Microlearning: when less is more

How the bite-sized format can revolutionize your training practices and support your enterprise's digital transformation
FOREWORD

This white paper is written for Human Resources and Training departments, who are now central to the digital transformation of their organizations.

Challenged by the rapid developments in technology and the dramatic change in employees’ habits and behaviors, HR and training managers must understand that they play a critical role in guiding and supporting their staff through the sociotechnological revolution facing their companies.

Clearly, the key to that is training. But what kind of training?

Corporate MOOCs, e-learning solutions... the "digitalization" of training is here to stay. But how this new "Connected Learner" behaves has yet to be fully understood - the one who wants to learn while he surfs online, who wants to find immediate answers to a Google search, who wants to have access to software and social networks on his PC, smartphone, and tablet... all without spending hours doing it!

Vodeclic is the product of an immense venture resulting in more than 25,000 hours of at-home IT training from Famiclic, a company previously created by one of its founders, Xavier Sillon. Drawing from its deep understanding about the psychology of users, their technological behavior patterns, and more fundamentally, their needs, Vodeclic developed its digital learning solution using an inherent Microlearning approach, and explains in this white paper how Microlearning is becoming one of the major drivers of employee performance.

CONTENTS

- Who are the "Connected Learners" of the 21st Century? 3
- What is Microlearning? 4
- What are the benefits of Microlearning? 5
- New pace, format, medium... Microlearning has become an inevitable mainstay 7
WHO ARE THE "CONNECTED LEARNERS" OF THE 21ST CENTURY?

Companies aren’t the only ones going through a digital transformation – the whole world is too! That’s a well-known fact.

In its 2014 “Measuring the Information Society Report”\(^1\), the ITU (International Telecommunications Union) gives some very telling figures. There are 3 billion Internet users across the globe today, along with 6.9 billion mobile phone subscriptions and 2 billion active users of social networks. Not surprisingly, Facebook boasts the most number of users, at 1.2 billion.

There’s no escaping this digital revolution and the consequences it brings in changing people’s habits and behaviors. The fact that information is instantaneous and global, that there are many different ways of getting in touch and collaborating with others, that millions of services are available online to book a train ticket, buy a perfume, or play an online game, it’s clear that the way we lead both our professional and personal lives (whose boundaries are already becoming blurred) has drastically changed.

There are numerous examples of how our behaviors have been reshaped, in many different areas: MOOCs emerging in the field of education, carpooling with Blablacar, online “music for everyone” with Spotify, finding accommodations in people’s homes with Airbnb...

To illustrate our point, Facebook recently announced its decision to enter the Enterprise Social Network market to compete with services such as LinkedIn and Yammer. This announcement underscores the extent to which the digital world is converging in both our work and private lives.

So many of the concepts that were merely talked about yesterday – Generation Y, BYOD, the Cloud – are the realities we must all face today. And businesses are not exempt. To improve their ability to innovate and be globally competitive, companies need to redefine their growth strategy by making digital technology a central focus of their business processes, and to harness it to better serve its customers and, more importantly, its employees.

According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), new millennium learners are “native speakers of the digital language”\(^2\). These new “Connected Learners” are at the very center of these changes, finding new ways to work and how to work faster, whenever and wherever they choose.

These new technologies are also affecting Connected Learners by further accelerating the pace of life and work, and changing their behaviors. In its November 2014 research bulletin\(^3\), Bersin by Deloitte describes the “Modern Learner” as empowered, distracted, impatient, overwhelmed, collaborative, and of course, untethered. We need to consider the consequences this has on their behavior: they have less time to get work done, less time to learn, diminished ability to concentrate, short-lived attention span...

As you’ve now come to understand, training has to accommodate these new behaviors. It’s no longer an option to make digital technology a key focus of training – it’s a must. Digital learning must also adapt to the new expectations of Connected Learners by being available just-in-time, flexible (when I want, where I want, what I want), easy to access (on my PC, tablet, or smartphone), and by offering training in bite-sized chunks!
Microlearning is an online training methodology that uses a performance-based educational approach incorporating short (5 minutes at most), content-rich videos, with text, pictures and audio. This approach is very much in line with overburdened learners who don’t have much time to devote to training. Short lessons allow them to work and learn at the same time by making the most of the learner’s ability to concentrate. It's much easier to carve out 5 minutes in one’s work schedule than a full hour!

With content developed using a step-by-step, recursive, and holistic approach, these modular learning units aim to provide training that fits into the realities of everyday work life. Because lessons are straight-to-the-point, they’re ideal for people who want to learn, but aren’t willing to dedicate too much time.

Even if the vast majority of HR and Training Managers have already developed digital training solutions for their employees, they are still sometimes quite confused and wonder whether short formats are even appropriate, as though the inherent quality of training is diminished by how brief the lessons are, as though they were “low-quality products”.

And yet, Microlearning is much more than just a short lesson format. It also incorporates other important aspects that result in increased productivity:

- **ONLINE** from a PC, tablet, or smartphone: learners have instant access, unlike the classroom format, in which they waste time just getting there.

- **SELF-CONTAINED**: each module is completely independent, even though it may be part of a larger learning objective. An individual unit can be accessed directly, without having to go through the previous X number of modules, which empowers the learner and gives him a feeling of freedom. To give an analogy, you can open any page in a dictionary to understand the definition of a word, but you can’t start reading a novel on page 200!

- **GRANULAR**: each unit presents one skill element, making sure it gets straight to the point. Learners can then organize and customize their training according to their own individual needs.

- **IN VIDEO**: video is the most effective medium for communicating information in a short period of time. It is extremely effective for performance-based training, since a picture is worth a thousand words, and a picture with audio is even more so!

- **CONCENTRATED**: Microlearning modules only have to convey the most essential information about a very specific topic. There’s no room for an introduction, conclusion, and all the other fluff. It’s unnecessary and counterproductive.

- **UP-TO-DATE**: Short lesson formats are easy to update. Learners are sure to have the most current training modules, unlike content presented in classrooms that quickly becomes obsolete.

As you’ve now come to understand, Microlearning is about all of these aspects, which is why this concept-turned-reality is an effective tool for persuading Connected Learners to train themselves.
What are the benefits of Microlearning?

Microlearning is not only a major driver of employee performance, but is also a revolutionary tool for HR managers to provide more effective training.

For learners: absorb and remember specific skills in just a few minutes

Because Microlearning is essentially based on mini lessons, it is well suited to the work life of today’s Connected Learner. They can access bite-sized training content, searching on very narrow topics, whenever and wherever they want.

Learners can then spend relatively little effort, digest and store information easier – while only having to concentrate in a short time frame – and get exactly the information they need.

By offering extremely easy access via a web-based platform and integration within a corporate LMS or HRIS, Microlearning makes it easy for learners to get training on a daily basis, on their own time, and improve their digital skills in the use of office applications, social networks, or the online services they access as part of their job.

"As a Connected Learner, if I’m given the choice between reading a 2 page document and watching a 5 minute video, I’ll choose the video!"
For HR and Training Managers: guaranteed training ROI, in both qualitative and quantitative terms

According to a Harvard Business Review Analytic Services report, business agility is the main driver for adopting Cloud Computing (Business Agility in the Cloud - 2014) [4].

HR and Training Managers are grappling with the problem of not being able to measure neither the amount of time wasted nor the costs associated with their employees’ lack of digital skills. By opting for a Microlearning solution, they can maximize their training objectives and present employees with new learning opportunities in order to:

- **INCREASE EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION** by using short video clips that don’t interfere (or interfere very little) with their day-to-day work. It all becomes so easy for users. They can quickly make training a natural part of their regular duties, thereby increasing a digital learning solution’s rate of adoption.

- **GATHER ACCURATE AND POWERFUL METRICS** by closely monitoring how learners are using the training solution. Statistical tools make it possible to track and assess the progress of employees’ digital skills on a case-by-case or on an overall basis. Learners can then be given more personalized, and therefore more effective, support.

- **MAKE THE MOST OF TRAINING TIME** by training employees faster and in a way that is catered to their needs, without being hampered by the logistics or costs associated with instructor-led training. Microlearning also ensures learners continuously develop their skills, in a relatively flexible unit of time, while automatically reducing the cost per hour for training.

- **CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN EVERYONE’S DIGITAL SKILLS** with modules that can be updated quickly, ensuring that employees are accessing modules that are always up to date and maintaining their skills over time.

- **OFFER INDIVIDUALIZED TRAINING PROGRAMS**: the granularity of Microlearning makes it possible to design programs tailored to each learner, and provide specialized treatment that is in line with their individual needs.

- **EMPower EMPLOYEES TO Be SELF-Sufficient** by giving them immediate answers to questions at any point in time while using a given application, without needing to ask a colleague for help or call the company’s IT help desk.

- **MAKE ACCESS TO TRAINING FASTER**: integrating a training solution within the company’s technology ecosystem (LMS, HRIS) makes perfect sense with the Microlearning approach. What is really the point in saving a few seconds to access a 2-hour online training course?
In today’s world, organizations have had to deal with the rapid rate of technological change. At the same time, it is even more critical, in these difficult economic times, for companies to do everything they can to maximize productivity. One way is to enhance their employees’ digital skills.

**NEW PACE, FORMAT, MEDIUM... MICROLEARNING HAS BECOME AN INEVITABLE MAINSTAY**

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**A company’s digital transformation depends on the digital transformation of HR**

In light of this, HR and Training Managers no longer have a choice. They have to lead by example and show that they themselves are committed to embracing digital technology.

“The medium is the message”\(^{(5)}\), in other words, the nature of the media (the vehicle used to convey a message) is more important than the actual meaning or content of the message.

Marshall McLuhan, Media philosopher – 1964

**LET’S RECAP...**

- Technology has broken down the boundaries between work and personal life and has given rise to new behaviors, creating a sense that things are moving at a much faster pace.

- Technology has also broken down geographical boundaries, providing access to information and services from anywhere in the world.

- Employees today are overwhelmed, impatient, and distracted. So it’s hard to make them want to learn, since that is time-consuming.

- The digital transformation of jobs is irreversible and opens the door to innovation. It also makes it possible to significantly reduce an entire host of costs.

HR and Training Managers have everything to gain from playing the Microlearning card. By taking this conceptual approach, they can become the driving force in their company’s digital transformation and more effectively make training a part of everyday life in order to:

- Help all employees have access to training.
- Allow employees to work and learn at the same time.
- Meet the real needs of learners.
- Make training more effective.
APPENDIX : REFERENCES


Vodeclic is an enterprise learning solution for desktop and collaborative skills.

With over 25,000 how-to videos in six languages (English, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Mandarin Chinese) – and 1,000 new additions each month – we are proud to provide an online training solution designed to help users enhance their digital, internet and collaborative skills. The solution features exclusive courses and learning tools for all users, as well as business analytics and APIs for enterprise customers, from SMB to Fortune 500.

With a 1,568% growth in 5 years, Vodeclic was named one of the most successful new technology companies in 2014, ranked 22nd in France in the Deloitte Technology Fast 50 and 105th in the Technology Fast 500 EMEA.

Vodeclic is headquartered in France, with an office in NYC, United States.