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# Omnipresent: Ubiquitous learning calls for new concepts

*Impatient digital users love explanatory videos and micro-learning*

E-learning has to adjust to the uncertainties created by the digital revolution and remote working. The ubiquitous nature of smartphones and tablets has triggered a behaviour change in users and their learning environments. Content is being accessed whenever, wherever and through whatever is available. One of the most dominant trends is little nuggets of information being presented in the form of explanatory videos.

Since the dawn of the computer age there have been many attempts at developing e-learning tools and resources. Even back in the 60s, people tried to communicate learning content via computers. In recent times, enormous progress has been made thanks to digitalization and the widespread use of mobile devices. The pace of change is dizzying. "We are living in an uncertain world and we have no idea where it will lead in light of the ongoing digital transformation," says Johannes Starke, Product Manager e-learning. As a consequence, many big players regard the traditional term 'e-learning'

as rather outdated and it has become fashionable to speak of 'cyber learning' or even announce that e-learning is dead and buried.

#### **How ubiquitous usage has changed the world (of learning)**

Learning has been impacted by many things. Starke uses the video gaming examples of Pokémon Go and QuizClash which were initially very popular saying, "These types of apps have left their mark on inspiring forms of learning." The all-pervasive usage of digital media doesn't just mean that concert-goers instinctively reach for their smartphones –

preferring to experience their surroundings via the eye of the camera – but also that people learn in a wholly different manner. The producers of e-learning content have to face up to this new reality and come up with solutions. The world has moved on and the focus has shifted from learning content that is controlled on the basis of a specific role or target group in a Learning Management System, to content that anybody can open on their smartphone at home, in the office or in the waiting room. In other words, in every imaginable context.

The 24/7 availability of learning content has changed the whole field of learning itself. Today, there is an enormous range of state-of-the-art e-learning measures that are available. For example, **tts** developed a shop training system for apprentices at the German retail giant REWE that relies on beacon technology. Small transmitters on the trainees' smartphones access learning units when-



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#### Facts & Figures

- Ubiquitous learning: mobile and always available
- Learning via smartphone: the challenge of flexible context
- Digital impatience demands a whole new approach
- Huge popularity of micro-learning and explanatory videos



ever they approach a corresponding beacon. Meanwhile the latest trend, as adopted by the WACKER chemical company, involves a mobile app guiding customers and sales reps together through learning content. This sees both employees and customers click their way through a decision tree to arrive at a product recommendation.

#### Spotify for learning: the trend for bite-size learning

Similarly to the way music lovers use streaming services, such as Spotify, to listen to individual songs instead of an entire album, there is a trend toward micro-learning. Impatient digital users don't want long, drawn-out background information. They prefer to receive quick, concise answers to specific questions. Learning content should come in short packages. It could also be automatically connected to further suggested

content such as Amazon recommendations, or even allow the compilation of 'learning playlists' that users can manage. There will be many new developments here in the near future. But contextualization could prove problematic, explains Starke: "A learning unit with a duration of just five minutes is rarely sufficient. And what will come after 'micro' if we don't even know the context or moment in which the learning content will be used, or even what device is delivering it?"

#### Explanatory videos are the new big thing

From a didactic perspective, explanatory videos lack interactivity: sitting back and passively consuming flies in the face of established learning theories. But their simplicity and widespread availability speaks volumes. Brief topics can be communicated in a perfectly concise and

entertaining manner via videos. This explains their ranking at the top of the trend monitor of the most popular learning media. "It's hard to imagine a less complicated way of conveying information than an explanatory video. And they are compatible with every device," enthuses Starke. And the medium itself has adapted to suit modern demands. For example, on public transport subtitles allow silent viewing. The square format has won the format battle as the direction the device will be held in, upright or sideways, cannot be predicted. **tts** has a long history of creating video series explaining HR processes in bite-size nuggets for the German pharmaceutical company MERCK.

Addressing new groups of remotely-working learners, or creating motivational programs, are just two new trends in e-learning which continues to develop and grow.