INCENTIVIZING TRAINING

CONNECTING L&D AND MARKETING

Marketing and training are two functions that may, at first glance, seem to have little in common. They have different audiences, different goals and different techniques.

But a recent study by Training Industry, Inc. and Allen Communication found that the two departments may have more in common than you might think, and learning and development professionals can benefit by applying marketing tactics to training.

Many training organizations are already using marketing techniques to a certain extent; in fact, 70 percent of respondents said their L&D departments are "very effective" or "moderately effective" at incorporating corporate branding in their programs. This number compares favorably with the 75 percent who gave their marketing departments similar ratings.

The marketing best practices that can increase the effectiveness of training go far beyond appropriately branding web-based modules. They involve consistent communications, incentivizing programs and understanding the audience as consumers of training to better connect the values of learners with available learning solutions.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF CORPORATE LEARNING

The modern training organization must communicate with diverse audiences, including both internal (employees) and external (customers). Where 10 or 20 years ago, training managers were focused on ongoing, long-term learning objectives, they now must also plan for more specific, campaign-based objectives.

For such learning initiatives to succeed, they must engage their audience. Learners – whether they're employees or customers – must understand the relevance of the training programs. Communications must be consistent, and learners must have a reason to participate.

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How can one L&D department meet all of these needs – reaching multiple types of goals with multiple types of learners while keeping them motivated and engaged? One answer is to approach engagement from a marketing perspective and applying marketing tactics to L&D situations. By cultivating an L&D brand, corporate training can become more flexible, drive organizational culture, and enable both internal and external audiences to achieve business goals.

Too often, our L&D initiatives focus just on transmitting information. Marketers, on the other hand, learn about their audience, identify their values and create materials that connect products with consumer needs. This model is what makes marketing so powerful, and it's a model that would make a huge impact on training if it were adopted by L&D professionals.

For example, when engaging learners with a new training program, L&D should understand learner needs and goals. Then, when marketing the program, training managers will be able to use that understanding to demonstrate to their audience how the program will benefit them. Connecting training program objectives with learner objects is a powerful incentive.

SHARING THE LOAD

Who is responsible for incentivizing learning? For 47 percent of the survey participants, their organizations use a deliberate mix of L&D and marketing approaches to make learning programs attractive to their audience. What's more, most recipients say that both their L&D departments and their marketing departments are successful at including branding in their initiatives – so the responsibility for promoting training initiatives doesn't need to sit solely in one department.

Nor does it: Respondents tended to agree that both L&D and marketing departments share responsibility for incentivizing learning, regardless of whether the audience is employees, external/channel partners, contractors, a B2B audience or B2C consumers. However, L&D tends to be more responsible, as one would expect, for incentivizing employee learning, while marketing tends to be more responsible for B2B and consumer audience learning.

Still, both departments are valued as important stakeholders for all audiences, and no one department is responsible for certain functional audiences only. Organizations should work to bridge the gap between marketing and L&D to maximize learner engagement. There is a lot that corporate trainers can learn from their marketing colleagues; by using marketing techniques to connect with learners as consumers, L&D can more successfully market its programs and increase learner engagement.

TYPES OF INCENTIVES

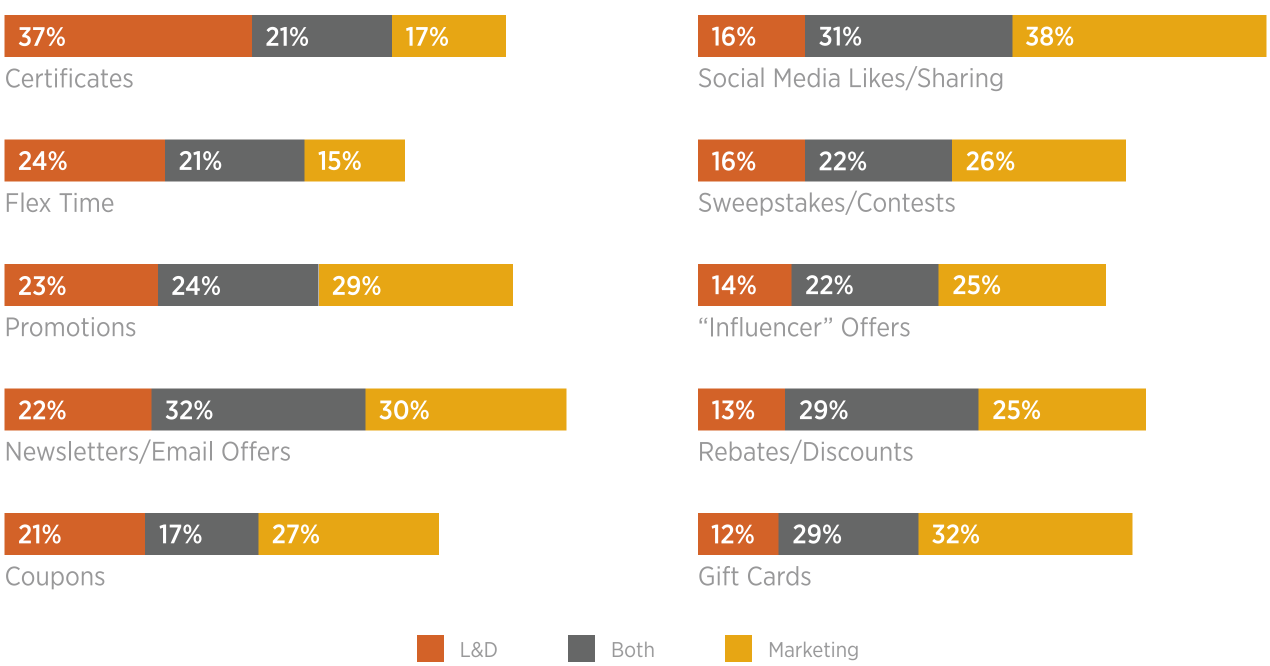
Managers in both training and marketing use a variety of incentives to motivate learners. Some are used primarily by L&D, some are used primarily by marketing, and some are used by both. In any case, each function can leverage incentives used by the other to increase learner engagement.

The incentives used predominantly by L&D include job-related benefits such as certificates and flex time, which are the least frequently used incentives in marketing. However, L&D could benefit from using other, non-job-related incentives to market training.

For example, Figure 1 shows that 85 percent of organizations use social media likes/sharing, either by the marketing department (38 percent), the L&D department (16 percent), or a combination of the two (31 percent). As an ever-present force in employees' personal and professional lives, social media is clearly an important engagement tool that L&D professionals should adopt.

Marketing departments also frequently use gift cards (32 percent) and newsletters/email offers (30 percent) to incentivize learners. However, only 33 percent of organizations report that L&D departments, either alone or concurrently with marketing, use gift cards. These types of incentives may represent a

FIGURE 1 | Incentives Used for Marketing Training



missed opportunity for training organizations to engage learners in their programs. While many large companies may be unable to use gift cards as learning incentives due to HR regulations, perhaps training organizations can adopt other incentives that target the same underlying motivations, such as non-monetary email offers.

> ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD WORK TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN MARKETING AND L&D TO MAXIMIZE LEARNER ENGAGEMENT.

Similar incentives include coupons (used by 65 percent of organizations), sweepstakes and contests (64 percent), rebates/discounts (67 percent), and influencer offers (61 percent).

When managers decide which incentives to use in their training programs, it is important to keep in mind that both L&D and marketing techniques are valuable, especially if the audience includes a variety of learners, from employees to external partners and customers. While most organizations view L&D as primarily responsible for engaging employees and marketing as primarily responsible for engaging B2B and consumer audiences, they also understand that relevant and consistent training content – supported by corporate branding – makes a significant difference.

By incorporating marketing techniques when developing enterprise learning strategy, L&D can become an important driver of organizational culture and business success. Training organizations should use a variety of incentives – including more traditional L&D incentives such as certificates and flex time but also marketing tools such as social media sharing, gift cards and email offers. Even more important, the training function should learn from marketing and treat learners like customers rather than simply as students. Having this mindset will enable L&D to consider learners' values, thereby increasing engagement and meeting the needs of the changing 21st-century enterprise.

For more information, read the full research report "Incentivizing Training: The Role of Marketing in Corporate Learning."