Energizing Your Professional Development Program–
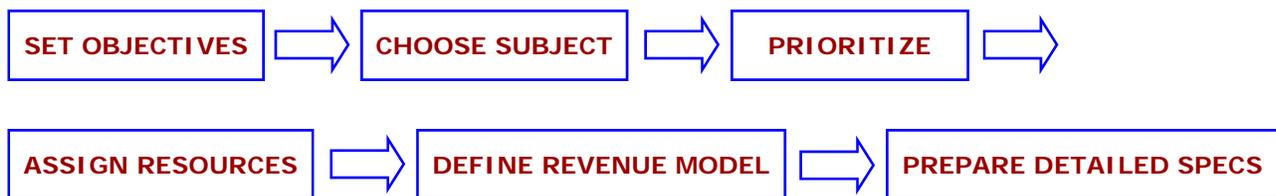## How to Kick it Up a Notch

by Erin Roberts

Do you want to take your professional development program to the next level? There are only two steps: Planning & Implementation. A common mistake is to start with Implementation.

Step 1: The Plan

Budget approximately one third of your total project time to complete the plan. A detailed plan is as important to your P.D. program as an architect's drawing is to a construction project. Your curriculum designer can help with this.

Overview

SET OBJECTIVES → CHOOSE SUBJECT → PRIORITIZE →

ASSIGN RESOURCES → DEFINE REVENUE MODEL → PREPARE DETAILED SPECS

Set Objectives

- What do you want to accomplish? To make education more accessible? More cost-effective? To provide more variety?
- What are your revenue requirements? Break-even? Cash-positive?

Choose Subject Matter

- Which areas are most interesting and topical for your members?
- What is the required outcome?
- Who are the subject matter experts that are relevant for your members?

Prioritize Opportunities

List all the opportunities that are consistent with your plan. Then pick one to three of them based on these criteria:

1. The project can be implemented within a reasonable time frame
2. The project can be implemented with existing available resources
3. The project has a high ROI (return on investment)

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Assign Resources

- What delivery medium will you use? A workshop format requires different resources than an online learning program.

- What are the other resources that you need? You may need background information, data, user input or technical services.

- Who are the players? At a minimum you will need a project manager, a subject matter expert and a curriculum designer.

Who are the players?

The SME works with a curriculum designer under the direction of the learning program provider. The learning program provider provides a project manager.

The SME and the curriculum designer work together very closely. The time required to complete the learning program depends on three things;

1. The knowledge collateral that the SME has available,
2. The amount of information disseminated in the learning program, and
3. The media requirements (i.e. workbooks, images, audio, etc.)

The curriculum designer – What is their role?

The curriculum designer's job is to deliver an excellent learning program to the user that enhances the reputation of both the SME and the learning program provider. They are responsible for content creation through to production. Their job is to learn what the SME wants to teach, and to distil this content into a format and flow that works effectively for the user. The curriculum designer also works with the SME to incorporate appropriate media to enhance the learning experience. Engage the curriculum designer early in the process. They can provide valuable expertise during the planning step.

The SME – What is their role?

The SME is the face and brand of the learning program. It is their expertise that is delivered to the user. The value of their subject-matter expertise and the power of their personal brand determine the take-up rate by the users.

The Learning program provider – What is their role?

The learning program provider has the list of prospective users, the knowledge of what their users want to learn and how they want to learn it. Their job is to choose the subject and the learning medium that generates the highest take-up rate from their clients. They provide the budget (or the sponsor), the audience and the marketing.

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Define Revenue Model

- How will you pay for the program and how will it generate revenue?
    - ⇒ Cover the cost out of your operating budget and then charge users a fee, or
    - ⇒ Find a sponsor to fund the program, or
    - ⇒ Do a joint venture with another stakeholder
- Who owns what and how will each party be compensated? Each player requires direct or indirect compensation.
    - ⇒ The Users. They must receive value for their time and money. Even a free learning program takes time to complete.
    - ⇒ The Provider. Your organization's reputation is enhanced by a high-value program. It can also be a valuable revenue source.
    - ⇒ The SME. The subject matter expert typically retains the right to their intellectual property. This can be licensed to the Provider on an exclusive or non-exclusive basis. Many SMES will license their IP in return for the exposure to potential clients and a stake in the revenue.
    - ⇒ The Curriculum Designer. If the designer also provides subject matter expertise they perform a dual role. If not, then they are either compensated directly like any other service provider, or with an ownership stake or some combination of the two.

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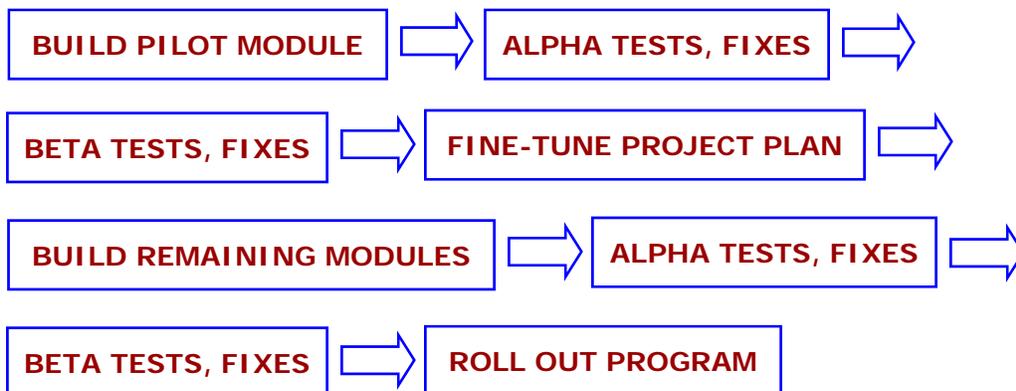
Prepare Detailed Specifications

Prepare a detailed outline of the program. Do this with the SME and the curriculum designer.

- What is the content for each module? Which module will you use for your pilot project?

- How is the content delivered? If a workshop, focus on useful workshop tools—not just a PowerPoint presentation. If online, consider how you can effectively use tools like interactive exercises, audio, and images.

- How will users pay? Online payment is the lowest maintenance option but you will need to invest in an ecommerce program. Telephone and mail are also an option but they are ultimately more expensive.

- What are the milestones and when must they be completed?

Step 2: The Implementation

This step includes three recurring phases; Build, Test & Fix and Fine-Tune Your Plan. Allow about one third of your total project time to Build. Plan another third for the two remaining phases. Don't ignore these phases or underestimate the time required. You will find flaws and you will need time to fix them.

Overview

BUILD PILOT MODULE ⟹ ALPHA TESTS, FIXES ⟹

BETA TESTS, FIXES ⟹ FINE-TUNE PROJECT PLAN ⟹

BUILD REMAINING MODULES ⟹ ALPHA TESTS, FIXES ⟹

BETA TESTS, FIXES ⟹ ROLL OUT PROGRAM

Build

A good plan makes the build phase straightforward. Start with the module that you've chosen for the pilot project. Budget time to test and fix your work and to fine-tune your plan at the completion of each milestone.

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Test & Fix

Alpha testing gets done first. These tests expose the obvious flaws and errors. Alpha testing is the responsibility of your curriculum designer and SME. Alpha testing ensures that the deliverables are functional and complete.

Beta testing uncovers more subtle flaws. These tests are done by a small group of real users. These are typically volunteers and their time must be respected. Ensure that your alpha testing is thorough and complete before beta testing starts.

After each testing phase, make the necessary fixes and then repeat the testing until the module meets your quality assurance standards.

Fine-Tune Your Plan

The pilot project helps you to find things that need to be changed before you are too far along. Adjust your plan to accommodate these changes before you move forward. Don't be afraid to continue to adjust your plan as building progresses through each milestone. Make sure to document your changes and assess the impact on your budget and time lines.

Be wary of scope creep. Adjusting your plan does not mean adding features. It's far better to reduce scope than to add to it. Save the "nice to have" ideas for version 2.0.

Erin Roberts is a partner with Zzeem

⇒ *If this topic interests you, and you would like to know more about how Zzeem can help in this area, contact **erin@zzeem.com**.*

⇒ *If you'd like to learn more about our workshop "**Professional Development Programs: How to Maximize Member Value & Revenue**", go to www.zzeem.com/ZzeemWorkshops.aspx*

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