



The Strategy Behind Content Reuse

Episode #16

with Joanne Bentley and Graham Edmondson

Joanne Bentley: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Leaders in Learning Design Podcast by Blue Consulting & Resourcing the place to get up to the minute information for cutting edge learning design. So today we're going to be talking about the issue of content reuse, as we think about content strategists, and the role that they play within the learning organization, trying to figure out how to optimize great learning resources.

I'm going to dig in a little deeper and figure out how this applies to you as an instructional designer.

Graham Edmondson: [00:00:38] Joanne, you've already used a couple of phrases there, you know, the whole idea of content reuse, content strategists. You're going to have to explain a little bit about what you mean by this idea of content reuse.

We were talking about content curation, but this is very specific and a bit different.

Joanne Bentley: [00:00:56] It is. Content reuse is really a tactical component of content strategy. And it's the place where you figure out how to use and develop a single piece of content for use in multiple places -- usually within your organization. The larger the learning organization, the more return on investment you're going to see. The more cost savings you're going to see with the reduction in wasted effort for content development.

And you're also going to find some really interesting levers to pull for improving your ability for consistent messaging across the enterprise.

Graham Edmondson: [00:01:38] So give me some examples of that. I'm not sure how that would look in practice. Reusing something in what kind of way, Joanne?

Joanne Bentley: [00:01:47] So, its cleanest definition, content reuse is any learning object that is used in it's an unaltered, original format.

That content is then used in a variety of ways in classes and study groups and different LMS courses. It might be included as a part of a communication. A video, for example: a clip that's just a minute or two long might be reused in a variety of different ways when you're developing it in its original instance.

You were almost planning for those different kinds of uses. So, your original intent might be to use it in course A.

- But it could also be sent out as a part of a communication to wet people's appetite to want to take the course.
- It might also be sent out as a follow-up piece after the course is over, to remind them of key learning points.

- It might be something that could be leveraged in another course to remind them of fundamental concepts before they move on.
- It might be used in some other completely unanticipated way, but it's essentially used in its entirety. It's not broken into something more granular.

Now there are other versions of reuse with new remix. You take parts of that original piece, and you reuse it. So maybe it's not a video this time. Maybe it's a lesson on a particular topic, but I developed it for a new hire and now it might be of use to folks on the floor. Well, all of the new hire verbiage has got to come out and you use current "as is" language when you're rolling out to the floor, so, you'd make some modifications in your instructions.

You'd make modifications in the way that you refer to your team members, perhaps. But there you're remixing as you're reusing, does that make sense?

Graham Edmondson: [00:03:58] It makes me think of a couple of things, because what you're talking about, maybe having to do with the customization.

If it's used for one purpose for a new hire program, it may be used itself, it may be used in another place, but you would change some of the content around ...it's a bit back to that idea of wrappers, isn't it, that we talked about last week. Where the objects, the generic object, if I can call it that... sits as it was somewhere else, but you can put stuff around it that make it relevant to the different situations?

So, it's more than just cutting and pasting it and lifting it and repurposing it.

Joanne Bentley: [00:04:44] It really is. And when you plan for reuse in the way that you develop, your instructions are separate from the actual activity or the interaction that you're building. So that those instructions can be flipped out for a different use group.

It allows for really easy reuse. Historically folks have gotten a little overwhelmed. They get super excited at first. Oh, we're going to reuse everything! We're going to reduce our costs by half, and they get really overenthusiastic and THEN they get overwhelmed. Because they didn't design their original learning piece to be broken apart and wrapped in a new way.

They couldn't imagine how else it might be used. And they were just focused on their original creation. And without envisioning how else it might be used, they embedded the instructions into the actual object itself, and now they can't break it apart and it's not as useful. And they find themselves recreating things [because it's easier].

Graham Edmondson: [00:05:50] So being aware of the concepts of it being potentially a reusable; well, can I use the phrase reusable learning object because we used to use that phrase a good while ago when we were talking about WBT didn't mean that, that was the kind of buzzword for a while. The idea that things would be reusable learning objects, but if you're going to have that kind of strategy, you design those things in such a way that anything that will be unique to a particular situation is excluded from the object itself from the reusable piece.

Is that right?

Joanne Bentley: [00:06:26] Yes. And you need metadata tags to be able to find it in a large learning repository. Can I Google or can I search that item and get usable returns?

Graham Edmondson: [00:06:39] Because if you don't and I think we've seen examples of this, something that's been reused in a client, you actually lose control of where it is. And if something needs to be changed, knowing where it's gone to and where it's been reused, if you haven't got a way to track that. You're in a world of hurt because there's going to be inconsistency is out there. Yeah. Is that a risk?

Joanne Bentley: [00:07:08] Oh, absolutely. And most of our listeners will be familiar with a Learning Management System where full courses live.

But perhaps you've heard the phrase, a Content Management System used interchangeably, and they're not necessarily the same thing. So, Content Management Systems are intended to have a more granular archived version of those courses. And you know, where that learning object or pieces or lessons, or even as granular as images.

Where is this image used? Now in a Content Management System, a true intelligent Content Management System, it says this image that my organization purchased off of say Shutterstock is used in 15 different courses. So, if you're able to track that single use of an image and say, well, we use it predominantly in this area of the business, but we're actually finding some really other interesting uses for it.

Or maybe that image is overused, and we want to get rid of it or replace it with something that's more current. You're able to find all of those instances and make those changes. And a really easy and relatively quick way.

However, most Learning Management Systems are just a collection of courses that you search to say, you know, is this course here? Is it still fit for purpose? Yes/No. Is it going to be delivered again? I mean, those kinds of sort of low-level interactions at a course level, are quite different than what we're talking about with content creation, reuse, remixing, redistributing, and retaining that content in a [true] Content Management System.

Graham Edmondson: [00:09:08] If we go down this path and we adopt this kind of strategy, what's the obvious benefits from it? What is the big payback?

Joanne Bentley: [00:09:20] So the big payback is in the reduction in development time and the efficiencies and standardization of messaging within the organization. So not too long ago I developed a quality course, and we were teaching quality folks how to do their role.

That course was then repurposed. Probably about 80 or 90% of it was then reused for a new hire version of that quality course. What did it mean to be delivering quality materials within that new audience? It got a little bit of recognition because they had budgeted about 40 hours for that new content to be developed.

And it was essentially finished within a day. So, we'd reduced the amount of development time and they began to get excited about the efficiencies. Wow, we developed so many courses, instead of treating them all as separate entities, let's try and figure out where we

are reusing that content." Well, then we created a similar version of that same course for the floor and then another version for a different role with similar quality requirements.

And before I knew it, my original course, I touched three versions of it. Now there were ten. Well, they were very excited that those efficiencies until they had to make changes.

Graham Edmondson: [00:10:47] So I can see the real benefit. I think people would be genuinely enthusiastic for those obvious reasons. But does it not also go hand in hand with the risk of there being quite a lot of duplicated stuff?

And is it almost like a little bit repetitive or is that not a possible downside to this whole idea of keep we using or something?

Joanne Bentley: [00:11:14] It is a risk, but it's quite minor because when you take the content and you have so much overlap by role to develop completely separate versions of it. They already exist in duplication and, you know, a manager in one silo, the organization had a very similar PowerPoint that they were using in another silo of the organization.

So, the duplication already existed when it filters through into instructional developers and they're putting together those courses for the LMS, especially within the last 18 months where we just everything's gone online. The duplications are becoming more visible.

Graham Edmondson: [00:12:01] So I suppose when you think about it, because it's different learner populations that it's being reused for, it isn't duplication in the sense that it's being reused with the same audience, it's the different audience.

That means that it's not repetitive and not duplication it's about efficiency. Is that right?

Now you mentioned that phrase learning strategist earlier, and I've got to be really honest. I haven't met an awful lot of those. I mean, I know the term, but tell us a little bit about that role and how that role or how important that role could be in this kind of situation.

Joanne Bentley: [00:12:46] Sure. So, Ann Rockley the author of Managing Enterprise Content kind of built on the work that David Wiley started when he was looking at the open education movement. He took what we were doing in education and said, we've got to be more efficient. And Ann said, well, how do we figure out how to do this?

And intelligent content is content that structurally rich, semantically categorized, and therefore automatically discoverable, re-usable, reconfigurable, and adaptable.

And we kind of struggled as content management folks saying, well, what does that mean? Where's the strategy part that's going to be a small lever that gives us that really big lift. And they're driving towards return on investment for the learning organization itself.

And when you can reuse, reconfigure and adapt your own internal content, then you have really significant lift. The problem came was that we didn't have large content repositories inside any organization, unless you were moving into say government or department of defense. Then we had enough content that it made sense.

Now, fast forward, 10 years from Ann's work. And now we have things like LinkedIn Learning and the soft skill content that's in LinkedIn Learning is actually quite good. Some of it's phenomenal. And there's no reason that instructional designers should be creating exhaustive courses, doing all that research, creating new ways to, to say those same concepts.

Some of them are by experts in their field. Poor/average instructional designers aren't going to come up with a better way of saying it. But they can reuse that content, especially if it's wrapped inside their organizational context. So, if an organization had a LinkedIn Learning license enterprise wide, they have those internal links and you would put that link inside your course.

So you'd create context for this role, and then you'd create maybe some activities that were customized and I've even seen it used where they say, "oh gosh, this course on time management, for example, is fabulous, but you don't have six hours to spend on time management, go to lesson one and do three, four, and five of the modules there. And then go to lesson six and do eight, nine, and 10", or whatever that might be because that's what applies to your role. And I can wrap that in my context and push it out. And here is 30 minutes of training on time management; roles specific, organizational specific. And all I had to do was **create context**.

Cause I think we get a bit nervous if we think we've got to just use ALL off the shelf material.

Graham Edmondson: [00:15:58] That's interesting because the way that you talk about it, that's where content reuse and content curation come together. But I think the real thing for the instruction designer here is that this in terms of content reuse can include things that they themselves are going to design and design consciously with the intent that they can be re-used and being aware of that.

That drives the way that you create something that's potentially reusable. You're leaving all that context to be in what we call the wrapper. I think that's a really interesting idea and I'm sure a lot of people as instructional designers will be seeing the benefit and the opportunity of efficiency.

Just being able to create a learning object one time and through wrappers reuse it in multitude of different places, but to make that a really effective and efficient kind of way to go about it. I like that idea, Joanne.

Joanne Bentley: [00:17:06] I think it's really powerful. And I think we've been cautious to go in that direction because it felt a bit like plagiarism.

So, am I stealing this? Am I doing something I'm not supposed to? And we're not advocating for that at all. And when you use the concept of wrapper and linking out to content that already exists, it actually helps you in lots of ways that keeps that content current. So, if the original piece is updated, your wrapper still stays intact and is leveraging those updated materials as well.

So, think about expanding what you think of when you think of reuse. We're good at recycling today, when it comes to our glass and paper products. We need to broaden our concept of what it means to reuse content as instructional designers, we have to get more effective and efficient in that process because not everything requires completely new creation!

We've just got to flex in this new reuse space.

Graham Edmondson: [00:18:12] I love how you link that back to recycling. That's a really nice connection to make. So how would people find out even more about this Joanne?

Joanne Bentley: [00:18:21] Well, we're going to be doing a series of blogs and we're going to continue this conversation in the podcast. So, shoot us your questions.

We'll put our emails in the transcript and we'll pop them in the description of this podcast. Send us your questions about content reuse, and we will dig in and add our expertise because we want you to have the resources that you need!

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