



HOW SSP DELIVERS MEASURABLE ROI

In the second of four articles, Peter Gray outlines the learning solution at food travel experts SSP, and explains how they met multiple recruitment and training challenges.

In the October issue we saw how SSP's Academy Live platform powered by TWM's technology, has become an enabler to the business, allowing the company to create a truly innovative, online and user-led L&D resource.

Here, we look at how SSP has embraced the digital generation that is joining its workforce to deliver measurable ROI. With its stable of household-name global brands, the company needs to recruit thousands of new colleagues per year, to support its ever-expanding portfolio of food and beverage units. Recruitment on this scale is a big challenge. SSP has to attract, induct and develop the right people to maintain the highest levels of service and quality to millions of customers.

Within the UK, for example, the enormous rise in tuition fees attached to university places is undoubtedly making young people

think more carefully about their career options and what might be their best way forward. This thinking is transitioning itself into young and ambitious members of the entry level workforce seeing an advantageous trade-off between rejecting university and building a career which includes the development of workplace skills, knowledge and behaviours. Seen as being the more desirable route, the consequence is that more young people are entering the job market sooner.

At the other end of the job market an ageing labour force is having its effect on young entrants to the labour market as well. The service industry clearly offers opportunities to young entrant. But achieving the balance between qualifications on entry and expectations for career progression is not easy. Motivating a potentially over-qualified workforce is just

one of the challenges faced by SSP's L&D team.

As the digital generation join the SSP workforce the L&D team has responded by incorporating more immersive, playful, collaborative learning. Incoming digital native learners are replacing outgoing baby boomers or traditionalists.

Recognition of the digital capability of new and young members of the SSP workforce has been a key driver in developing SSP Academy Live. In addition, the more recent SSP Academy Lite – a specific new 'wrapper' around the main online Academy, displays and delivers content specifically for the pre-joiner population. Addressing the learning needs of joiners before they formally join the company is proving hugely successful and represents the first step on their online career journey within the organisation.

All food and beverage service operators have to comply with complex and lengthy Food Safety Regulations and compliance statutory issues. Any new joiner to the SSP team, in any of its outlets, needs to rapidly ascend the scale of food handling competence and gain regulatory sign-off as quickly as possible. SSP Academy Lite has proved to be a major enabler in this arena, providing an online environment in which pre-joiners can immediately begin the process of understanding digital learning at the outset of their career. For the digital generation this is a natural process, and one that rewards them with a small monetary payment in recognition of their time and effort. This comes into effect if the training is completed prior to the more formal and personal Day 1 Induction 'Now Boarding'.

DIGITAL ETHOS, BLENDED APPROACH

SSP's group Learning and Development Manager Daniel Mills takes up the story: "We know that the earlier we can introduce new members of our workforce to the concept of online blended learning and career progression – the quicker they will begin to see SSP for precisely what it is – a global player with massive career opportunities that are open to those who want to develop their skills within the organisation. A favourite expression I often use is 'why work for one brand, when you can work for them all!'

"We already know with Discovery, our award winning management development programme, that we can and do appoint

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more managers than ever before from within the organisation. This makes for a very clear and compelling argument for new joiners who wish to succeed in this area when they join us as new colleagues. Embracing their digital capability and incorporating this into a more formal personal development plan and career path provides the opportunity to present real clarity about what is possible in their future."

Embracing the digital era has, for SSP, been about more than simply providing digitised learning content within a digital environment. A 'digital ethos' simply recognises that digital solutions should enable – not replace – good (blended) learning and development solutions. Digitising content meets the needs of a new generation but also keeps things up to date and cuts costs. Simply using the online environment for on-boarding materials required for new starters has saved the company approaching £30,000 per year.

Keeping recruitment costs down by growing talent internally is one of many reasons why the learning and development professional should expand their offering to appeal to the younger workforce. With record youth unemployment there's no shortage of applicants to join SSP, but inspiring and motivating the new joiner to stay with a particular organisation is a greater challenge. SSP share the bigger picture with their new joiners, the career paths available are visible, attainable and underpinned by development programmes that are exciting, thus facilitating the thirst of youth to connect, collaborate and share.

TWM's Pathway Builder has provided a framework to develop and display content specifically aligned to Coventry University's syllabus, increasing internal fill rate from 7% to 56%; evidence that although university isn't necessarily the first port of call for all ambitious school leavers – gaining a degree qualification from within the workplace is a concept that's gaining momentum.

WORKPLACE CONNECTIVITY: THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Although the excitement surrounding digital learners and mobile technology is very real, and with plenty of justification, SSP are not alone in that they have very real restrictions when it comes to mobile technology enablement. Let's not forget, the digital

generation answers questions simply by 'Googling'. Any restrictions with the implementation of mobile technology are an issue. The vast majority of SSP people have no need for a mobile phone to complete their daily workload.

The shift to technology from desktop to laptop or tablet provides the platform whereby shared knowledge is power. One type and size is very rarely ever suitable for all. SSP researched the potential use of tablets for a multitude of differing deployments, but regardless of what might have worked technologically, the company remains faced with the biggest challenge being suitable connectivity (paid or free Wi-Fi) within the work environments. Ultimately, practical problems and the costs associated with them can still prove preventative when deploying learning technology.

We know that that the digital generation is much more responsive to social networking and can be L&D's greatest advocates by tagging content that's worth sharing and making comments to add further value and context to the messages being conveyed. We now operate in an environment where if something's not working, you'll soon know about it. Equally, by using learning technology intelligently, SSP has underpinned one of the oldest teaching mantras: 'A picture is worth a thousand words'. This is just as relevant today as it has always been.

By delivering eLearning via TWM's platform, SSP has achieved a significant reduction in the need for in-house classroom training events. This move, away from face to face delivery into the arena of blended learning, has bought with it a £128,000 saving in time and travel costs incurred by delegates and costs charged by in house trainers associated with the classroom approach.

NOT ONLY THE BUDGET

But the digital dividend for SSP has not been just about the budget lines. It's also been about a philosophical approach adopted towards the company's new digital learners as well. Daniel Mills: "Harness the desire to create and share. As people are finding their place in the corporate world and making that difficult transition from education to the workplace, give them a voice."

Today, this means that the new generation



embrace social media often with a textual and language approach that worries traditional L&D thinking. In other words, is the way people communicate, helping or hindering L&D's cause? Are we missing the 'physical interaction' of the learning past in favour of the electronic trail? We are where we are.

The new generation can convey what they want to say in 140 characters or less. Our role in delivering learning to sustain whatever is needed within the organisation is to keep it brief, precise, punchy and easy to remember. Making it personal along the way will help too.

SSP as a business is highly reflective of on-the-job learning. It is very fair to say "No prior knowledge needed" on joining – but within a matter of days, to be effective, new joiners need to be able to say to themselves: "Considerable knowledge gained". This is happening because of the highly focused deployment of learning technology online collaboration rooms, virtual mentoring schemes, online ideas markets and WebEx learning lunches and forums. Technology is the enabler.

Informal learning in the workplace makes

Fast facts

- SSP employs 30,000 people and operates over 2,100 food and beverage units in travel locations worldwide
- Brands include Starbucks, Caffé Ritazza, Burger King, M&S Simply Food, Millie's Cookies, O'Leary's, and Caviar House & Prunier
- Academy Live is a user-led blended online environment offering a breadth of material for people to empower themselves and control their own L&D pathway
- Pathway Builder is a framework aligned to Coventry University's syllabus, increasing internal fill rate from 7% to 56%. Gaining a degree from within the workplace is gaining momentum
- Approaching £30,000 per year has been saved on on-boarding resources for new starters
- The move away from face-to-face delivery has resulted in a £128,000 saving in time and travel costs incurred by delegates, trainers etc
- Learning solutions provider is The Working Manager (TWM)

up nearly three-quarters of workplace learning according to the 70:20:10 framework. We know that the new generation brings with it a natural instinct to absorb learning from a variety of sources and mediums. L&D can harness this appetite to enrich its learning programmes and create wider appeal and adoption.

In Part Three: Find out more about the tools and strategies that SSP has adopted to successfully facilitate the 70:20:10 model.

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