

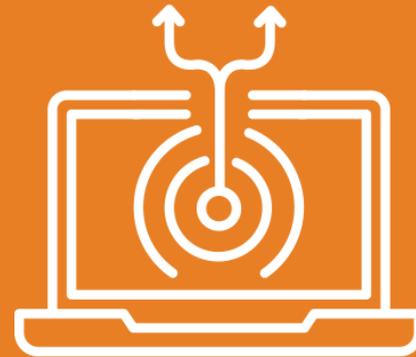


Learning Paths: Creating Pathways to Success

The new normal has led to a **greater need** for self-directed, online learning and training than ever before. Thankfully, eLearning tools like learning management systems (LMS) are available to meet this need. Without direction, however, your learners will likely become lost as they progress in their studies. Whether you're teaching your customers how to use a new product or guiding an employee through compliance training, your eLearning offerings need a clear and sensible structure.

This is why you need to create learning paths: critical tools for eLearning that enable individuals to progress at their own pace without losing the thread that links lesson to lesson and course to course. This guide gives you everything you need to establish learning paths in your organization and create an **integrated learning ecosystem**.

What is a Learning Path?



A learning path is a guided sequence of courses with the goal of teaching a particular subject or skill. These pathways may be explicitly laid out by the learning administrator or assembled by the learners themselves. The goal of the path is to provide direction to the learning experience while still allowing users some control over that experience. Modular learning paths can also be created and then tailored to suit individual learners' needs and preferences.

It's a simple, intuitive idea, but it's harder to implement than it may seem. A learning path needs to keep learners engaged as they move along it. It must also proceed in a sensible fashion to avoid confusing learners, which may prevent them from completing the path.

The ease — or difficulty — of creating a learning path depends on the tools you use to manage and deliver content to your learners. That's why learning paths are **best implemented using an LMS** — a scalable, web-based platform for managing and delivering online training and learning programs. An LMS lets you automate much of the management required for eLearning while crafting personalized and self-guided experiences for your users. With an LMS, you can easily define learning paths, and users can enroll in and access them from anywhere with an internet connection.

Learning paths work best when combined with other modern eLearning practices, like microlearning, personalization, and blended learning. Microlearning — which **breaks training material down into shorter, comprehensible segments** — is an excellent way to create modular learning paths that can be assembled in various ways. This is only one of many ways to personalize your learning paths, which today's learners expect and crave. Learning paths can also benefit from a **blended learning approach** — combining eLearning with in-person instruction — as some portions of the path may be best delivered through **on-the-job** or **instructor led training (ILT)**.

Types of Learning Paths

There are two ways to organize learning paths: as a linear sequence, or as a nonlinear group of courses that gives learners some choice in how they want to tackle them. Linear paths limit the control users have, but they're well-suited to subjects that require all users to engage with material in a set order. An effective nonlinear learning path may be more difficult to create initially, but learners will find the freedom and personalization it offers engaging.

The Advantages of Using Learning Paths



Learning paths provide the structure your learners need while still allowing them the freedom to progress through content as they prefer. Here are some specific benefits learning paths deliver:

- **Error-Free, Efficient Enrollment:** Without learning paths, it's necessary to select courses one by one, a tiresome process that can easily lead to mistakes. Paths allow users to enroll in an entire sequence at the click of a button, saving them time and ensuring that they'll be completing the right content.
- **Satisfied Learners:** The feeling of accomplishment you get when completing a course is great — the first few times, anyway. It's easy to get frustrated when moving through a long series of courses with no end in sight. Learning paths avoid burnout and keep learners satisfied by clearly showing where they are in the path and their tangible progress towards its end.
- **Personalized Experiences:** Whether it's a modular path that can be assembled in various ways, a non-linear one that provides multiple routes for progression, or even a path that only requires completion of some of the courses offered, learning paths are a great way to empower users. This capacity for personalization also means paths can easily be adapted to fit a variety of learning styles.
- **Better Outcomes:** Learning paths gradually build upon prior knowledge to ensure that learners always have the information they need to succeed. This guided approach makes it much more likely that learners will reach their objectives and retain the knowledge they gain.

How to Design a Learning Path



Identifying what you want to teach — and planning how you'll teach it — is the first step to developing a learning path. Determine the core goals you want each learner to achieve by progressing through the path, then map it out from beginning to end. However you structure the path, ensure that it will provide each learner with the essential information they need regardless of the approach they choose.

After you've completed your initial planning, following these best practices will ensure your learning path delivers the impact you're looking for.

Reduced Accident Risk

The ability to tailor learning paths for individual learners is a huge advantage, so lean into it. Once you've determined the core lessons you want to impart, consider how you might combine them with your users' preferences. You can also let learners set their own goals as they progress through the path to keep them motivated.

While empowering learners is valuable, remember that the guidance learning paths provide is just as important. Avoid giving users too much control, as this defeats the purpose of creating a path in the first place. Instead, make sure that you've put guardrails in place to keep everyone on track while allowing learners as much freedom as possible within these necessary limits.

Focus on Transitions

When creating your path, try to identify the points between lessons or courses that may cause the most trouble for users. Take extra time to address these critical transitions so learners don't lose sight of their next steps. Use recaps, assessments, and other tools to keep the relevant information fresh in users' minds and establish a clear connection between where they've been and where they're going.

In the same vein, ensure that paths build upon previous knowledge gradually and logically. Any options you afford the learner should only be made available if they follow this principle.

Adjust Based on Data

All your eLearning offerings can be improved based on insights you glean from key performance indicators (KPIs), but this is especially true for learning paths. How many learners are successfully completing all the content in the path? Are any specific points acting as stumbling blocks? How have users rated various parts of the path? When you use an LMS, you can generate reports with this data and other metrics at any time and then adjust your learning path accordingly.

Learning Path Examples



To help you understand how to implement learning paths in your organization, here are three examples of how you might use an LMS to do so.

Training an Employee

Let's say you need to train a new employee in your IT department on proper information security. This is a prime opportunity for creating a learning path that teaches your employee all your infosec practices, from password management to encryption. A nonlinear path that allows your employee to choose which subjects to engage with probably makes the most sense here, as with some exceptions — like a basic overview of infosec, if necessary — the courses can be tackled in any order without issue.

Once you've created the courses yourself or obtained them from a third-party vendor, you can group them into a learning path and give the employee access. They can now engage with the material at their own pace, wherever and whenever works best for them.

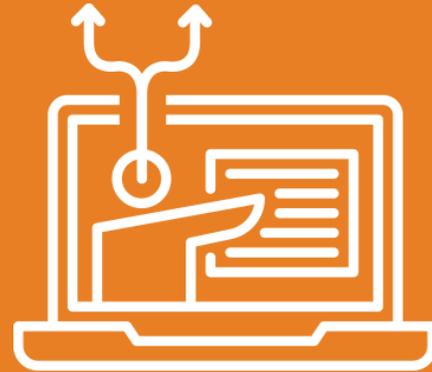
Teaching a Customer or Partner

Learning paths aren't limited to training employees. When you need to show customers how to use one of your products, a learning path is a great tool. If your product is something physical, you may want to develop a linear learning path that takes the customer from assembly to maintenance, while a nonlinear path is an excellent way to teach customers the many features of a software product. You can create the paths in your LMS, tailor them for various types of customers, and then automatically set up access for new customers as they're onboarded.

Professional Development

Finally, you can take advantage of the modular nature of learning paths by using them to help leaders at your organization **pursue professional development**. You might want to train them on how to better show appreciation at work, or how to keep their team engaged. Using an LMS, you can quickly assemble and assign the perfect path for whatever goal you have in mind.

Design Your Learning Paths with Ease



Learning paths are the best way to organize your courses, and the simplest way to create them is by using an LMS. An LMS lets you easily build a catalog of courses — from your own library and from quality third-party providers — and then link them together to create linear or nonlinear learning paths. Learners can then enroll in a learning path and the system will track their status as they progress.

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