

RATINGS

formerly Media Reviews

Online

Making Web Content Work

Reviewed by Patti Shank for *Training Media Review*

I design and build instructional Websites, so you'd think I'd be enamored of them. Truth is, most Websites, including instructional ones, are hard to navigate and their content is hard to use. As Steve Krug, in his Web usability book *Don't Make Me Think*, says, "It's not rocket surgery." But Krug also says that even though usability is common sense, it's not always the obvious choice.

Making Web Content Work, from Information Mapping, is an intriguing online course that addresses usability in Website design. I recently took the company's course Developing Business and Technical Communications and thought it was valuable for making information more readable and understandable. Still, I wasn't sure how to apply everything I learned to instructional information on the Web. Making Web Content Work helps to close that gap. It covers content and audience analysis, page and site design, and organization of different types of Web content. Here's a list of modules:

- Planning Your Content (two modules)
- The Design Principles
- Organizing the Content Hierarchy and Designing the Navigation
- Types of Webpages
- The Information Types, and Presenting Procedure and Process on the Web
- Presenting Principles, Facts, Concepts, and Structures on the Web
- Testing the Site.

This online course is instructor-led and encourages contact with the instructors and other learners. Much of online training seems to consist of dull self-paced courses with little or no ability to interact with others even when interaction is critical to instruction. But this course provides many opportunities for reflection and sharing insights.

Each week-long lesson culminates in an activity that requires the learner to work on a Website or part of a Website design. The activity is uploaded to the course so that the instructor and other learners can view it and provide feedback. The lessons provide many examples of real Websites and opportunities to test users' understanding. Even though much of the information wasn't new to me, the review was helpful. In every lesson, I gained critical and useful insights about a module of an online instructional technology course that I'm re-

designing. I was pleased that each lesson gave me an opportunity to reconsider problems learners have experienced with that module and come up with better solutions.

This is a good and useful course. The content is chunked and easy to follow, there are lots of examples and printable summaries of all online lessons, you can see other learners' work, and the instructor feedback is timely and helpful.

Minuses? At times, the course tries to cover too much. Designing navigation alone could be an entire course. I would've preferred to spend the eight weeks on the organization of different types of Web content and how to use the mapping techniques I learned from the first course on the Web. But that may be because I have a lot of experience with the other topics. The two weeks on organizing content were good; I just wanted more. I hope Information Mapping will provide additional courses to address the other topics in depth.

Learning online in a well-designed course is convenient if you're motivated to do the work without someone cracking the whip. I'm an independent, self-motivated learner, so the lessons and assignments were manageable despite the fact that I'm busy. The content was compelling, and I didn't want to miss anything.

Recommendation

If you develop online instructional materials and need to know the basics of how to make them more usable, this course should do the trick. The content is immediately applicable, though it's characterized more by breadth than depth. If you already know a bit about the topics, it may not be as helpful. In general, the Information Mapping method is fantastic.

Video

It's Show Time!

Reviewed by Jason Lewis for *Training Media Review*

That the Stew Leonard's supermarket chain is a success is unquestionable. It serves more than 100,000 customers per week in three stores in the greater New York City area, and *Fortune* ranked it as one of the best places to work in the United States. It's widely recognized by its customers as the "king of customer service."

It's Showtime! is a documentary-style description of how Stew Leonard's delivers noteworthy service. At only 15 minutes long, it's short and punchy and can

easily fit into a one- or two-hour training session on customer service. The accompanying facilitator and participant guides are useful.

The content revolves around these principles: Live the culture. The customer is king. Consistency is key. A skilled facilitator can easily generate useful discussion about what great service means and the attitude it requires. The video could be used as an introduction to such a session or as a short inspirational reminder of the importance of customer service.

Be warned, though, that the video focuses on attitude, not skills or policies. It describes the concepts behind Stew Leonard's success, including that the customer is always right, a positive attitude is important, and frontline staff can make a difference. There's nothing cutting-edge here. At US\$695 for the video and \$795 for the DVD, this is an expensive offering to rally the troops. It won't tell your people exactly how to deliver better service, and I'm concerned that showing the video to frontline employees and calling it "customer service training" could be misleading. Staff attitude is a necessary, but insufficient, aspect of customer service.

Still, the video is fun and moves quickly. It has interviews with staff and vignettes of inspiring customer-staff interactions. The production values are high, and bullet points remind the audience of key points.

The facilitator and participant guides come as Microsoft Word documents. The facilitator's guide is thorough and provides sample agendas, lesson plans, scripts, checklists, and feedback forms.

Recommendation

I would recommend *It's Show Time!* only to large organizations that have already trained staff in customer service skills (listening, solving problems, and such) and need some ongoing inspiration. Given its exclusive focus on attitude, it shouldn't be the first training employees receive in customer service. However, the themes are right on the money and should be taught and re-taught frequently.

Course Details

Making Web Content Work, online, 2003, Information Mapping, 800.463.6627; www.infomap.com. Purchase: US\$995.

It's Show Time!, video, 2002, 15 minutes, VideoLearning Systems, 800.622.3610; www.videolrn.com. Purchase VHS US\$695, DVD \$795. Other material: leader guide, participant materials.

Making Web Content Work

★★★★	Holds user interest
★★★★1/2	Production quality
★★★★1/2	Ease of navigation
★★★★	Interactivity
★★★★1/2	Value of content
★★★	Instructional value
★★★	Value for the money
★★★★1/2	Overall rating


It's Show Time!

★★★	Holds viewer interest
★★★★1/2	Acting/Presenting
★★★★1/2	Diversity
★★★★1/2	Production quality
★★	Value of content
★★	Instructional value
★1/2	Value for the money
★★	Overall rating

Patti Shank is an instructional technology consultant and a writer and speaker on instructional technology topics. She is the managing partner of Learning Peaks, a distance learning consulting firm, and can be reached through her Website; www.learningpeaks.com.

Jason Lewis is a consultant and trainer focused on change management and corporate social responsibility; jason.lewis@cloudbreakcompany.com.

Product evaluations are provided by Training Media Review and do not imply endorsement by T+D or ASTD. For more information, contact TMR at 877.532.1838; www.tmreview.com.

 WWW.LEARNINGCIRCUITS.ORG to access TMR's reviews of e-learning materials, including e-courses, authoring software, learning management systems, and more.

