
IMPROVING EMPLOYABILITY OF THE SHORT AND LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED WITH UFI LEARNDIRECT – ABSTRACT

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Background

Ufi, the organisation behind learndirect, has previously focused on building the skills of the UK working population. The Employability offering for the short and long-term unemployed, however, turns its attention to improving the prospects of unemployed people in achieving employment, upholding learndirect's track record of increasing skills, confidence and opportunities.

As part of Ufi's Employability offering, the organisation wanted to produce a blended learning solution to fit in with this wider strategy, and linked to the ASDAN Employability Award qualification.

Ufi partnered with Epic to produce the e-learning elements of the blend.

Objectives for the Employability blend

- Provide a product that focuses on getting the unemployed into employment;
- Offer candidates a seamless journey through learndirect by tying together products on offer to unemployed people;
- Break the cycle of long-term unemployed candidates returning into the initial Job Centre Plus stages;
- Address the short-term unemployed during the initial 13 week stage with the aim of minimising those entering the Gateway programme;
- Create a product where e-learning is the core learning component with additional support elements where applicable;
- Ensure the e-learning is pitched at appropriate level;
- Ensure consistency with Ufi's wider strategic offering in employability;
- Incorporate mixed media such as audio and video in the e-learning component (and reuse of video in DVDs);
- Provide a product that gives Ufi an advantage in the market with other providers offering employability products;
- Provide a set of e-learning modules that can be accessed as standalone modules or combined with other modules to form a variety of separate courses;
- Adhere to Ufi's accessibility requirements;
- Create a product that is accessible both from the learndirect LSE and the Course Source LMS (SCORM 1.2 compliant).

The e-learning solution

The primary audience for the learning was individuals who were long-term unemployed and those in the first 13 week period after becoming unemployed. It was expected that there could be low levels of language, literacy and numeracy amongst a large proportion of this audience. It was also possible that the target audience might hold negative attitudes towards formal education and that their previous experience of IT might also be limited.

Therefore the solution designed by Epic:

- Used simple and clear language;
- Supported all elements of onscreen text with audio and meaningful illustrations and photographic imagery;
- Employed a large number of video and animation sequences to further reduce the impact of any literacy issues;
- Avoided conventional and overly conservative means of presenting the key learning;
- Clearly communicated what was required of the learner, sign-posting any necessary interactions;
- Had a clear, consistent interface that was non-threatening to a novice user.

All in all, the resulting e-learning was a media-rich, engaging, effective learning experience that considered and accommodated the particular requirements of the target audience.

The approach chosen provided learners with a combination of:

- Simulated job environments that challenge the learner to demonstrate the necessary skills and attitudes needed to be successful in a real world situation;
- Tutorials that provide the learner with training on appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- Case studies of real life success stories about people who were unemployed but have since gone on to find successful employment;
- Engaging quizzes that allow the learner to gauge their own levels of understanding
- The chance to build useful example documents and templates which can be used by learners in their search for employment;
- Motivational facts of famous and/or historical figures whose stories directly relate to the content.

The offline element of the blend as produced by Epic comprised:

- Printable summaries of key learning that could be taken away by learners;
- Example models and templates of key documents such as CVs;
- PowerPoint's for use by tutors in group discussion;
- DVDs containing video assets for use in role play.

Conclusion

The partnership between Ufi and Epic has given Ufi the capability to provide learning in a vital area to a very wide audience of the unemployed throughout the UK at a scale which could not have been managed by face-to-face means alone - and in a style that suits the needs of this audience.

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