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The Beginner's Guide to Creating an Online Training Program: Step 4 — Engage

How to motivate learners to stay engaged in online training

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Step 4: Engage

If you've worked on the previous steps of the Online Training Program Creation Guide, you've defined, outlined and built a solid online course. Now it's time to make sure your content finds its audience and that they can reap the benefits.

By now, all your content should be produced and uploaded into a learning platform. Step 4 of the Framework — Engage — focuses on the delivery of the module to the target audience. At this point, you should revisit the learner persona defined in the first step of the framework and use that information to implement the delivery of the content and create your ideal learner flow.

This guide covers three major issues: How to market the course effectively to your target learners, how learners will access the content and how to keep them interested while they're going through the material.

But first, let's begin by clarifying what we mean by engagement.

What Does it Mean to Engage Learners?

An engaged learner is more likely to complete your training program, more likely to retain the information and more likely to be successful with your company. When a learner is engaged in the course material, it's a win for both parties.

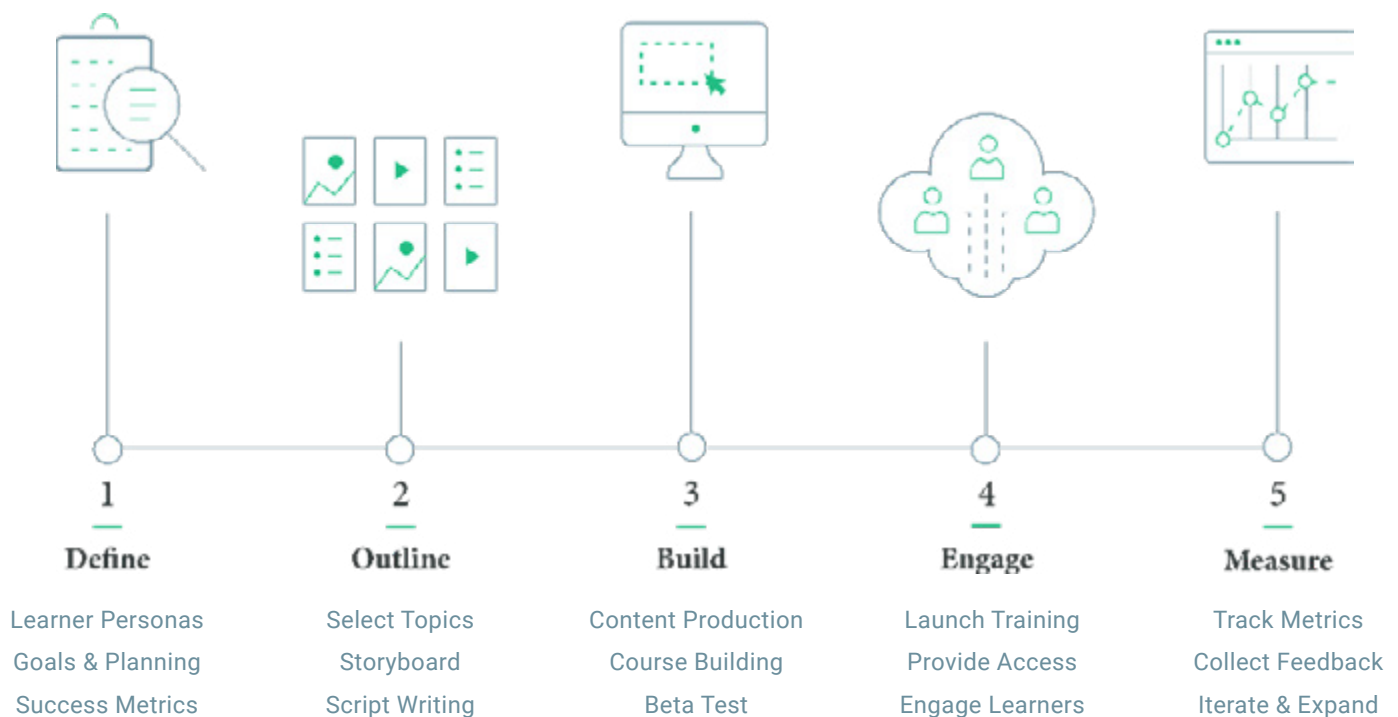
Training that is delivered in a dull, static or confusing manner will get through to only the most dedicated learner. With so many different options available to consumers, you can't count on

your audience struggling through a dry product manual or dense training course to get the basics. You need to deliver your content in a way that is engaging.

How will you know if your audience is engaged? A robust training platform will offer a range of metrics and assessments to help you measure success. In Step 1, you defined the success metrics that were most important to your company's goals. By building meaningful assessments into your course, you glean valuable information about completion of course activities, knowledge retention and engagement. These metrics will be key to understanding how effective your course is.

Marketing Your Course

The most expertly designed course in the world won't engage



learners if they don't know it exists. That's why it's so important to consider how you'll market the course to your target audience of employees, external partners, contractors and on-demand workers.

To create an effective marketing plan, it's helpful to revisit the learner personas you developed in Step 1 of the Guide. You identified where your target audience can be found, their pain points and how they like to learn. That guided how you developed learning content, and now it can help you attract those learners.

Revisiting the learner personas is a crucial part of establishing your course's value, offering enticing incentives and effectively delivering your message.

1. Establish Value

The first step in effectively marketing your course is to help your target learners understand exactly what they're going to learn and why it will be valuable. Address what matters to prospective users:

- Will it make their workday more efficient?
- Will it help them attract more customers through your platform?
- Will it boost their revenue streams?
- Will it save them time?

Don't simply tell learners that the course will do these things. Instead, integrate testimonials from other learners, offer previews of the content and highlight learner success stories to back up your claim.

Include these pieces of social proof throughout your marketing initiatives — on your blog, in social media posts, in your email

newsletters and wherever else you interact with your target learners.

Of course, once you've attracted a target learner with this value proposition, your content needs to reflect that by being relevant, meaningful and practical. Otherwise, your busy target learner will quickly abandon the course in favor of the next item on their

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to-do list.

2. Incentivize the Course

A well-chosen incentive can increase the value of the course to your target learner, adding an extra reason for them to engage with the material. This can be anything from small enticements earned at various milestones to a larger incentive like certification or a prize earned upon completion of the entire course.

A few incentives to consider:

- **Certification:** Offering an industry-recognized certification like HubSpot Academy's Inbound Certification raises the value of your course. Learners will be motivated to complete the course both to gain the knowledge and for the credential.

- **Prizes:** Incentivize your learners by offering prizes like product discounts, store credit or swag. Be creative! A prize need not be expensive to be a good motivator. Think about your target learner and what they would enjoy.
- **Perks:** Offer additional perks to learners who complete the course, such as access to exclusive events or additional tools.
- **Recognition:** List those who have completed the course on your site, or offer them a badge to demonstrate their expertise and help them gain more business on your platform.



The most effective incentives are those that are tied into your business objectives. If you want to set your company up as an industry leader, for example, consider offering a certification for course completion. If you want to use the course to increase brand loyalty, consider offering perks that create deeper brand experiences with your learners. A well-known example of that tactic is how Dropbox grew its user base in its early days by offering more free storage space — a deeper experience — for completing its micro-learning modules.

3. Deliver Your Message

What's the best way to make your target learners aware of the content? That depends on your learner persona and the outcome you're trying to achieve.

When it comes to marketing your course, think about message delivery in the same way you would when marketing anything else for your business. Consider the whole toolkit of tactics ranging from "push" (or outbound) marketing to "pull" or (inbound) marketing.

Ideally, you'll deliver your message using a variety of techniques designed to reach your target learner. As a practical matter, you'll have to prioritize, so think about which channels your audience naturally moves through and how they prefer to be reached.

Outbound marketing: Most effective when you want to cast a wide net and attract a variety of learners to your course.

- Email blasts
- Social media posts
- Press releases
- Advertising
- Promoting through influencers or affiliates

Inbound marketing: Most effective when you want to attract a highly-targeted and self-qualified group of learners to your course.

- Blog post or explainer video
- Gated content like a white paper or ebook
- Embedded content in a user dashboard or within the program
- Email blast to a selected segment of your list

— Content marketing

Delivering the Course Content

Once you have made your target learners aware of your course's existence and communicated its value, you need to give interested learners access to the course.

A good training platform will provide you with plenty of options when it comes to making your course accessible — whether it's public or gated, free or premium, anonymous or requiring the creation of an account. Make sure you're choosing the one that your target audience will find the easiest and which will be most in line with your business goals.

Some questions to consider:

What Is the Easiest Way for Learners to Access the Content?

Go back to your target learner personas, and think about how to make it as easy as possible for them to access the content. Will links to the training module be prominently displayed in their partner dashboard? Will it be delivered as part of an email autoresponder series to a certain segment of your list or after a learner signs up for an account? Will you blast the link out on social media?

How you provide the link depends on a variety of factors, like when and where your target learners will be accessing the course (such as on-the-go on their mobile device or while sitting at their work computer) and how publicly available you want the course to be.

Should the Course Be Gated or Publicly Available?

Should anyone who wants to be able to access your course? Or is the course only for a select few?

The public availability of your course will depend on how targeted your audience is. If the goal of the course is to raise awareness of your brand, you may want to make it as widely available as possible. If the goal is to turn existing users of your platform into power users, you will want to provide a private link only to them.

A robust training platform lets you control access in multiple ways,

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such as pre-assigning courses based on the role of the individual learner, creating a catalog of courses available to registered learners or making courses available in a public-facing website.

Should Access Require Account Creation?

The number of barriers you have between your target audience and your course will affect engagement. Requiring learners to create an account will result in fewer learners than a completely open course.

But that's not always a bad thing. If your goal is to generate leads, it's smart to put your course behind a gate like a lead generation form. Learners are then self-selecting to engage with your company. You're trading the possibility of higher registration numbers for users who have demonstrated more commitment.

Keeping Learners Engaged

Once you've marketed your course to your learner and enticed them to try it out, the next part of engaging them is keeping them involved in the course.

Here are some ways to keep the momentum going:

1. Send Email Reminders

A good training program will allow you to synchronize user data with your email program to send targeted email messages that will help keep them on track. Triggered by actions users take in your



course, emails can be used to confirm user enrollment, remind them to begin a course and nudge them to complete outstanding assignments or to revisit if they have been inactive for a certain period of time.

Email is also a good way to keep in contact with learners after the course in order to keep them updated on new training offerings and to help them keep the knowledge they gained fresh in their minds.

2. Facilitate Conversations

Discussions are a great way to help learners stay engaged with the course and cement the material in their minds. When robust discussions occur, learners are more likely to thoroughly consume the content and extract greater meaning and value from it.

Include discussion prompts throughout the course and encourage learners to add their input. A strong training program will provide opportunities for discussion. For example, Northpass has a native discussion tool built in that allows for private discussions at the course level, at the activity level or between members of a small group.

The best discussion prompts will be open-ended (so that the learner is challenged to come up with their own solution) and tied back in with the learning objectives of the unit. Ask questions like:

- What are some common concerns you hear about from customers?
- What is the best way to handle this difficult situation with a customer?
- What support modules have worked best with customers in your experience?
- Can you share a positive experience you've had with customers?

3. Create Community

Building a community around your course is a great way to inspire learners to stay engaged with the material. By creating a place for learners to interact with each other, you also create opportunities for them to answer each other's questions and share knowledge peer-to-peer — which will help them master the material even more thoroughly.

The venue can be anything from a forum on your own website to

a Facebook group, depending on the audience. Think about what perks or incentives you can offer to help motivate the community to stay active. For example, top commenters may be given additional recognition within your platform, or you may choose to require regular participation to maintain your course certification.

4. Take an Active Role in Discussion

If you choose to create a community, however, you will need to put some guidelines in place to moderate the community and encourage participation. Without some regular management of the forum, it may not have enough momentum to sustain itself.

Consider how you will monitor discussion forums. Will that responsibility go to a staff member? Will you recruit power users to act as moderators? As the community grows, the discussions will begin to build their own cadence, but in the beginning you should expect to take a much more active role.

Break the ice by asking learners to tell you about themselves and their expectations for the course and by soliciting feedback as the course progresses. Facilitators can encourage fruitful discussions by posting links to additional resources and asking provocative questions that challenge learners and encourage lively debate.

5. Provide Feedback to Learners

Timely, constructive feedback is another key way to engage learners. We retain information more easily when we're asked to apply the information rather than simply asked to read it.

In-depth assignments outside the course can also help learners engage more deeply with the material. A training platform that allows learners to download assignments, complete them and upload them back to the platform provides you with additional opportunities to give feedback.

Quizzes and other interactive elements aid learners by gauging how well they understand the material, and they can help cement the knowledge in the learner's mind. As a bonus, by viewing quiz results, you'll also have a better understanding of the places your course succeeds and where you could improve the content.

6. Solicit Feedback from Learners

Giving learners opportunities to tell you how they're doing in the course will not only keep them engaged, it will also provide valuable insight into how effectively the course is meeting the needs of your learners. Solicit feedback publicly in your online discussion boards or privately through email follow-ups or phone calls.

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With a good training platform, you'll also be able to create and embed surveys within your courses. Northpass integrates with tools like Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey and Typeform to help streamline the process of survey administration.

7. Live Interactions

Self-serve and asynchronous learning has the advantage of convenience and scale, but live interactions provide a tremendous amount of value to your learners and gets them heavily engaged. Webinars, Q&A sessions and regularly scheduled screencast

trainings give your learners a chance to ask questions in real time, to let you know their interests and to build bonds with one another and with your brand.



You've covered the first four steps of the Beginner's Guide to Creating an Online Training Program — Define, Outline, Build and Engage. Now that those are in place, it's time for Step 5 — Measure. In the last step, you'll learn how to check metrics and collect feedback in order to iterate and expand on your course.

You can use a hybrid model that combines these live formats with asynchronous training. Another benefit of hybrid models is that webinars and other live events help build content to use later, since they can be recorded and embedded into the course.

Next Steps

Up to this point, you've put in the preparation work needed to create a high-quality training course. Taking the time to consider how you'll engage your audience of learners will help you add even more value.



[Request a demo](#) to learn how Northpass's modern training platform can help you leverage content to engage your audience.

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