Chapter 26

Udemy: Blended and e-Learning for Transforming Teaching and Learning

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At *Udemy*, we are reimagining what it means to be a student and what it means to be a teacher. An online marketplace is an entirely new approach to lifelong learning, one that lets the enormous pool of everyday experts produce entirely new content to meet the demands of that huge pool of potential students around the world.

Rather than relying on the way we have always done things, this approach actually draws on the shifting forces in our world—advances in technology, improving bandwidth, commerce across borders, a cultural embrace of sharing, and an acknowledgment that education needs to evolve to keep up with the demands of our economy—to enable the upward mobility that people are searching for.

The best teachers have the power to change lives. Reflecting on most impactful educators in one's own life, the list likely includes classroom teachers, coaches, mentors, managers, and friends. To unleash the power of online learning, we need to open teaching to all cultures and localized contexts.

Issues and Challenges: The Potential for Impact

At the same time that unemployment is high, across various geographies and industries, many companies have positions for which they are unable to find qualified applicants. In the People's Republic of China, 74% of employers have said that they have positions they cannot fill. In Brazil, that number is 63%, and in the Russian Federation, it is 57%. Youth unemployment in all of these countries is above 15%. The problem is not entirely about job creation but also about job preparedness. Even once employed, graduates and employers have learned the hard way that a degree

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does not mean job preparedness. Only 42% of employers believed that new graduates are ready for work, while 72% of educational institutions felt their students were entering the workforce prepared (Herzog 2014).

Compounding this problem is the fact that, because industries are changing rapidly as technology drives them, workers must continue training to stay relevant. As a hiring specialist put it in a recent Thomas Friedman article, “In the new economy, ‘you have to prove yourself. A degree document is no longer a proxy for the competency employers need.’ Too many of the ‘skills you need in the workplace today are not being taught by colleges’” (Friedman 2013). To put this in perspective, in the United States in 1900 only 17% of all jobs required knowledge workers, whereas more than 60% do today. As developing economies mature, the needs for training and education change.

The pace of change in the workplace shows no signs of abating. In fact, studies show that 65% of today’s grade-school children may end up doing work that has not even been invented yet. That is a little terrifying, especially if the only skills you have are based on the classes you signed up for at age 18. The skills you learn in university may be enough to get your first job, maybe even your second job. But they will not be enough to keep getting better jobs for 40-plus years.

Imagine that you graduated from university 10 years ago with a degree in marketing. Today, you might be competing against millennial for roles that require running Facebook ads or advertising on Instagram, things that did not even exist 10 years ago. But as we all know, “I never learned that” will not get you a promotion or a new job. It will not even help you keep the one you have. Gone are the days when you got a job straight out of university and spent decades working your way up through the ranks at the same employer. Last year, the median job tenure for workers aged 20–24 was shorter than 16 months. For those aged 25–34, it was 3 years, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, still far short of the 5.5-year median tenure for all workers aged 25 and older.

What happens when, a couple of years into our careers, we discover we need additional skills to help with the job we actually have, or the job we are trying to get? We do not have a time machine to help us go back and take the right courses in university, assuming those courses even existed back then.

It is not like it is easy to go back to university; that is a huge, expensive investment. For most people, it is also not what they need. They need media training, or experience building web pages, or whatever the equivalent focused-but-incredibly-important skill is for their job.

Proposed Solutions

If online learning can have a real impact on significant global issues of unemployment and workforce development, the future must be one in which courses teach what matters at a local level. With such diversity in demographics and driving industries, content must be responsive to individual countries’ challenges.

To be clear, this need to train workers for the specific localized industry is not an unrecognized need: Training centers and workforce development programs exist around the world. However, the traditional train-the-trainer models are reliant upon costly in-person seminars, limited by the number of instructors, capacity, cost, and student's ability to travel. The potential impact of online learning is significant.

As online learning evolves, it is worth asking of online courses: Will this help someone change their income, stay in their existing job, or find a new job? Will it help them find jobs in the industries that matter to their communities? What are the endemic skillsets and critical experiences from the older working generations that should be shared with the younger members of the workforce?

Why the *Udemy Marketplace Model* Works

At *Udemy*, we believe the marketplace model has the power to transform education, because our students and instructors are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

Much has been written about low course completion rates for online courses. This does not take into account the question, how many people entered the course hoping to finish? What was the motivation to enroll? Did they in fact reach their learning objectives? When we asked students who were more than halfway through a course the question, "Has Udemy helped you achieve your learning goals?", 92% of the participants answered yes.

Course engagement largely tracks the intention of enrolling. When we surveyed our students, we found that 90% came to learn practical knowledge, 30% of users surveyed came to build something (e.g., a website, an app), 25% came with the intention of developing skills to shift careers or prepare for an examination, 25% came to hone their skills, and 10% came for help with a start-up or business. This motivational data make clear what students were willing to pay for.

As a result, our students are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Some take courses to get a raise, while others take courses because they had an interest in creating a website for their personal usage.

Like students, our instructors are also motivated intrinsically and extrinsically. When we surveyed our instructors, we found that most were motivated by the desire to teach and share their knowledge. But creating a course takes time and effort, and we have seen that extrinsic motivation—the prospect of being able to charge a nominal amount for their course—has also driven course creation.

How the *Udemy Marketplace* Works

With students able to solicit instructors from whom they want to learn and to rate the quality of the courses they have taken, the marketplace matures to meet student demand. For instructors, besides being able to share knowledge, teachers are directly

rewarded for quality teaching. That is, teaching can become a sustainable income source for local experts if teachers want to charge.

In this new model, the UdeMy learning ecosystem is sustainable. It cannot be perpetually funded—we leverage the interests of the students to drive not only content creation but also funding for teachers to teach.

Therefore, the UdeMy marketplace can be a self-sustaining model for education. As students discover new courses, their instructors make money. Those instructors make new courses; others see those results and develop their own; the course list grows; more students join; and on and on until...well, there is no until. These network effects mean that this education ecosystem continues to grow across countries, subjects, languages, and a huge range of lifelong learners.

Implications for the Future

Going Global

We are tackling the global education puzzle at UdeMy, guided by the notion that learning improves lives. We create an even playing field for educators, with a platform that makes it easy for anyone to create an online course and publish in a broader marketplace.

For our millions of students, we aim to make top-quality learning content from the world's experts significantly more affordable for anyone, anywhere. As of March 2017, we had 15 million students all over the world who were taking more than 45,000 courses and learning from 20,000 instructors. Courses were in over 80 languages.

Interest is Clear

Two-thirds of UdeMy students are from outside the United States, and that percentage has grown rapidly since our inception over the past 6 months. These visitors are from more than 200 countries and territories. Native mobile applications for iOS and Android enable offline downloading so that reliable Internet connection does not become a prerequisite to effective learning.

Technology is not waiting for businesses and employees to keep up. There are too many skills, too many potential instructors, and too many hungry learners out there to put limits on who can teach and when and where they can do it. So, it is time to try something entirely different, to create new content that meets the demands of today's workers and comes from the people who are already ready and willing to teach it.

A marketplace for learning is how we solve the need for more skills in the workplace. This is how we give people a real way to ensure that they have the tools they need to keep moving further up and up and up, as far as their desire to learn and grow will take them.

Conclusion

If we want to keep up with constant change, we need to become lifelong learners. We all know that person—the one who learns Italian or computer coding “just for fun”—who is constantly pushing himself or herself to learn new skills. In the new economy, lifelong learning cannot just be for them anymore; it is going to be a thing that all of us have to do.

We are just beginning to tap the potential of online learning around the world. We continue to think about what will be next. What is the best way to deliver online learning to students around the world? Whether it is a video or something else, we hope to be at the forefront of that movement. We challenge ourselves to continue to innovate on the product to enable the best teachers around the world to reach hundreds of millions of students around the world.

Links to the presentation materials: <https://events.development.asia/materials/20160921/udemy>. <https://events.development.asia/materials/20190827/udemy-government>. <https://events.development.asia/materials/20190827/innovative-approaches-digital-learning-0>.

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