Delivering Bottom-Line Results at the Speed of Business at TalkTalk

Winner of 'Excellence in the Production of Learning Content - Private Sector' at the 2015 eLearning Awards, this case study focuses on how TalkTalk designed a programme to meet rapidly changing business needs in just 8-weeks.

Organisational Context

TalkTalk Telcom Group PLC offers fixed line and mobile voice, Internet and pay TV to some 4 million customers under the TalkTalk and TalkTalk Business brands. As part of a project to grow the groups mobile offering, they launched an important unlimited SIM only plan in April 2015. The challenge? They would have to deliver training to over 4,000 agents in just over 3 weeks, across four different countries. The result? They reported a 467% increase in SIM sales volume which they credit to their people and the way in which the group delivered training throughout the business operation.

This case study explores how the TalkTalk training team worked to understand the business need and went on to demonstrate business value by improving organisational revenue and reducing time to competency.

Identifying the business need

In early March 2015, TalkTalk's Commercial Team requested to release an unlimited mobile SIM offer to market on 27th April 2015. The SIM would be available to purchase through a variety of channels, impacting on a large number of agents in a variety of roles, spread over a large geographical area. TalkTalk's new product brought with it both excitement, and logistical challenges. The training team identified that the successful implementation of this product would depend on their people's understanding of the product, and their ability to sell it to customers confidently.

The learning needed to cover:

- Product knowledge
- A refresher of agents' sales soft skills
- Developing the agents' ability to correctly process sales on the systems

4,100 agents trained over three weeks

The need to deliver learning to 4,100 agents in total, and the short timescales from the start of the project to product launch, meant that classroom training just wasn't an option. Therefore, TalkTalk's Training Design team were tasked with creating an innovative bite size learning solution that covered these crucial areas, whilst reducing delivery and study time effectively.

Design and implementation using a campaign approach

With short timescales come further challenges: How do you design an engaging and effective e-Learning programme in just 8 weeks? TalkTalk knew that the unlimited SIM only product would shake things up in the mobile telecoms market, so certain elements also had to be withheld from agents until the end of the programme, such as price.

Building on the power of anticipation, the design team ensured that information was released to the training team gradually over the 8-week design window, using a Non-Disclosure Agreement. The project was being developed and designed right up until the launch date, even down to the development of the systems needed by the agents to process sales. Naturally, this created a challenge for the training team who couldn't use realistic training simulation environments. This meant that dedicated subject matter experts had to work closely with the training team to ensure training materials could be signed off as soon as they were created.

Making time for learning

When the timeframes are so tight, the next challenge TalkTalk faced was ensuring that their call centre agents were actually available for training.

Previous e-Learning took place while agents were taking calls – something that was deemed to negatively impact the learning process and the customer experience. With only a short period of time to deliver what they needed, training was scheduled during the teams' weekly protected half hour 'team talks'. Using protected learning time meant training could be delivered effectively in three bite-sized parts, each building on the last. This was delivered over three weeks, with the first part in the series including a video introduction to explain the new proposition. A standalone version of this video was also played on loop across call centres in the UK, the Philippines, India, and South Africa.

Driving Engagement

The training team ensured that learning was relevant to the learner's needs in 3 ways:

► They customised the programme to different roles, so that learners only had to complete training relevant to their role.

► Using design concepts, course started to include simple games tied into the theme of the mobile phone.

► The programme also incorporated proven strategies to embed learning, such as questioning throughout to reinforce main points, as well as scenario-based interactions which allowed the learner to explore the impact of their decision on the customer.

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Overcoming technological barriers

With learners spread around the globe, some partner sites connecting via an external network struggled to access the learning. This presented a great opportunity to pilot TalkTalk's new LMS, *Omniplex*, designed to address the issue. Using the LMS, meant that learners could now access the learning from any site, and the system could be tested prior to launch. For the first time, the Training Team could track completion accurately and push materials out to their learners.

Demonstrating Value

TalkTalk reported an unprecedented training success result of 84% satisfaction from their learners. There was a great reaction from learners to the new design with 94% agreeing there was sufficient practice throughout the course and 89% saying that it had challenged them (in a positive way!)

Agents acknowledged that the product was great to sell and held many plus points for customers, but they also cited the clear message they had in which to explain the benefits of the product.

467% increase in SIM sales volume

More importantly for the business, the new SIM plan showed to be outperforming forecasts as a result:

- Unlimited SIM plan as a percentage of overall SIM sales (+76.79%)
- Sales volume increase from week 4 to week 8 after launch (+467%)

What is more, since roll out, agents have been credited by the customer for their sales skills and the way in which they propositioned the product.

TalkTalk make the case that the knowledge and skills of their people contributes vastly to the success of a product launch on this scale, and after taking into consideration the agent feedback, are confident that *"The success of the launch was largely as a result of the programme of training that supported our front line agents."*

Short timescales and huge deliverables were a challenge for TalkTalk, but the 'Grow Mobile' training programme used innovative and revolutionary content to enable the successful implementation of an effective solution for the business. Building on the working relationship between Training and Design teams meant key business needs could be identified, learning interventions could be planned with the business need in mind, and the team had a number of measures they could report back on at the end of the project to demonstrate value.

8 Tips for delivering bottom-line impact with learning, fast!

1. **Identify the key business need:** What is the learning going to help you measure? How will you track this? Align the learning to your business objectives and goals.

2. **Identify your internal experts:** Who are you going to need to involve in the intervention and what are their roles?

3. **Develop a strong brand strategy:** get creative with your communication.

4. **Don't be held back by the past:** if something didn't work before, don't be afraid to rethink the proposition and format.

5. **Focus on what people need to do** rather than what they need to know.

6. **Allocate time:** understand the time available for learning and use it intentionally.

7. **Challenge learners:** allow them to practice, speak their language and make it relevant.

8. **Communicate success:** Celebrate both the learning and the value measures you identified at the start (i.e. business performance improvements, staff satisfaction, customer feedback and increase in sales).

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