5 Instructional Weapons to Win the Microlearning War!
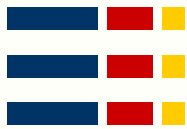

MICROLEARNING:
THE NEW WAR ZONE

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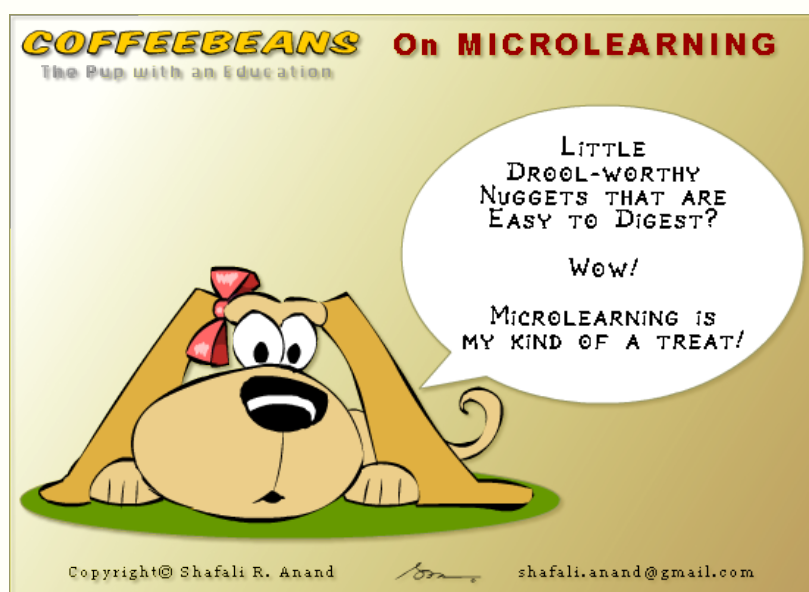*The Creative Fire within You*

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It's a war-zone out there - only the war isn't being fought with tanks and bombs and missiles, or weapons of mass-destruction. Instead, it's being fought with weapons of psychological construction. This war is being fought by everyone - the manufacturers, marketers, content providers. Anyone with a presence in the virtual world is a willing or unwilling participant in this war, which is being fought for the attention of the consumer.

The providers of learning too are competing to gain consumer's attention and microlearning is the newest war we must fight and win.

What is Microlearning?

Microlearning is learning served to the learner in small portions. These portions may be a part of a bigger knowledge chunk, or they may be little self-contained nuggets of information – but what makes them qualify as micro-learning is the fact that they are really small when compared to the traditional learning. Coffeebeans, the pup with an education, shares her thoughts on microlearning

With the shrinking attention spans and the overload of information experienced through a little personal but virtual window into the world, our new-age audience are drawn toward small nuggets of learning – nuggets that they can pop in, chew upon, and digest in less than 10 to 15 minutes, while they are waiting for someone somewhere or commuting to and from work.

We, the learning providers, keep our hawk-eyes trained on every new trait that our learners exhibit, because without them, we don't exist.

So how's the application of instructional design for microlearning different from that for conventional longer-duration deep learning?

The Microlearning Audience

Some reflection upon our new-age, pressed-for-time learner will make it clear that this learner's attention is difficult to get and easy to lose.

Why?

Mostly because our learner's smartphone, which is her preferred digital device (More than 50% of all Internet traffic is generated by smartphones) is a hub of vigorous digital activity.

Of all the other information pieces that compete for our learner's precious attention, following are just a few.

- Instagram feed
- Video feeds from multiple channels
- Podcasts from their favorite online stars
- WhatsApp messages popping up on their screens
- SMSs from a sweetheart, a friend, a cousin…
- Email from work, from a friend...
- LinkedIn or FB requests
- Twitter feed
- …

And jostling with these, is this piece of learning that you've so painstakingly and lovingly created…

But this isn't the end of it, because yours isn't the only piece of learning out there!

Your microlearning nugget must also compete with:

- The microlearning attempts of other learning providers
- An online course that she's registered for
- A certificate course that requires deep learning
- …

So, you see, this learner is a more complex creature than your regular traditional elearning consumer, who consumes your content ensconced in her most comfortable armchair with her favorite laptop perched upon her knees, and who plans to spend a reasonable amount of time going through the fruit of your efforts – namely the course that you've created.

You need to be on your feet, mate!

You need to be your feisty-fiery best!

You need to draw your most powerful instructional weapons from the armory and march into your learner's mind!

And to accomplish this, you must first see the true persona of your audience, which is the sum of her following three avatars.

The 3 Avatars of the Micro-learner

The micro-learner exhibits three important characteristics, which are reflected in her three avatars.

1. The Scout
2. The Assessor
3. The Ambassador

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The Scout, the Assessor, and the Ambassador are all important for the micro-learning creators. Let us see why.

1. THE SCOUT

This audience *needs to be wooed and wowed at first sight*. They will give you about 15 to 20 seconds to make your first impact, or will move to better and brighter content that's clamoring for their attention.

Hear their silent plea, "captivate me or lose me," and pay heed. In this avatar, your

THE 3 AVATARS OF THE MICRO-LEARNER
AVATAR # 1: THE SCOUT

THE SCOUT
The Scout in your micro-learner expects to be impressed by the content.

You must get your micro-learner's attention within the first 10-20 seconds.

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microlearning audience is scouting for the content that addresses their learning need, and you need your content to be there out in the front row, smack in the middle, ensuring that your audience finds it and finds it interesting.

2. THE ASSESSOR

This audience is *continuously assessing the worth of your content*, and if they feel bored or they don't get the promised/expected value from your content, they'd drop out at the slightest nudge from a notification regardless of where it has come from. The attraction of the unknown is pregnant with a new untested

THE 3 AVATARS OF THE MICRO-LEARNER
AVATAR # 2: THE ASSESSOR

THE ASSESSOR
If your micro-content has got your micro-learner's attention, you've found yourself a learner and an Assessor.

If the learning experience is effective and enjoyable, you win.

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promise – while your content has already broken its. Don't break their heart. Deliver on your promise and the Assessor avatar of your micro-learner will be ready to give you a glowing testimonial.

3. THE AMBASSADOR

This audience is also *quick to like, love, and share*. If your content gets them and they get it

too, they would be quick to share it with their friends – they are looking for good content to share, because their virtual process is defined by their online behavior. Sharing good content would help their online avatars develop a better personality. If your content connects with them, they would connect you to others and help you grow your audience with the tap of an icon.

It's clear that microlearning has its own

THE 3 AVATARS OF THE MICRO-LEARNER
AVATAR # 3: THE AMBASSADOR

THE AMBASSADOR

If your micro-learner likes your content, then within 10 to 15 minutes you've found yourself an ambassador.

The Ambassador likes, shares, and even praises your content to help you find more micro-learners.

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challenges and advantages. As long as you can manage the challenges, you'll be able to reap the benefits.

5 Instructional Steps to Ensure your Victory in the Microlearning War

As always, Instructional Design lights our way

forward into our micro-learner's heart. Here are a few things that a micro-learning designer can do.

1. Make the ARCS model of learner motivation (John Keller) your mantra to success. Get the learner's attention. – first through perceptual means then by quickly arousing their curiosity. Ensure that you amalgamate the gaining attention part with establishing the relevance of the content, as you have about twenty seconds. This would mean a clear infographic or about 50-60 words of content.

2. Stay with lower Bloom's Levels (1 to 3) for your micro-learning nuggets. Unless of course, your nuggets are quiz-only nuggets.

3. Provide learning in small chunks (if your nugget is geared toward providing learning. If it's a quick quiz then this isn't applicable.) Remember that this learning is mostly being consumed on a smart-phone, and your readable single-chunk (paragraph/set of paragraphs) content on a smartphone screen wouldn't be more than about 300 words, after which scrolling would start becoming tedious. One might argue that the mobile user is habituated to scrollable content, but that doesn't change the fact that it adds some extraneous load, which if avoided, can make your content easier to digest. Remember, we are in the business of making learning easier and effective.

4. Use graphics that are simple, direct, relevant, and interesting. As a former multimedia designer, I can assure you that a cluttered graphic is going to jettison your learner out of your nugget quicker than Spider-Man can swing from one building to another.

5.   Ensure that your microlearning nuggets come equipped with a way for your audience to share the content – if they like it and they don't find a way to share it, you've lost an opportunity.

5 INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS TO MAKE YOUR MICROLEARNING EFFECTIVE

Read the full article "5 Instructional Weapons to Win the Micro-Learning War," on LinkedIn.

1. Gain the Learner's attention using Perceptual and Curiosity Arousal.

2. Establish the relevance of your content for the learner.

Do 1 and 2 in the first 20 seconds.

3. Provide content in small easy-to-digest chunks. (50% of the online content is consumed through smartphones.)

Provide all your content in less than 10 minutes.

4. Use small, attractive, relevant graphics. Avoid clutter.

5. Ensure that the learners can share the content whenever they want to, not just at the end of your microlearning nugget.

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These five methods, of course, as always, are just the tip of the iceberg. Our minds are a mine of ideas. Once we break ground and reach in, we'll come up with cartloads of instructional methods that will help reach our micro-learner and win her heart.

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