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Why adults learn - and the art of learner seduction

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1



Will people be persuaded to learn only if they're entertained?

How far is this just a hook – and how far does it make the message more memorable, understandable, integrated and accessible? **by Bob Little, Senior Partner – Bob Little Press & PR.** For over 20 years, Bob has specialised in writing about, and commentating on, corporate learning – especially e-learning – and technology-related subjects. His work has been published in the UK, Continental Europe, the USA and Australia. Recently Bob publish the e-book: **'Perspectives on Learning Technologies'**

Entertainment is not the goal of a learning programme. However if the learning material designer can achieve a well-balanced and well-thought out, entertaining learning environment, it has a great potential to influence a learner's emotions and motivation in a positive way – or 'wow the learner'.

There are many things that make people go 'wow', including something that makes them say:

- 'That's clever.'
- 'How did they do that?'
- 'This'll make a difference to my results.'
- 'Did I just do that?'
- 'Someone asked what I think.'
- 'I get a pay rise for completing this learning.'
- 'I can remember this after all these years.'

Of course, the 'wow' can be extrinsic as well as intrinsic to the learning material.

Some ways to achieve 'wow' in learning materials include:

- Gagné's nine instructional events – which begin with 'grab the learners' attention' because, if this doesn't happen, you never get to the second instructional event. However, if you do it too much, you never get to the second instructional event either!
- Keller's ARCS – Attention (which makes learners sit up and take notice), Relevance,

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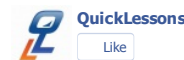
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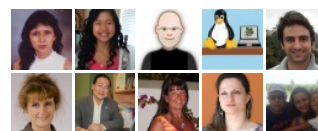
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Confidence and Satisfaction.

· Intrinsic motivation – derived from an appropriate level of challenge, fantasy and curiosity. The curiosity is prompted by doubt, perplexity, contradiction, incongruity and irrelevance. However, there's a counter argument which is that learning inhibits curiosity and drive because, once you've learnt something, the desire to learning something else is reduced.

'Wow' can come from outside the learner. You can have dull learning but still have a 'wow' because the pay-off for the learner is strong. Or you can get the 'wow' from the learning itself.

It's generally agreed that modern online learning needs the 'wow factor' but, at the very least, it needs to be interactive.

Interactivity – for many years, a buzzword in the learning technologies world – can be seen as a vehicle through which to create a compelling moment or event. If, as a developer / deliverer of learning, you can get a learner to the point where that person is emotionally ready to learn, this is a point of 'seduction'.

The 'emotional moment' is important because it pleases, informs and seduces the learner. In learning terms at least, there are five steps to seduction:

· **The First Moment.** There are those who say that, if you translate the history of human beings into a single day, where human beings were created at 12.01am, it would take until 11.12pm for them to discover fire. The use of tools would be discovered at 11.57pm and, at 11.59 and 58 seconds, humans would develop language. This is meant to illustrate that written and verbal communication is a relatively recent development for human beings. Before that, communication was emotional and instinctive. Today's subject matter experts tend to concentrate on the (written) content of learning materials but emotions provide a stronger communication drive than written or spoken words. Everyone makes an emotional decision within a few seconds of being confronted with someone or something that's new. That decision is extremely strong and influences subsequent experience.

Learning materials developers need to satisfy learners' emotional needs initially by:

– Fulfilling the reward cycle – providing a visually and/or verbally attractive 'reward' for users who've just loaded a particular programme.

– Ensuring that they understand and embrace the learners' goals.

– Understanding the learners' psychological involvement with the learning materials and motivation to complete them. Clicking on-screen buttons is following a system rather than engaging in learning. By understanding the learners' goals, developers can seek to mould those goals – be they personal, psychological or professional.

· **Engagement.** 'Interactivity' is not navigation. Some – old fashioned – learning materials' only examples of interactivity are the 'forward' and 'back' buttons. Learners need feedback. Feedback is fun. People enjoy it and feedback implies interest – both in the learner and in the learning materials. Feedback engages the user and interest is enticing (since everyone likes it when someone else shows an interest in them).

· **Location and timing.** The location of key elements on a screen is both important and often ignored.

· **Trust and respect.** The rules are: never treat the learner like an idiot and maintain a 'well behaved' system. In other words, the learning materials should be consistent throughout and the navigation system should always be in the same place on screen, for example.

· **Create mystique.** There are various ways to achieve this, including the use of on-screen 'click me' buttons. These arouse the learners' interest because they don't know what will happen if they follow the instruction.

This article has been adapted from the contents of chapters 7 and 5 respectively of Bob Little's e-book, '[Perspectives on Learning Technologies](#)' (e-book; ASIN: B00A9K1VVS). This e-book is available from [The Endless Bookcase](#) and from [Amazon](#). It contains over 200 pages of observations on issues in learning technologies, principally for learning & development professionals.

The **readers of QuickThoughts have a 10 per cent discount on the price of the e-book when it is bought from [The Endless Bookcase website](#)**. Purchasers should use the **code BLPELMF13** when buying the book. This reader offer is exclusive to your America Learning Media's readers and will expire on 31st August 2013.

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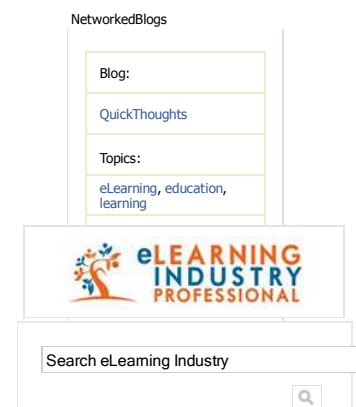
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