



Why Learning and Marketing Should Be BFFS

How a good marketing strategy can increase user adoption and engagement.

A Sad Story of a Successful Launch

Sad? Why would a successful launch be a sad story? Seems like this should be a story with a happy ending, like a perfect fairy tale, but unfortunately many times it's not.

Picture this... your team just rolled out a new learning management system (LMS) six months ago, and the launch was a huge success. You were amazing. You did everything to ensure the launch went off without a hitch. You worked across the organization to understand each team's learning requirements. Invested the time and resources to select an LMS with all the bells and whistles you need. And then your team filled it with engaging, relevant content. Yay you!

The launch announcement went out, you conducted company-wide training, and feedback was excellent. Your LMS has a great user experience. It is packed with creative, interesting and interactive learning programs, hundreds of courses, videos, social and collaborative features – everything to make it as easy as possible for your people to access learning.

You've got all the right stuff. Now your people will reap the benefits of self-directed learning, and the higher productivity and employee engagement that follows. This is going to have a real impact – in fact, you're pretty sure that a big bonus is in your future, maybe a promotion.

Now it's just a matter of waiting for the positive results to roll in. So you wait.

And wait.

And wait.

And then (cue drum roll)...

Ugh! Usage is the same as it ever was. Beyond the mandated courses for compliance and onboarding, very few people ever return. Your ROI is terrible and you have to report this back to your CLO or CFO. You promised results and they aren't there.

Are your palms sweating yet?

What Happened?

The mistake was thinking that the LMS launch was the end rather than the beginning. We've all done it, believed that "if we build it, they will come." But that only works in the movies; in real life you need to tell people why they should come, then tell them again, anreminding them until they do

come, get real value out of the experience, and keep coming back. Because despite your employees' good intentions, learning often takes a back seat to the long list of competing priorities of work and personal life. Competition is tough. People naturally look towards other sources for information. "Let me just Google that" is often our first thought. Learning programs may not be the first place they think of when they need information. You've got what they need, they just don't know it yet.

It's time to become a marketer!

“ In a recent Bersin poll to discover the obstacles to learning at work, 64% of learning leaders said their people are not aware of the learning and development opportunities available in their organization.

— "The Real Challenge with Learner Engagement: L&D Has a Marketing Problem," Bersin by Deloitte Research Bulletin, 2015 ”

How to Market Like a Marketer

Don't know where to start? You have an amazing resource right in your own company – your marketing team. Get to know them. Ask for advice. Pick up the phone and invite one of your marketing coworkers to lunch – or if you really want to get them talking, happy hour. Learn what they do to create messaging, manage the brand, engage customers, promote products, and build loyalty.

Welcome to Marketing 101.

Hearing what your marketing colleagues do to sell your organization's product or service will get your creative juices flowing so you can begin thinking of ways to apply the same concepts to marketing your learning and development product. While there are countless ways you can market your LMS to ensure your employees are continually visiting and using your product, here are some relatively, simple, proven strategies that can help:

Branding - More than a Pretty Logo and Catchy Title

A strong brand is a marketing must-have, and for good reason. A company's brand is its "personality." The brand is the visual representation of the organization. Brands communicate the company's mission and values, product features and customer success. A brand promises specific benefits and elicits emotions from the people who engage with it. When those emotions are positive, customers are motivated to take action – buy, use or recommend a product – and they develop strong brand loyalty. When a brand is damaged, emotions turn negative and they run.

A strong learning brand will communicate the promise you are making to your employees and show them that you are a partner in their success. Develop your brand, fulfill your promises, and your learners will keep coming back.

Here's how to start:

- Define the mission of your learning and development strategy and the promise you will make to your people.
- List the benefits that learning and development programs bring to your employees – not the other way around. To shamelessly paraphrase – it's not what the employees can do for you, it's what you can do for your employees.
- Develop the qualities you want associated with your brand and the emotions it should elicit.
- Create a consistent look and voice for your learning brand that communicates the brand promise – create a logo, a tagline, and a style guide to ensure that communication (emails, web copy, presentations, flyers, etc.) is consistent.

Be vigilant about staying true to your brand and don't forget the importance of protecting it! The quality of the learning experience will impact your brand, so keep a close eye on employee feedback, and respond to negative feedback quickly and make changes as needed. Repairing a damaged brand is hard and creates a major setback – you definitely don't want to go there.

Know your Audience

Marketers need to understand their audience so they can speak to them in their language and deliver messages that resonate with them. To effectively market your LMS, you need to understand what motivates your employees, their goals as well as their challenges. It is also important to know how your people feel about learning and development within your organization so you can address any misunderstandings and change negative impressions. For example, how much effort is required for your employees to use the LMS? If they perceive the "cost" to be more than the advantage and the messaging doesn't address that, most people won't make the effort.

Segmenting your audience into groups defined by common attributes will help you craft targeted messages. Create a few personas that represent the goals, concerns and motivators of your employees. Have fun with it, give them a silly name, list of hobbies or even use some free stock photos to represent each persona. Make them visible and real by displaying their pictures on the wall, so you can keep them in mind while you develop your plans and strategy.

Now the Fun Begins

Back to our sad story about the successful LMS launch that resulted in NO change in employee usage — the missing piece was that there was no communication plan for after the launch. Without a communication plan to keep learning top of mind, the employees moved on to other things and learning retreated to the back burner once again.

Marketers are constantly communicating the value and benefits of their product through a variety of channels including the company website, public relations, social media, email, events, telemarketing and sales promotions. Communication activities are organized into campaigns. Marketing campaigns are theme-based programs carried out over a defined period of time that use a variety of channels, and most communication includes a "call to action." Actions vary and include things like downloading a piece of content, registering for an event, visiting a website or printing a coupon.

Campaigns are where you get to be really creative! With your new marketing hat on, think about some campaigns you could do over the next six months revolving around specific themes, and align those to your brand and message. Campaign ideas include career competency themes like leadership, project management, or creative and innovate thinking strategies.

Build a communication plan for each campaign that maps out the messages you will deliver, calls to action, communication channels and measurable goals. A call to action could be click a link to a 5 minute video, register for a webinar, or attend a learning event – any activity that further promotes or demonstrates the benefit of learning and brings them closer to your goal – loyal, repeat customers. Create a schedule and include which channel you will use to deliver each message. Take advantage of existing internal communication channels such as email, intranet sites, company newsletter, or create a new one like a learning blog or a dedicated learning newsletter.

Measure, Tweak and Learn

Marketing analytics – the tracking and measuring of campaign performance — is part of every marketer's toolbox. Without measurable goals, and tracking against those goals, marketers would be flying blind with no idea of what worked and what didn't. We mentioned above that your communication plan should include measurable goals. Each activity within a campaign needs a goal as well. Tracking against your goals will let you know when something isn't working so you can try slightly different wording, a whole new message or a new call to action until you hit the mark. The more campaigns you do, the more you learn, and you are a marketing rock star.

A cohesive, targeted approach to marketing learning and development will keep it at the forefront of your employees' minds. With your strong brand, knowledge of what makes your people tick, compelling messaging, and fun, engaging campaigns, you can create a plan that motivates your people to take the action you desire: participate in learning programs and activities that increase their skills, engagement and productivity and drive your organization forward to achieve strategic business goals.

According to Bersin, 66% of L&D professionals admit they have a hard time getting employees to engage with L&D offerings. Getting people engaged isn't just about selecting a fantastic learning management system and filling it with good content, it's also about marketing the solution to your organization. If you want a successful learning program, take a page out of marketing's book.

Bonus: L&D Marketing Cheat Sheet

Here are some ideas to get you started. You can't do them all, choose the ones that fit your goals and organizational culture:

- A monthly learning newsletter that highlights new, popular content
 - Learner of the month – highlight an employee with the most usage
 - Develop a learning blog featuring a variety of topics around professional development, career growth and workplace culture
 - Create mini promotional videos featuring members of the L&D and management teams explaining the importance and benefits of the program
 - Share learning news, tips and insights on your organization's internal social networking tools like Yammer, Chatter and Jive (to name a few!)
- You don't need a degree in marketing or the advertising skills of Mad Men to make your learning programs shine. You just need a brand and communication plan that lets your learning program stand out!

If you're looking for some advice, give Meridian a call at **1-844-MKS-CORP**. We have a team of learning experts and marketing gurus happy to help!

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