Learning content has never been easier to create.

It is true that creating learning content comes with its own sets of challenges, but the plethora of tools available today have made authoring somewhat easier. What is not getting easier, however, is information overload for the learner.

Organizations with the ability to easily create content on the fly means that new content is often created for every situation. Now, learners have to sift through mountains of content to get the information they need. A recent report showed that 24 percent of learning leaders said “content overload” was a huge problem in their organizations, and 38 percent more said that knowledge transfer and retention of content are their biggest challenges.

John Sweller, an Australian educational psychologist that is known for formulating an influential theory of cognitive load, says there are three types of cognitive load: intrinsic, extraneous, and germane, that together add up to total cognitive load.

Sweller states that there is a need to develop instructional design principles based on our knowledge of brain and memory. So in essence, these three types of cognitive load must be less than the current working memory capacity of the learner.

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Your goal is to get your strategic content into one system rather than being spread out across multiple content repositories, authoring tools and governance policies. Without this baseline reconciliation of all of your current resources, you’ll never be able to truly control your learning content. You have to know exactly what you’re working with. This is how you can reduce time and money spent on duplication of content and redundant efforts.

**ACTIVITY:**

**TAKE THE “HOW TO LOGIN” CHALLENGE**

1. Identify a critical business system for your organization. (i.e. CRM system)
2. Take a quick inventory of training and performance support materials developed in your organization around processes that involve usage of this system.
3. Now count how many variants of “How to Login” there are in all of these training materials.
4. Now multiply that number by two because chances are you only found half of the instances that exist.
5. If you translate your learning content, now multiply that number by the number of languages.

This is an illustration of redundant content. So far, the record number of “How to Login” instances recorded to date is 252.
This may seem counterintuitive, but it’s a necessary step. There might be content that you wrote four years ago that was really great back then, but it might be very outdated now. If you’re able, look at the usage statistics of your learning content and you’ll see something interesting: Some pieces of content get accessed constantly while other pieces rarely, if ever, get viewed.

You can easily weed through all this unused, underperforming content with a quick look at access stats. But – and this is important – don’t delete it yet. Just create an archive for your older, unused content.
STEP THREE

UPDATE THE MOST-USED CONTENT FIRST, THEN REINTRODUCE AND REUSE

Take the top pieces of content that are actually used in your organization and make sure they’re up-to-date. Then you can optimize your content by chunking it up into smaller, reusable, easy to consume pieces. In the study Nine Ways to Reduce Cognitive Load in Multimedia Learning, they refer to this as a segmentation effect:

STUDENTS UNDERSTAND A MULTIMEDIA EXPLANATION BETTER WHEN IT IS PRESENTED IN LEARNER-CONTROLLED SEGMENTS RATHER THAN AS A CONTINUOUS PRESENTATION.
Once your streamlined content is updated and you’re starting to bring in new pieces of content, it’s time to focus on consistent tagging and organization. This step at first can be overwhelming. But it is critical to the whole process as none of this work you already have done matters if learners still can’t find the content they need quickly. Remember, the average employee spends only about 32 hours on formal learning per year, although that does not include the 80% of learning that happens informally. If you apply the 70-20-10 rule here, learners spend about 280 hours a year on informal learning. Still, you don’t want your learners wasting any time finding the right content.

Starting with a smaller library can help you figure out organization and tagging schemes more easily. Plus, it should be easier to test search functionality so you can make finding your content as important as creating it. The other thing is that search engines like Xyleme’s Content Delivery Service (CDS) don’t just index the tags (meta-data), they also index the structure and the text inside the documents. This is another reason to consider getting all of your learning content into one system so the search index is complete.
Content overload can also be a symptom of not having an optimized experience for a mobile or tablet device. If you don’t have it already, make your content accessible to the devices your learners use every day, so they have information where and when they need it.

Mobile workers now carry, on average, 3.47 mobile devices for work. The modern learner needs to be able to access learning content at the moment of need. But you can’t just simply take the content you developed for the desktop and assume that it will transfer to mobile without degradation. Things like PowerPoints, PDFs and large images just don’t necessarily work on mobile, so you will have to consider a mobile learning strategy.

READ THIS LIGHTPAPER FOR MORE ON MOBILE LEARNING. →
STEP SIX | ANALYZE AND REVISIT

You don’t want to go to all this effort without knowing what is working and what isn’t. You have to be able to see the granular details of how each content block is consumed and performing. Especially as you reintroduce content and focus on findability and availability, you should see those usage numbers start to change dramatically.

You should then be able to significantly reduce content clutter by axing materials that never get used, saving time and resources. And since your content is improved, it should help learners better solve their issues. Based on those reports, you should adjust as frequently as you and your learning organization can handle.

If these steps seem undoable, it might help to partner with someone who has the technology and the experience to help you solve your biggest learning content problems. Xyleme specializes in content management for learning and development organizations. With Xyleme, your organization can:

- Better know your content and manage it effectively
- Sort and prioritize content development
- Easily reuse content across multiple courses and programs
- Add deep content search capabilities anywhere your content appears
- Deliver content to any device, anywhere your learners are
- Analyze your learning content and help determine where you should focus next

"As I have onboarded instructional designers within the system, we have noticed an increase in the reuse of content and the system has generated opportunities for collaborative writing."

- Dan Schaeffer, Learning Designer Training and Development Center, Paychex
In short, we help you take control of your learning content strategy, helping your organization move beyond content overload headaches and on to success.

Want to learn more about the problem of content overload? View our lightpaper on this topic.