



## Kineo Briefing

### 7 ways to market e-learning

By Stephen Walsh

Like any other product or service, e-learning needs marketing to attract customers, get them to buy into it, and keep them coming back for more. Very few people in the e-learning industry are marketing professionals. So we need to do a little learning.

At Kineo we have had hands-on experience in developing and implementing marketing plans for e-learning. Here we present a taster of **7 marketing and implementation actions** that you can take right now to achieve better results in e-learning take up, completion, satisfaction – and sustainability.

We're deliberately staying out of the tactical PR territory of how to write a memo or design a poster – good things to do, certainly. But before you get to that point, you need to know what you're trying to say, to whom. And that's what we're looking at here.

### Our top tips:

1. They're right: You do have to sell the sizzle
2. Give the learners what they want
3. Line managers are your new best friends
4. Find Elvis
5. Find lots of Elvises
6. It's a jungle out there: Be a Guerrilla
7. Ask the marketing department (D'oh!)

## 1. They're right: You do have to sell the sizzle

Even people who feel faint at the sight of a marketing plan know this to be true: you sell the sizzle, not the sausage – the benefits, not the features. If you want to market e-learning, you must be able to answer these questions:

- Who stands to benefit from your e-learning, directly or indirectly?
- What are the perceived benefits for them? What problem does it solve for them, what pain will go away, what will they be able to do better as a result?
- How will you tell them about how your e-learning delivers these benefits?

The more you know about the benefits for your market, the better you can design – and then market – to it. This is as much about design as it is about marketing. Good learner-centred design practices feed directly into good e-learning marketing practices.

Ok, you say, but the sizzle sounds different depending on who I am. Quite right. So let's look at who you're marketing to and what they're likely to care about.

## 2. Give the learners what they want

Goes without saying (we hope): your learners are your primary customers. If they do not see how your e-learning delivers a benefit to them, your well-made course will quietly gather dust in the LMS.

What are some of the potential benefits for e-learning (and training in general)? It's probably some or all of the following – and different for each learner.

### **“It's relevant to what I'm trying to do right now”**

Always top of the list. If your e-learning captures people at the moment when they absolutely need what you're providing, 90% of your marketing is done. A major

benefit of e-learning is immediacy. No “you’re on our waiting list for next month’s course”. Access and immediacy are key benefits for your marketing communications. Play to their strengths.

**“I want to advance in the organisation”**

The desire to be trained is rarely an end in itself. People want training so they can do something better. They want to do something better so they can be rewarded for it. Your e-learning should focus on what that something is – which may be different depending on people’s roles.

**“I have to do it for compliance”**

Much e-learning is mandatory. That doesn’t mean you don’t have to market it. You’re trying to build a long-term relationship with your customers, so even if they have to do it, they should feel that a need has been addressed.

**“I get recognition for completion”**

Related to the above, if your organisation is one that rewards completion of training, through performance review, credits, or advancement, play to that in your marketing messages.

**“I get a chance to network”**

A benefit that on the surface looks like it’s really for face-to-face interventions, but with the rise of collaborative e-learning elements like online communities of practice, Wikis and Blogs, this is increasingly a benefit that you can use in marketing e-learning.

There will undoubtedly be other motivators specific to your learners in your organisation. You need to find out what they are, and position your e-learning as addressing these benefits. A good exercise in doing this is to list all the features of your e-learning and convert them into “which means learner can...” benefit statements. For example:

Feature	Benefit
E-learning is delivered as 10 minute modules	Which means learners can easily manage their time commitments and fit the learning into their schedules
Course has an upfront diagnostic	Which means learners can focus on the content they need the most, saving valuable time

Your e-learning vendors probably do this in their marketing to you. So why not take that lead and work it into your messaging?

### 3. Line managers are your new best friends

Marketing e-learning doesn't stop with the learner. In a recent survey for E-Skills, staff said that the person who had the most influence on whether they completed e-learning were their line manger. "My boss didn't say it was important" is all it takes to kill an e-learning initiative. So, how do you get the boss to say "this is great, make the time for it"? Three things you can do:

1. Sell the benefit to the manager

As above, you need to understand what motivates your managers. It is most likely to be team or business unit performance. You need to involve them in making sure the e-learning is a tool to improve that performance – and communicate how it will do so to them.

2. Get them involved

Don't wait for your development to reach the end stages before you start asking managers what they think. Because they will think "you should have involved me sooner". Make managers part of your user group. They're far more likely to champion it, to peers and learners, if they feel part of the solution. There's a time commitment, and this can slow development, but better that than rapid deployment of e-learning that nobody uses. You've also got to get out there and talk to them. Ask for 5

minutes at regional meetings, send them updates on the project, go to internal conferences and tradeshows...you will repeat yourself many, many times. But that's what it takes to get a marketing message through.

### 3. Get them *really* involved

Managers are probably one of your primary sources of subject matter expertise. Get their views, names, pictures, voices, video in your e-learning. Appeal to their egos and make them look good – they will talk up the e-learning as a result. It may sound base, but self-promotion is a very strong motivator – take advantage of it.

## 4. Find Elvis

In most organisations, there is a dominant personality, the person whose endorsement of an initiative and personal support makes a huge difference. One consultant I know calls them the “Elvis” of the organisation. It's often the CEO. If you can work your connections, get their attention, sell them on the benefit of e-learning to the whole enterprise, you will reap enormous marketing gains. When Jack Welch “got” e-learning in the late 1990s, he became the unofficial chief marketing officer for e-learning in GE. It wasn't easy to get his attention. But it was worth the effort.

## 5. Find lots of Elvises

Ok, so maybe your organisation doesn't have just one Elvis, but a network of them. Part of your marketing should be to tap into that network.

The language of Malcolm Gladwells book “The Tipping Point” is useful for the e-learning marketer. In analysing the way in which social behaviour spread like epidemics, Gladwell has identified three groups of people who make things happen:

- Mavens
- Connectors
- Salesmen

**Mavens** are people with huge levels of detailed knowledge on a subject who are happy to share that knowledge. They're respected for being experts and people take their recommendations seriously.

**Connectors** are people who know lots of people in different areas and sectors. They connect different worlds. Connectors have lots of acquaintances, which makes them important in the spread of new ideas and behaviours.

**Salesmen** are the people Gladwell defines as people who persuade people to try something or listen to a new idea. They tend to be optimistic and enthusiastic. They build trust and rapport easily.

So who are the mavens, connectors, and salesmen for e-learning in your organisation? They're probably senior leaders, managers and learners (mixed up in different categories). Find them, get them onboard, and they will help your viral marketing campaign.

## 6. It's a jungle out there: Be a Guerrilla

You've no doubt heard of Guerrilla marketing. It's been around as a concept for over 20 years now. It's all about getting the most impact on a very low marketing budget, where time is more available than money. Many of the Guerrilla tactics are directly relevant to how to market e-learning, be it as part of an overall organisational change or for a specific intervention:

- Give stuff away: make it easy for people to sample the e-learning. Remove the fear factor through hands-on demonstrations in as many

contexts as you can: in the cafeteria, webinars, printouts, whatever it takes to make an impact

- Publish lots of articles: bring evidence and proof that it works, from outside your organisation and through testimonials
- Contribute to forums – become a maven of e-learning in your organisation
- Get speaking slots – show and tell at conferences, meetings etc.
- Have passion for what you're doing – it's infectious
- Have expertise that your customers lack – be the person how knows how to solve their problem via e-learning and build a reputation for expertise
- Have resources that your customers lack – show how you can solve problems quickly and build a reputation for efficiency
- Get testimonials: from learners, managers, stakeholders

This all about building a relationship with your target audience so that you start to establish trust in the organisation.

## **7. Ask the marketing department (D'oh!)**

Sometimes in our relentless drive to get it all done we overlook the wealth of marketing knowledge and resource inside the organisation. If you have a marketing person or team, they can provide great insights on how to design and run a campaign. They may also help you with some of the deliverables (we're not talking about mousepads, posters, newsletters and the like in this insight, but that's the kind of things they can certainly help with).

A note of caution though: the marketing department looks out, not in. Internal and external marketing may require a very different touch (not least because you will have a comparatively tiny budget to play with).

## Summary

We've looked at some ways to generate support for your e-learning initiatives. Some of them are more traditional marketing techniques. Some of them are more about working internal networks to create a viral campaign. Added together, we hope this quick overview gives you a starting point for your marketing efforts.

Share your thoughts with us on this briefing at [info@kineo.co.uk](mailto:info@kineo.co.uk) or call us on +44 (0)870 3830003.

[www.kineo.co.uk](http://www.kineo.co.uk)