



Learning & Development
Learning Culture

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The Real Challenge with Learner Engagement: L&D Has a Marketing Problem

As workplace learning shifts toward more continuous, self-directed approaches, many learning and development (L&D) departments are suddenly finding themselves in competition for employees' attention—and too often, they're losing that battle.

In today's work environment, capturing and holding your employees' attention, and sustaining their loyalty, requires letting go of many conventional methods for corporate training. The learning function needs to think differently about some fundamental aspects of L&D.

The learner engagement challenge actually has its roots in some common marketing problems: weak brands, intense competition, and unsatisfied customers. To overcome these issues, learning professionals would be smart to borrow some basic lessons from time-tested marketing practices.

Key Insights

- 1 Stakeholders are not engaged or satisfied with L&D.
- 2 L&D should build and sustain compelling brands.
- 3 L&D should appeal to executives and managers, as well as learners.
- 4 L&D should improve the entire learning experience, not just the courses.

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Stakeholders are not engaged or satisfied with L&D.

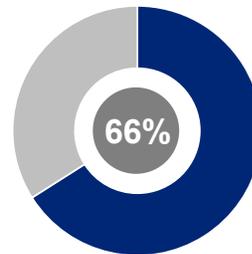
L&D teams are constantly competing for employees' time. Work, email, and meetings almost always come first. Many employees are reluctant to engage with company-provided training, especially when it isn't mandatory.

Additionally, the enterprise L&D department used to be the only game in town for developing new work skills. Now, employees, managers, and business leaders have lots of options—from online searches, videos, and social networks to massive open online courses (MOOCs), industry gurus, and even colleagues.

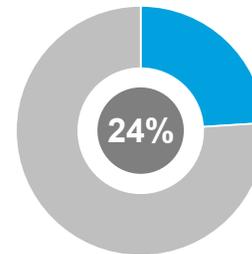
Most executives and managers see L&D as more of a distraction than a driver of business performance.

It is therefore critical to not only capture employees' attention but also to earn and keep their loyalty.

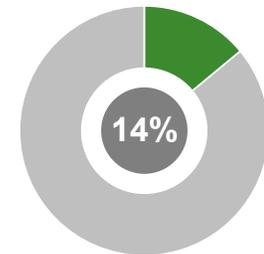
L&D: Employees, Managers, and Executives Are Disengaged



66% of L&D professionals tell us they're having a hard time getting employees to engage with L&D offerings.



Less than a quarter of line managers think their L&D department is critical to achieving their business goals.



Only 14% of L&D leaders believe they are viewed as strategic partners by executives. 52% are seen as mediocre or worse.

Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2014.¹

¹ Sources: (1) *Three Marketing Lessons for Learning and Development* (webinar), Bersin by Deloitte / Todd Tauber, June 2014, available to research members at www.bersin.com/library; (2) "Would You Recommend Your L&D Department?," CLOMedia.com / Jay Cross, April 14, 2014, <http://www.clomedia.com/articles/would-you-recommend-your-l-d-department>; (3) *Key Findings – Become a High-Impact Learning Organization*, Bersin & Associates / David Mallon, Janet Clarey, and Mark Vickers, August 2012, available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.

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Stakeholders are not engaged or satisfied with L&D. (cont'd)

Why aren't more workers engaging with L&D offerings? We polled 100+ learning leaders to ask just that. The figure here shows there are several obstacles—although the four key obstacles are indicated on top in dark blue.

L&D teams are trying to respond by fitting training into work and by enabling workers to “pull” learning resources when and where they need them.² The problem is, many learners and managers don't view L&D as an essential partner. And as a result, many are going elsewhere to develop knowledge and skills. That's a marketing problem, not a learning issue.

Obstacles to Learning at Work



Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2014.

² Source: *Corporate learning redefined: Prepare for a revolution*, Deloitte University Press / Josh Bersin, Josh Haims, Bill Pelster, and Bernard van der Vyver, March 2014, <http://dupress.com/articles/hc-trends-2014-corporate-learning-redefined/?id=gx:el:dc:dup676:cons:awa:hct14>.

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L&D should build and sustain compelling brands.

Brands are important because they can inspire, influence, and compel potential customers (and other stakeholders) to give their time and attention, make particular choices, pay premium prices, and spread the word.

Brands, however, are more than just names, logos, and taglines. They are the combined set of expectations, experiences, and memories that people take away from using products and services. Employees and managers will remember their experiences with L&D staff, processes, and practices.

Brands should, therefore, matter in L&D, too—a lot. Yet, right now, most learning departments' "brands" are not well managed (if they're managed at all).

Only 14 percent of line managers would recommend working with their L&D department; more than half of them wouldn't.³

3 Purposes of a Brand



Source: Prophet, 2014, <https://www.prophet.com/sites/strongbrands/>.

³ Source: "Would You Recommend Your L&D Department?" CLOMedia.com / Jay Cross, April 14, 2014, <http://www.clomedia.com/articles/would-you-recommend-your-l-d-department>.

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L&D should build and sustain compelling brands. (cont'd)

Brands don't just happen. Developing and sustaining a strong brand takes careful thought, methodical planning, and relentless focus.

4 Steps to Creating and Maintaining a Strong Learning Brand

1 Define a clear purpose

Ask yourself:

- What purpose is the best, most desired, and important to our organization?
- Why are we valuable to our audiences?
- Are we focusing too much on the learner and not enough on the organization?
- How is our purpose aligned to the culture?

2 Understand the "competition"

Ask yourself:

- What other resources are our workers using for learning? (YouTube, professional networks, web, etc.)
- Why are learners using other resources?
- Can we (or should we) compete with these resources or should we utilize them in our own learning strategy?

3 Differentiate your position

Ask yourself:

- How can we do a better job of connecting with the utility, value, and expectations that workers and organizations want?
- What differentiates us from our competition?

4 Connect on their terms—not yours

Ask yourself:

- How can we create a brand identity that connects with the audience on their terms, not ours?
- How will we alter our names, logo, taglines, messaging, and communication efforts to connect with our learners?

Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2014.

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L&D should appeal to executives and managers, as well as learners.

Start by understanding your consumers—the learners

The workforce and the work environment have both become incredibly diverse and complex. Learning professionals generally accept that a one-size-fits-all approach to learning just doesn't work anymore. Yet most L&D teams don't know enough about their end users—the learners—to engage them effectively.

Without understanding their audiences, L&D professionals will find it difficult to create more diverse, better targeted learning experiences. Enterprise learning teams should, therefore, focus more of their own attention on getting a solid grasp on their audiences' needs, wants, and behavior.

L&D's Limited Understanding of Their Audiences



Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2012.

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L&D should appeal to executives and managers, as well as learners. (cont'd)

Employees—the learners—are not L&D's only stakeholders.

Building a cohesive learning brand and consistent, compelling messaging about the value of L&D demands an understanding of three main audiences.

62% of L&D leaders say managers are the primary "owners" of their organization's learning culture and practices.⁴

Only 31% of L&D professionals tell us they consult with line managers on a weekly, monthly, or even yearly basis.⁵

L&D's 3 Main Audiences

Audience	Roles	Motivations
Executives (Buyers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set priorities and provide funding Set strategic direction and priorities Shape the culture Support learning initiatives 	The impact of learning on business objectives and priorities (not satisfaction or even ROI)
Managers (Influencers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence employee priorities Execute business strategies Own learning culture Frequently own some of the budget 	Solving their own pain points and driving team performance
Employees (Consumers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give up their time and attention to learn May pay for learning 	Doing their jobs better and more efficiently, avoiding being overwhelmed and overworked, and developing their careers

Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2014.

⁴ For more information, *High-Impact Learning Culture: The 40 Best Practices for Creating an Empowered Learning Culture*, Bersin & Associates / David Mallon, June 2010. Available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.

⁵ Source: Bersin by Deloitte Learning Measurement and Evaluation Practices Survey, August 2014.

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L&D should improve the entire learning experience, not just the courses.

The learners' journey starts long before the event and continues long after.

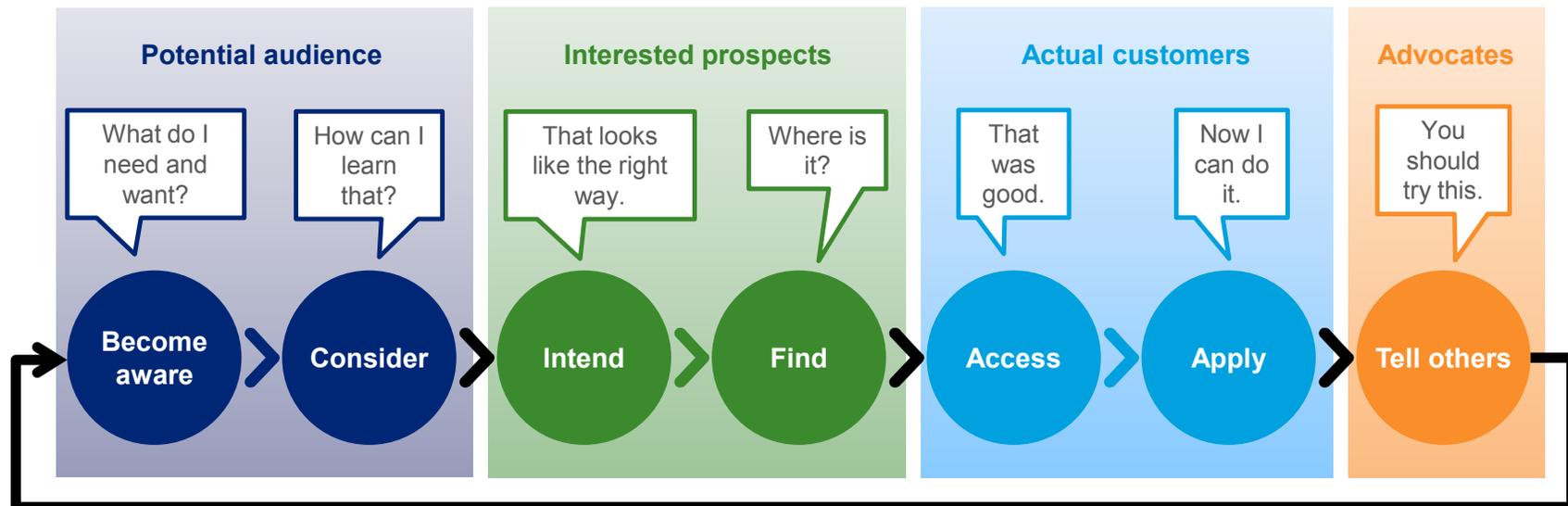
The learner experience is one of the most important elements in building a strong L&D brand. The experience with L&D, however, starts long before someone shows up for a training event or launches a course. Learners actually go through a long journey on the path to new knowledge and skills. Those steps mirror the path through a typical marketing pipeline.

Before customers can even begin the journey, they are just potential learners. When these people begin to search for solutions, they become interested

prospects. They only turn into actual customers once they've made a choice and used a solution. If they then apply what they learned and find it useful enough, they might come back again for more—or better still, tell others about it.

Turning audiences into prospects and converting those prospects into customers is hard. It takes consistent, integrated, and effective communications, coordinated across multiple touchpoints.

The Learning Journey



Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2014.

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L&D should improve the entire learning experience, not just the courses. (cont'd)

L&D should promote learning throughout the entire experience.

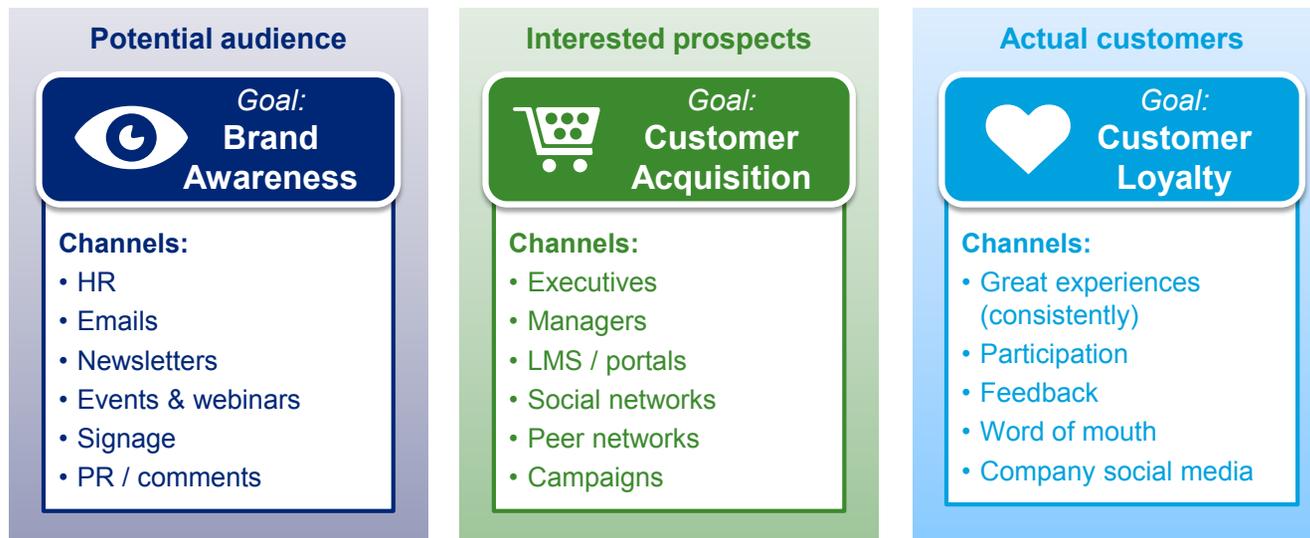
Determining which channels to use depends largely on the goal. Emails, for example, can be an efficient way to reach a lot of people quickly to generate awareness. But they're also easily ignored, so emails demand careful thought and creativity.

Engaging managers, meanwhile, can be an effective way to generate demand. Of course, that's easier said than done. Less than half of L&D professionals

understand how their work is linked to their organization's performance.⁶

Providing great experiences—consistently—is perhaps one of the best ways to breed loyalty. It's hard to get customers. So it pays to keep your customers happy by making learning fast and easy to access, relevant to their work, and painless to endure.

Multiple Channels for Promoting Learning



Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2014.

⁶ For more information, *High-Impact Learning Culture: The 40 Best Practices for Creating an Empowered Enterprise*, Bersin & Associates / David Mallon, June 2010.

Conclusion

It is increasingly difficult to get employees and their managers to give up their time and attention these days, so it pays to keep them happy by making learning fast, easy, relevant, and useful. To do that, learning professionals should do three things:

- Intentionally define and reinforce a compelling brand for L&D
- Understand stakeholders needs, preferences, and habits
- Work on improving the entire learner experience, not just the courses

For L&D professionals, this is a new and different way of thinking. Start by reconsidering some fundamental aspects of L&D.

"We just don't view our job as teaching people. We really view our job as inspiring people to learn. If we can get that right, the rest of it will come."

– CLO, Consumer Products ■



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