5 Tips for Sourcing a Great e-Course: Just like Playing an Enjoyable Round of Golf

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Thanks to online, self-paced courses, professional development is now targeted towards the busy "just in time learner." A Google search can return many types of learning opportunities offered through all kinds of venues. This blog presents a five-step strategy to source the best course so that you have an effective online professional development learning experience. The best online learning experiences are just like playing a great round of golf that isn't necessarily "par for the course."

To begin your Internet search for an effective e-learning course, open a new browser window and type "online self-paced courses + topic." Pages of web-based options are waiting to be discovered. However, this search does require some due diligence and an evaluative approach.

Think about the last time you traveled to a new city and were looking for a golf course to play.

Here are some questions you might have considered before choosing the course. A) What attributes did you look for in the course? B) Was the course public or private? C) What was the cost per round? D) Was the course challenging or easy? E) What was the course's reputation?

All of these questions contributed to the qualities you were looking for in the course and factored in to how you were going to spend your time and money.

These same types of rules apply when looking for an e-course. Here are some tips to help you source an effective e-course.

1. **Accredited or Industry Certified.** To ensure that CEUs or PDUs are offered, look for courses that are accredited or industry-certified. If you are learning to advance a teaching certificate for example, be certain that the district will accept the credits from the institution. Please note that not all institutions are effectively certified by a proper sponsoring provider or accrediting-body. Before you spend time and money, make sure you research the institution or sponsoring provider beforehand. Most school districts require an accompanying Credit Approval Form to help you with this decision.

   For your industry, you will need to be aware of these same credentialing requirements. Given the potential lack of familiarity with effective and accredited e-learning, it is helpful to find courses where

there is an accredited university sponsorship. Here's why:

We know that lots of times you are betting while playing golf. By winning that bet there are direct benefits to you – a free drink, bragging rights, or money in your pocket. In the same way, you are betting on the e-learning course and the knowledge gained through that course. You are betting that the information you learn will benefit you directly in the same way as when you bet on your round of golf. You want to win those bets every time.

Leadership via Design has an abundance of experience designing, developing, and implementing these kinds of courses so you can win your educational bets. We design elegant, approachable, and engaging courses customized to meet clear objectives and effective outcomes.

2. **Engaging and Effective.** The reason that so many online e-courses fail is because they are like playing a Par 3 course. All of the holes are the same. There is no variety. It's so much more fun to play a regulation course, because this type of course is intrinsically more interesting.

   In a lackluster e-course there is no "attentional engagement." There is no variety. The modules are text-heavy; there are no videos, lively presentations, or engaging Interactions. Many times,

there is no context for the learning. Too often, too heavily-worded and boring PowerPoint presentations are the sole method of instructional transfer.

To be engaging and effective, e-courses should include videos, living and practical text, some type of reflective journal response, case studies, a live component, and pragmatic activities and scenarios that directly apply to your industry and learning objectives.

Remember, there are two objectives in golf - continuously improve and win! The same attributes should be evident in your next e-learning experience.

3. **Online Discussion Forums**. Look for e-courses that include ways to have meaningful discussions in a self-paced learning environment. These should include:

   a) Forums for online chats or active discussions in the course;
   b) Opportunities for engaging thoughtful discussions in on-site professional development groups;
   c) Ability to submit reflective journals into the Learning Management System throughout the course;
   d) Applied activities-based learning;
   e) A live person or facilitator to provide feedback for the work you submit and responses or feedback to your questions.

Back to the golf metaphor; the online discussion forums are just like the 19th hole. This is the place where you and the other people in your foursome share your stories about your successes and challenges. The online discussion forums serve the same purpose, but they are more powerful, because your stories have a wider audience, there are clear objectives around the discussion, and you can meaningfully gain from the limitless experience of other course participants. The key benefit of this environment is that you can capitalize on the wide-array of other people's experiences and feedback.

4. **Organized, Consistent, and Intuitive.** Inconsistent course design can get in the way of effective learning. When courses are not well-designed or easy-to-follow, this can be a real turn-off. You want to throw your clubs before you even start.

    Think about your last round of golf. Just like every other golf course, there were 18 holes. Every hole had a tee box, a fairway, and a green. A flag marked where the hole was. The course was consistent, predictable, and followed conventions for the game. Even if you had never played that particular course before, you knew what to do.

    An effective Learning Management System is designed to systematize your online learning course experience. However, without adequate training for how to navigate the system, this experience will be just like your first-ever round of golf when you weren't sure what to do or how to begin. Therefore, before getting to work on the actual course content, there needs to be a clear and consistent lesson design that includes an explanatory video or tutorial right up front explaining how to navigate the course. Without a clear pathway through the course, the learning experience plays out like an obstacle course in miniature golf. You don't want to be yelling "fore" before you even begin.

    I know in one course that I recently evaluated, there were 73 student activities and 36 graded activities to be completed over 5 weeks. The course workload was completely unmanageable for both the participant and the proctor. Participants want to know beforehand what to expect – just like the golf course. On a golf course there are 18 holes. You want to know your round is somehow playable. You don't want to play on a course that is unreasonably difficult – especially as a beginner. You want to know that you can complete your round in a manageable amount of time and with a somewhat predictable number of swings. Similarly, course facilitators are like greens' keepers. They don't want to mow around too many sand traps. If the e-course is over-burdening the facilitator, the amount of time that can be spent with you will be inadequate. In an e-course, tasks should be analyzed and evaluated so

that you know what you are getting into before you start.

5. **Learning on the Go**. The course should output to mobile devices. There should be opportunities built into the learning experience that enables you to access the course wherever and whenever you need to. Announcements or tips could to be sent via text message or email while you are enrolled in the course. The messages should not occur so regularly that they are a nuisance, but they should occur often enough that you feel engaged and are able to apply the tip or activity to your professional experience.

   Let's revisit our golf metaphor. Once you get hooked, your competitive drive takes over and you want to keep getting better and learning more all of the time. The problem is that you can't be on the golf course every minute of every day. Through the use of mobile devices, you can interact with the game than by actually playing. Take Swinguru Golf, for example. It can help you improve your game on-the-go or while you are relaxing at home.

Overall, e-learning courses should be robust, meaningful, engaging, and enriching. They should be priced appropriately. These are indeed exciting times for e-learning professional development! Please be on the look-out for Internet Learning Portal. ILP is coming soon and this venture is designed to bring you various types of learning options. In the meantime, let Leadership via

Design help you move up the leader board of your career through our innovative and customized course design.

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P.S. Please don't ask me what my handicap is.