

Unexpurgated Raw first draft: "The Author's Cut"

Implementing E-Learning

by Jay Cross and Lance Dublin

Positioning

Segmentation dealt with identifying the people in our target markets. Positioning is about what's in their heads.

Jack Trout defines positioning as, "not what you do to the product, but what you do to the mind." In *The New Positioning - The Latest on the World's #1 Business Strategy*, he writes, "Business is a battle of ideas that play out in the mind of the prospect. (My position versus your position)."

Position? That's where the customer sees your product in the marketplace. BMW automobiles are sporty, the "Ultimate Driving Machine." Volvo is safe. Cadillacs are luxurious. Or were.

How do you want your eLearning to be perceived relative to alternative uses of your consumers' time? To other means of professional development? To other ways of learning to serve *their* customers better?

Mindful Learning

Is your eLearning authoritative or loose? Gospel or gossip? Definitive or open-ended?

Be forewarned. What we are about to tell you is quite controversial. The sources are *Mindfulness* and *Mindful Learning*, two books by Ellen Langer. Langer is a professor of psychology at Harvard and not everyone agrees with her theories.

In an experiment, professors at one college handed out a paper on urban sociology, telling students they would have a few minutes to read it, after which they would be tested on the material. Another group of students were

given the same paper and the same instructions, with one addition - they were told that the content of the paper might not reflect the real situation.

Which group do you think did better on the test?

The second group, those who were told to be skeptical, achieved higher scores. Why? Because uncertainty engages the mind.

When people mull something over, testing it for fit with what they already know, they are putting it in context, i.e. finding a place for it in their network of thoughts and memories. In contrast, when people are told “This is it,” they often simply stuff it into short-term memory; without a longer-term connection to what they already know, the idea quickly fades.

What could you do to help eLearners retain more? Rather than position an eLearning experience as absolute truth, you could tell them that the content is the latest thinking on the subject but that it’s subject to change. The introduction could ask the learners to look for places the material doesn’t apply. Or to suggest better approaches for getting it across.

Boeing prototyped a knowledge management system by interviewing mechanics on the shop floor. This was rough: handheld amateur videocams, factory background noises, and choppy editing. In early tests, the “Funniest Home Videos” versions proved very popular. The gritty, jiggling images conveyed that this was person-to-person. This was not hype; it was the real thing. Investing in expensive studio productions instead of ad-hoc, low-tech guerilla video can backfire. Learners need questions, not answers.

Where do you want to eat?

Twenty years ago when we talked about learner-controlled instruction, it was often a euphemism for pamphlet. The idea was that you could read it or not, at whatever speed you were comfortable with. Now learner-control connotes that the learner can choose her own path. Course? We don’t need no stinking courses!

Courses are an expensive, overly rich, formal dinner compared to the relaxed buffet that lets you pick and choose. Learning is food for thought.

Training Diner 1980

- Nothing à la carte - all meals take at least 50 minutes
- Limited menu - chef only cooks basic skills
- Nothing is prepared to order
- Open only at meal times
- No self service - the waiter delivers the meal when it's ready
- No take-out - learn in the classroom, not on the job
- Unneeded fat - e.g. travel, rehash what's known, overkill
- No substitutions -you eat what everyone else eats
- No eating between meals - learn only in class
- Eat your peas - because you should, not because you want to
- Wine choice is "red" or "white" of unknown origin
- Menu is "conventional" - and therefore out of step with the times
- Frozen ingredients - for convenience of the kitchen

eLearning Bistro 2002

- Smorgasbord - choose what you want
- Stay as long (or little) as you like
- Broad selection -- food for everyone's tastes
- Chef also prepares dishes to order
- Salad bar, desserts, and other items are self-service
- Eat at the table, at your desk, at home, while commuting
- Eat when you're hungry, open 24/7, have a snack
- Attractive, wholesome, fresh ingredients draw you in
- Menu is experimental, seasonal, accommodating
- Less fat/more fuel - more signal/less noise
- Waiter can describe six boutique chardonnays for you

Where would you rather eat?

Imagine your eLearning Delivery System is a Restaurant

What does it look like? How's the food? What do the restaurant guides say about it? How does Zagat rate it for décor and service?

Aspect Learning Center, a Great eLearning Bistro

Kara Underwood's team at the Learning Center at Aspect Communications lives and breathes the bistro philosophy. When she arrived in May 2000, sales training at Aspect Communications was three weeks of death by PowerPoint in one room, one size fits all. Her mandate was to reduce time-to-productivity by 10%. Her team created a blended, holistic, mentored program that cut time-to-productivity an astounding 37% while also cutting costs in half and chopping time out of the field by 60%!

By relegating product, tools, and process knowledge and technical training to "e," Aspect trimmed a 15-day experience to 4 1/2 days of largely interactive application practice.

New hires in sales at Aspect Communications are assigned a seasoned mentor who observes their behavior and guides their development. The new hire receives checklists of development steps for the first 30, 60, and 90 days. An item might be a unit of training or a joint sales call. An LMS tracks accomplishments by individual and signoff by the mentor.

Aspect Communications is shifting its corporate direction from hardware to software, necessitating training for the sales force, channel partners, and customers. Rather than reinvent the wheel (and burn out subject matter experts), Aspect leveraged subject matter expertise and project management time by implementing a unified e-Learning curriculum with multiple versions. The in-house sales force receives the comprehensive product-training curriculum; channel partners get the same, minus competitive information; customers receive an e-Learning overview followed by the technical instructor lead curriculum.

Location, location, location

Position is all about place. In fact, that’s what the dictionary tells us *position* means.ⁱ

Position

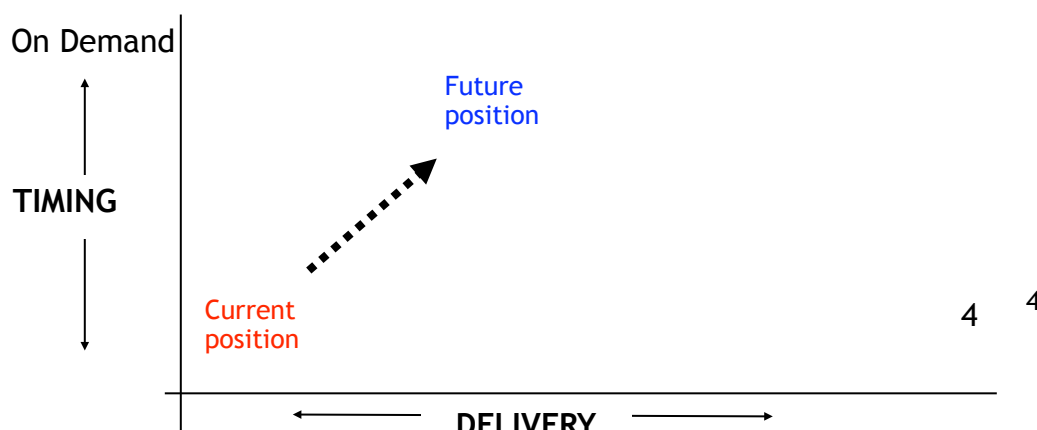
SYLLABICATION: po-si-tion

PRONUNCIATION:

NOUN: 1. A place or location. **2a.** The right or appropriate place: *The bands are in position for the parade’s start.* **b.** A strategic area occupied by members of a force: *The troops took up positions along the river.* **3a.** The way in which something is placed: *the position of the clock’s hands.* **b.** The arrangement of body parts; posture: *a standing position.* **4.** An advantageous place or location: *jockeys maneuvering for position.* **5.** A situation as it relates to the surrounding circumstances: *in a position to bargain.* **6.** A point of view or attitude on a certain question: *the mayor’s position on taxes.* **7.** Social standing or status; rank. **8.** A post of employment; a job.

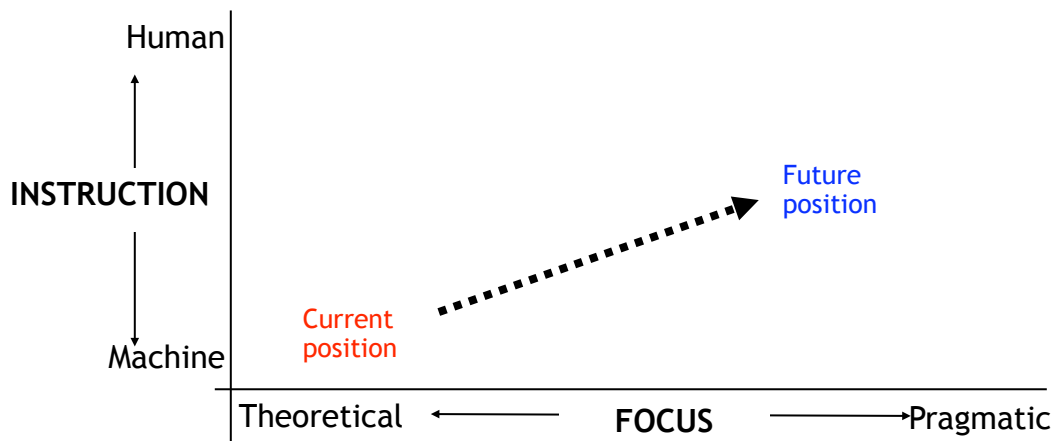
What’s a good way to find what position you’re in? A map. Marketers use maps. They’re not topographical; they’re maps of concepts.ⁱⁱ

Here’s a sample concept map. Plot your current location. Then show where you want to be. For example:

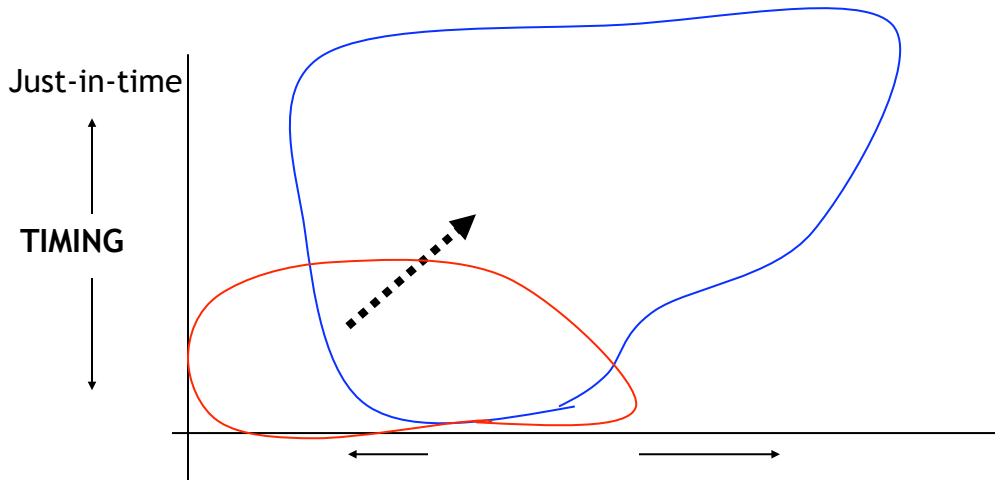


INTERPRETATION: Classroom has accounted for most training delivery in this organization. The face-to-face delivery is live and offered on a schedule.

The organization wants to offer more content on demand, both for the convenience of the staff and to deliver content close to when it's needed. At the same time, the firm wants to provide more canned material because it's less expensive and it scales. However, the firm does not plan to convert all of its content to canned. Sometimes a human is the only way to answer a question, so the firm is also making subject matter experts available on-call; every major business function will have its "advice nurse" to supplement the packaged lessons.



INTERPRETATION: Sales training at this company had consisted primarily of generic sales skills modules purchased as part of a license agreement with a major vendor. This was both cheap and scalable - training delivery was totally automated and "already paid for" as part of a license for IT skills. Since the modules did not describe selling situations in the firm's industry, most people failed to learn from them. With competition heating up the firm wanted to reposition itself as a solution provider rather than a seller of point solutions. The company is moving to a combination of presentations delivered by sales force superstars and a high-end consultative selling package with field exercises.



INTERPRETATION: You may find it more meaningful to map areas where your eLearning is taking place and where you want to advance it to. Here we see a firm that's moving from formal (classroom) training in advance to training when you need it (which might be class). The just-in-time training will be either clips from courses rerun on demand (formal) or channels open 24/7 for inquiry, coaching, and true mentoring.

You need to select the dimensions that you see shifting in your situation, perhaps:

Generic ←-----→ Custom
Solo←-----→Collaborative
Entertaining←-----→Dry
Dreary←-----→Fun
Fundamentals←--→Late-breaking news
Industry←-----→Proprietary
Knowledge management←--→Training
Department←-----→Enterprise

Select two or three dimensions that matter in your marketplace. Describe your current and desired position.



ⁱ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000.

ⁱⁱ Impress your friends by calling concept mapping “psychographics.” That’s a term invented by consultants to legitimize heftier fees.