

Converting to a Distance Learning Format

A Best Practices Guide

Ty M Carriere

Walden University



Dr. Celeste Fenton

EDU 6135: Distance Learning

Abstract

At some point, might be tasked with taking a traditional face to face course or training module and converting it to a blended form of instruction that still needs to achieve the same outcomes as the traditional course. This Best Practices guide will help the trainer tasked with doing a course conversion with ideas, tips and what their new role will be.

Converting to a Distance Learning Format

A Best Practices Guide

The first thing to remember is that methods used to facilitate online/blended and traditional courses are the same (Laureate, n.d.). You're still the facilitator, they are still the learners and the outcomes of the course needs to be the same in content and quality. Having said that, there are some challenges to a blended format as well as advantages.

Pre-Planning Strategies

As the trainer, there are things you need to do before you can convert your course to a hybrid format. A hybrid course means that some of the elements in this class will be face to face and others will be online. Typically, the instructional portion is online. This means you need to have a strong syllabus and lesson plan that you've gone over (with an SME if necessary) to make sure that there are no surprises and it's familiar to you (Laureate, n,d). Using the ADDIE model will make things much easier. It always starts with ADDIE (Laureate, n.d.)

<p>Analyze</p>	<p>In this case, we know it's a Hybrid course and the content will be put on a server so the trainees will have access, but will the learners all have the same technology to access it? Analysis of the learners, the content being taught and the company or schools goal in this course or training is imperative to create a good lesson plan.</p> <p>We must decide:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. what delivery method, software and technologies are required to access the content. 2. what content will be Synchronous and what content will be Asynchronous 3. what will be used to assess and evaluate the transfer of knowledge 4. what are the constraints of the training (i.e. time needed to develop and modify content for online, deadline when training needs to be completed, work schedule of learners, etc.) 	<p>Notes:</p>
-----------------------	--	---------------

	5. what CMS fits the needs of this course and the students (i.e. if it needs video, does that CMS easily support streaming videos?)	
Design	Once decisions have been made based off the analysis phase, remember to outline your performance objectives and design activities and exercises that will engage the learners rather than merely copying your face to face content and sticking it online. Consider the delivery format and exercises that not only test the student retention but asks them to bring their own experiences to the discussions when applicable (Simonson, Smaldino, Zvacek, 2015).	Notes:
Develop	<p>Create the tools, and the training online populating the CMS you decided on. Create and upload the course materials. Remember that they are being modified for distance learning efficiency. (i.e., videos, interactive exercises, etc.). Time permitting, test a prototype with a closed group and observe any problems</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a Train the Trainer's module for trainers who will be delivering and facilitating the course. First you train the trainer (Laureate, n.d.). 2. Set everything up in the CMS to be tested before implementation to the trainees. 	Notes:
Implement	Everything has been tested and is in place, now it's time for the real test! Implement the training and observe any problems while supporting the learners by staying in constant contact with the learners. Don't disassociate yourself from the students (Laureate, n.d.).	Notes:
Evaluate	Finally evaluate the success of the students outcomes as well as the course itself.	Notes:

Enhanced for Distance Learning

Many aspects of the original training program could be enhanced for a distance learning format by the addition of activities. Dr. Piskurich states that Activities and applications are the heart of an online course (Laureate, n,d.). Activities don't need to be long and complicated devices programmed in. Activities could be as simple as answering a question at the end of a chapter or even a paragraph and stating that you (the learner) understands the material so that a) Learners know that they have to pay attention, and b) students take more responsibility of their learning. In other words, as a student you can't say I didn't see information after you've checked it off and acknowledged it. Activities and exercises could be as simple or elaborate as the trainer needs it to be.

The Role of the Trainer.

The role of the trainer in the distance learning environment is still that of the trainer but with more responsibility. Communicating with the learners in a face to face environment is a lot easier than an online solution so the trainer must consistently reach out to the learners and stay in touch (Laureate, n.d.) and keep them engaged. PowerPoint for example should be used sparingly because it's an un-engaging way to deliver content and the more content that needs to be transferred, the more likely you'll lose the students attention. The term is called Death by PowerPoint (Laureate, n.d.). When training a learner that you might not see often if at all, it's extremely important to have a presence.

Encouraging Online Communication.

One of the biggest differences with face to face vs online instruction is asynchronous discussions. Getting learners to post and comment on each other's posts is the backbone of online learning. It was stated that the "kiss of death" for any distance learning course is lack of student participation. Students who participate in discussions and group activities have been reported to retain more information for a longer period in time (Simonson, Smaldino, Zvacek, 2015). This also means that the trainer must participate in all Synchronous and Asynchronous discussions giving feedback and pushing the students with more questions.

Conclusion

The same and yet different, taking a conventional course and converting it to a blended or online course takes a lot of effort to properly do it correctly. The benefits can out way the drawbacks if it's a more efficient solution and offers more flexibility to have more learners attend and succeed in their training. Recreating and in some ways reinventing the delivery of the content takes planning and a good trainer will have to be more attentive to the students that he or she doesn't see all the time, but if the course is engaging with lots of activities and exercises and a teach who shows that they care about the learners, a successful course follows.

References

Laureate Education (Producer). (n.d.). *Facilitating online learning* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://class.waldenu.edu>

Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., & Zvacek, S. (2015). *Teaching and learning at a distance: Foundations of distance education*

Laureate Education (Producer). (n.d.). *Delivery analysis* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://class.waldenu.edu>