pre-conceived idea of how the platform would ideally work. Use their ideas, and manage the compromises.

Stage 2: Populate with meaningful information. For a social platform to be purposeful, it needs to have useful, relevant and up-to-date information. The content needs to be written with the online behaviour of 'scanning' in mind. Text needs to be concise, using short sentences. Graphics should be used to reduce text burden. More complex information should ideally be presented in video format. Newsfeeds from related quality external websites can help users to be outwardly focused.

Other features include a feed on the home page that lets people know what's been recently updated, a twitter-like feed of short comments and polls of current topics of debate.

Stage 3: Implementation and maintenance. Start with a pilot group, such as a high functioning project team. Monitor online behaviour closely, and speak with users to identify early what features they like, and what might be stopping users from entering the platform. Look out for user activity you didn't expect. Remember, the purpose of the platform is to enhance work-based social learning. The

platform should be adding value to users, not creating additional effort. Ideally, something else in their work day something that was previously an effort or a gap has been resolved by the platform.

The platform will require careful monitoring, to make tweaks to useability, to fix up user mistakes and reward positive online behaviour. Be sure to communicate the platform widely. Educate users on how to use the platform and the expected behaviours or norms. An introduction video outlining the platform benefits to staff, and a functionality or “how to” video placed on the home page are very useful. Also be sure the executive team regularly use the platform themselves. Ensure they model the behaviour expected of users.

If the platform has been developed with a clear purpose and need in mind, and with user input during development, then the platform will have the best chance of succeeding. However, it will take time for the platform to take a life of its own. Be sure to have realistic success measurements, and don't let momentum drop. The quickest way to kill the social media initiative is to have days in which there was no contribution made to the platform. Broad disinterest will be very obvious.

One final comment. Continue to monitor the useability and functional updates occurring in public social media spaces, such as YouTube and LinkedIn. These platforms put a lot of R&D effort in product development and so enhancements are generally done with a lot of purpose in mind. Examine their improvements, and think about whether you should emulate them in your platform. After all, your organisational users are often familiar with public platform best practice, and they will have changing useability expectations. Remember, any enhancements you do make need to be done with thought to the transition users will need to go through.

In the next episode of the Connect Thinking E-Learning Academy podcast, we'll explore trends in social media platforms for learning.

This has been Alison Bickford. Thanks for listening and I look forward to seeing you online.