No Agency Left Behind: Digital Learning for a Hybrid Future

MARKET TRENDS REPORT

Introduction

One of the lessons learned from a year-plus of remote work is that the way we learn needs to change, for the sake of both employees and agencies.

So how do we transform our classroom learning constructs overnight without compromising the learning experience? The right kind of digital learning is the answer.

Digital learning has become a critical tool on the path to the future for government agencies, but many of their e-learning platforms are stuck in the past, saddled with outdated technology stacks such as top-down learning management systems (LMSs) or generic web conferencing tools used for mission-critical live or synchronous virtual trainings. Those systems are unable to address specific use cases and lack the hands-on, interactive environment that "digital natives" have come to expect. Delivering modern learning experiences is the need of the hour.

Specialized solutions that can deliver both live and on-demand trainings and courses, in online or hybrid online/classroom settings, can give agencies much-needed agility in employee training. Upgrading the learning and development (L&D) stack will require an agencywide effort that starts at the top.

To learn more about specialized solutions for on-the-job training, GovLoop partnered with Adobe, a leader in digital learning solutions, for this report. We will examine the shortcomings of traditional learning systems, and how a platform of specialized solutions can make a big difference in engaging users, improving learning and retention, and in turn improve job performance. We'll also detail the steps agencies can take toward implementing a specialized system for digital learning.
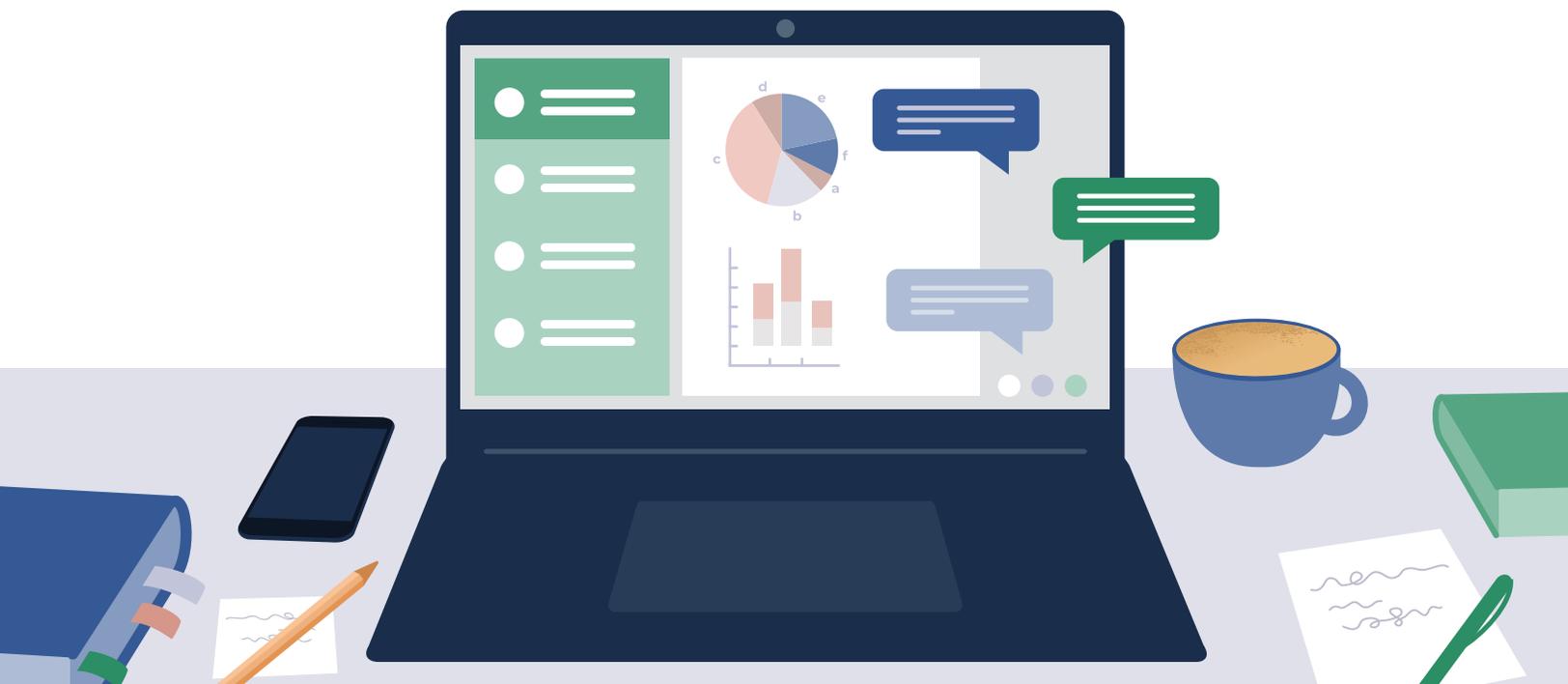
By The Numbers

2.1 million

The size of the U.S. <u>federal civilian workforce</u>

3.2 million

The number of active duty military, civilian, National Guard and Reserves personnel in the <u>Defense Department</u>

82%

of federal employees expect to <u>continue to telework</u> after the pandemic, either three days a week (41%) or four to five days a week (41%).

$2.5 billion

The amount the U.S. government spent on <u>e-learning products and services</u> in 2019

$30

The amount companies make back for every dollar spent on e-learning, thanks to an <u>increase in productivity</u> among employees

87%

of millennials and 69% of non-millennials consider <u>career development</u> an essential part of a job.

68%

of employees prefer when learning takes place <u>in the workplace</u>.
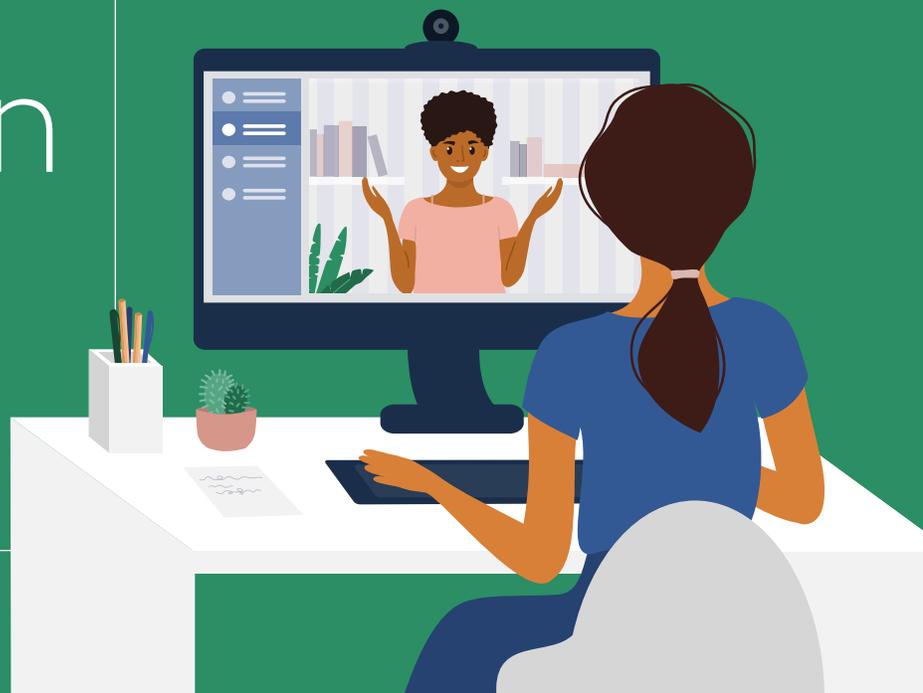
The Goal: Make Digital Learning Go Viral

The Challenge: Learning Systems Fall Behind

Relying on outdated solutions for virtual training is more costly than agencies might realize. The use of older or general-purpose solutions makes it difficult both to manage learning programs and to create courses that are effective.

First, they need the ability to *rapidly build and deliver repeatable, consistent training across the organization.*

Almost all organizations have high-level LMSs in their enterprises, but they tend to be top-down systems implemented by the IT department and delivered whole cloth to units in an organization. People could use it, but couldn't tailor it to their needs or create content on their own. They were built for HR, not for the instructors or employees. Instructors, forced to make the best of it, paid the price.

"They were more in a consumption mode rather than in a production mode," said Mike Murtha, a Solutions Consultant for Adobe who specializes in tailored L&D requirements of federal, state and local agencies. "And that's just not going to cut it today."

Second, agencies need to *drive greater engagement and provide hands-on interaction to keep learners' attention.*

Recent studies have shown that e-learning increases employee engagement by up to 18% and retention by 25% to 50%. Adobe has found that a platform that allows learners to get involved with authoring and managing content accelerates that engagement, with learners producing content and enjoying the experience more. The same holds true for live virtual training, where constant interaction through content design and changing scenarios weaved into the instructor's delivery (instead of mundane PowerPoints) measurably increase engagement and retention rates.

People's everyday use of smartphones and laptops has changed their expectations. "The bar has been raised," said Murtha. "Everything is three clicks or less, and it's a very positive experience; otherwise, we leave it. I think the same holds true in the e-learning environment."

The Solution: A Specialized Learning Platform

A platform designed for specialized training can bring agencies' e-learning programs up to date for a modernized, mobile and remote workforce.

For starters, the material should resonate with employees. Collaborative, hands-on learning in an environment that provides a common visual experience helps them retain information and encourages them to think for themselves.

Technology that can deliver interactive live virtual training, which video conferencing tools barely support, can make a big difference. It allows courses to be built quickly and delivered consistently and repeatably without instructors having to re-work everything for every class.

It can have a multiplying effect, Murtha said, with people using the training more often than they would in a top-down model.

Some key features in a specialized e-learning platform include:

- **Multiple formats:** An effective platform can work in a variety of modes, including live sessions with instructors, recorded sessions available on demand and virtual reality settings.
- **Personalization:** Incorporating technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) helps a program learn more about users through implicit and explicit traits – and further personalizes content.
- **Hybrid classes:** Post-pandemic training programs will likely be a mix of online and classroom settings, so a robust solution will have the flexibility to handle both.
- **Engagement design:** Importantly, it should engage users in ways beyond just screenshare, video and chat. Specialized tools, enabling polls, reactions, drawings and interactive course design can induce participation from virtual learners and keep their attention just as effectively — if not more so — than what instructors can achieve in physical classrooms.
- **A secure environment:** Security, of course, is always a paramount concern, so any solution should conform with FedRAMP, which sets federal standards for cloud services and is typically followed by state and local governments as well.

Best Practices for Engaging Digital Learning
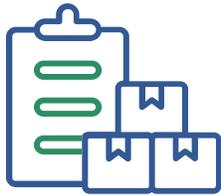
Take an all-inclusive inventory.

Upgrading an agency's L&D stack shouldn't be done piecemeal – for example, by tasking the IT department to find the best available LMS, virtual classroom environment or e-learning authoring tools one item at a time. Instead, an agency should take a complete inventory of what it has so that leaders understand how an e-learning platform needs to be integrated.

Let business value drive decisions.

Ideally, the transition should start at the top of the organization, and it should be a business-driven approach that incorporates the needs of the entire enterprise. Rather than letting the IT department drive the technology decisions with a standard cost-optimization approach, L&D leaders should make their own choices based on the business value of the training, not just the costs.

Ride with the best of breed.

Agencies upgrading their e-learning platforms should choose a solution that covers the full range of specialized training needs. A solution provider with extensive experience in e-learning — from content creation to live delivery to learning management systems — is also an important factor. It can be difficult to find a solution that fits all use cases across the organization. An integrated solution suite can deliver a platform with a full portfolio of capabilities without having to procure and manage different pieces.

Emphasize the learner's experience.

The bar has been steadily rising when it comes to users' experience, fueled by practically every aspect of people's lives, from online transactions to AI-driven smartphone apps. Both instructors and learners have come to expect an intuitive, interactive environment. They also expect a democratized e-learning approach that enables them to create content as well as consume it. Learners, for example, could become instructors or get involved in managing content. Social learning is another critical element, where learners can teach other learners, which helps effective training to spread. Instructors, meanwhile, should have the ability to customize courses while maintaining control and oversight into learner engagement in live virtual classrooms.

Communicate.

Agencies should set the stage by making sure employees understand the importance of the training and have been familiarized with the capabilities — including authoring and teaching components — of the tools they'll be using. This is an area where buy-in at the top can make a significant difference.

Collect feedback.

Digital learning needs to evolve to keep up with changing technology and job requirements. Soliciting employee input will help agencies assess the effectiveness of their programs and make improvements.

Case Study: E-learning Promotes Workplace Safety

At the Kentucky Labor Cabinet, education programs are a matter of public safety – in some cases, even of life and death. The agency is tasked with spreading the word to business and industry about Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards concerning workplace safety, whether it involves restaurants, construction sites or port facilities.

In addition to addressing a broad spectrum of businesses and their distinct safety concerns, the Labor Cabinet also faced some resistance from businesses that saw the agency as an enforcement arm. But its goal is a collaborative, educational approach with business. And the agency has found that implementing a robust e-learning and webinar platform from Adobe has increased its reach by an order of magnitude while effectively engaging the business community.

The agency chose Adobe Connect as a hosted solution, with Adobe Captivate to create content and webinar materials. The tightly integrated combination provides a reliable environment with the ability to quickly create the kind of content that increases engagement and information retention.

With Adobe Connect, the agency not only reaches 10 times as many people as it did with in-person events, but the level of engagement has changed how people view the Labor Cabinet — and even increased attendance at the live events it hosts.

"Businesses and employees alike now see us more as a critical resource for helping them operate safely," said Kim Perry, the agency's Director of Education and Training. "As a result, more people are engaging us in person."

HOW ADOBE CAN HELP

Adobe, which has a long history in digital learning for government, offers industry-leading solutions for modern learning experiences. Adobe Connect and Adobe Captivate Prime are FedRAMP-authorized tools that allow you to take advantage of robust security features and best-in-class cloud services.

Adobe Connect, a leader in secure cloud services, offers security features, such as TLS and AES-256 encryption, plus the controls to enforce least-privilege policies. It is the primary solution used by many agencies today. It is currently available for a free 30-day trial.

Adobe Captivate Prime, also available for a free 30-day trial, is a world-class LMS that delivers personalized digital learning. Learning can be embedded in the workflow by integrating the LMS with other enterprise platforms via a robust application programming interface framework.

Tight integration between Adobe Connect and Adobe Captivate Prime provides best-in-breed solutions for every synchronous or on-demand training need in your learning ecosystem.

Learn more about Adobe Connect

Learn more about Adobe Captivate Prime

Conclusion

Government agencies at all levels have been pursuing modernization, but e-learning has lagged behind in those transformation efforts. Upgrading the L&D stack and giving users an engaging, interactive learning experience in both synchronous and on-demand mediums, however, is essential to delivering modernized services. After all, the people on the front lines are the face of those services, so their training has to be specific to their jobs, up to date and interactive enough to enhance the learning experience and learning retention.

Too many LMS systems haven't kept up with the times. They are often cobbled together, insufficient to the task and incapable of delivering the use case-specific content that would make a real difference in employee training. Most web-conferencing solutions are simply audio-video delivery with a chat window. A platform with a full portfolio of specialized, integrated e-learning tools can deliver the user experience that learners today expect, and the effective training that the agency's mission demands.

ABOUT ADOBE

Adobe is changing the world through digital experiences. Great experiences have the power to inspire, transform, and move the world forward. And every great experience starts with creativity.

At Adobe, Creativity is in our DNA. Our game-changing innovations are redefining the possibilities of digital experiences. We connect content and data and introduce new technologies that democratize creativity, accelerate document productivity and empower digital businesses. We're always looking around the corner to develop new technologies and bring innovation to our customers, year after year.

ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 300,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

For more information about this report, please reach out to info@govloop.com.

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