

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR COLLEGE

TDA 2016

Developing an institutional digital
strategy

Brad Beach – key points



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Key points

The TAFE product is about the student experience, not simply sharing content

What is a TAFE product? Most of us would agree that the 'product' is something far more than just the course content. Very few, if any, would say what makes our products high quality is the "great content," instead, we say, "your experience with us will be great or memorable." It's helpful for us to reflect on our own personal learning experiences and recall those 'light bulb' moments and consider what made these moments memorable. The answer to the question, "What made that light bulb moment wonderful?" is rarely because you were given the best designed textbook or handout or because of the physical room you were in. Instead, the answer is more likely because of what happened, what someone told you, what you experienced, the conversation that has stuck with you. Memories are made of conversations and experience, not content.

Does your e-learning strategic plan have the student experience at the center?

When we develop strategic plans with the face-to-face and/or traditional student in mind we tend to come up with documents/processes/policies which focus on the "student experience," or the "learner life cycle" etc. This is because we know, that in most cases it's not our content or our classrooms that make the difference for students, it's the way in which the teacher engages with them. Yet, when we develop e-learning strategies the main focus is usually the method in which we distribute content to the learners. Over and over we draw diagrams which have "content management systems or learning management systems" in the middle and somewhere to the side of the diagram is a list of tools for communicating with students. Instead of a plan constructed around the methods, strategies and practices our educators will use to engage learners in rich dialogue or to promote rich educational experiences.

Where should we be getting our inspiration for our digital strategy?

There is a need for TAFE institutes to look more broadly in order to gain an insight in how online technologies can and are being used to engage with people. This is something that we are generally reluctant to do. Just think about the lack of change in the design in lecture theatres and classrooms over the last 2,000 years. Other than having amplifiers and large monitors it might be possible that an educator from Plato's Academy would be able to recognize the existing workplace and practice of educators given the design hasn't significantly changed. Is there another profession where the workplace is recognizable to a worker from 2,000 years ago?

The future of learner engagement will not be found in another TAFE provider, it will be found elsewhere in the explosion of TV options, dating apps, the hashtag culture, podcasting network stations, gaming apps and other unlikely places. Our strategic digital plans should be informed by observing how people choose to live and consume their entertainment content.

Streaming Television

Netflix/Stan/Presto/iView are all examples of how people are demanding new ways for consuming content differently. However, this is not just about time shifting, it's about 'bingeing', on demand, the when I want it culture! This in turn is impacting on the nature and composition of the content. Bingeing does not require a cliffhanger at the end of each episode. This means the production can move away from the traditional format and experience for consumers.

How should we be designing learning experiences if our students are wanting to time shift and binge?

The hashtag #

Most television programs, radio programs and even government elections are utilizing hashtags. It's become a critical marketing tool and method for connecting with consumers. The ABC's Q&A program is a perfect example. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that TV programs didn't invent the notion of the "back channel". Instead, it was an organic development driven by consumers. Getting their content was not enough, people wanted to talk with others while consuming the content.

Our students are creating their own back channels about our Institution and their experience. Are we including this in our digital strategy?

The explosion of Podcasting

Kevin Smith, independent filmmaker and owner of Smodcast says that producers of content need to get people's attention by "sitting in the cracks of people's lives". Podcasting is an excellent example of how to do this, but it's not as simple as recording a live broadcast and loading up the recording. The BBC Graham Norton podcast is a redesigned radio recording with a customized beginning and end. In fact, the end of the Podcast encourages and rewards consumers of the Podcast version to make contact in a manner not open to the live radio audience. The "Stuff You Should Know" Podcast is another example of content that is not a recording of a live show. The Stuff You Should Know live shows are not recorded and uploaded. Instead the programs you get live are different to program you get from the download version.

How does your digital strategy maximize customization yet still be re-designed for purpose?

Geographic dating apps

Tinder is one of the newer dating apps that allows people to see others interested in “dating” who are geographically close to the user. People are swiping left and right and now even rating the people they have dated. It’s not uncommon to see TAFE institutes on Foursquare, Swarm etc. *How long will it take for students to want to rate our educators, their experience and us? Does our digital strategy enable learners to swipe right to find fellow students studying similar courses?*

Data is great – but a caring teacher is better.

Never before have we had the opportunity to track our students the way we can now. We can see which pages of content they looked at, how often, what time of day and the IP address of the computer they used to access the course. We can see which assessment questions they are answering with ease and which ones the group as a whole struggled with. We can monitor the number of students who withdraw when the first assessment task is due. We can review all of this data and draw helpful information from it. Yet identifying the student who is on the edge of dropping out, is best done by the teacher who has a relationship with the learner.

Our digital strategy should include exploiting the benefits of data collection and analysis but at its core it should focus on prompting meaningful relationships between educators and learners.