

Linking Learning Outcomes to On-the-Job Skills:

THE SECRET TO BUILDING
AN EXCELLENT CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE IN RETAIL



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Despite the fact that online purchases only account for 10% of total annual retail sales [in the United States], shifts in consumer buyer behavior and double-digit e-commerce growth are leaving brick-and-mortar retailers increasingly uncomfortable. Today's customers have an ever-expanding list of shopping options when they want to make a purchase -- why should they choose your brick and mortar store? If you want your retail store to stay competitive with nimble startups and alternative marketplaces that bend on price and cater to convenience, you need an edge.

Fortunately, today's modern, mobile customers have been very clear about one thing: the importance of customer experience. In-person support is a strong driver of getting shoppers into stores, which gives traditional brick-and-mortar retailers an enormous opportunity to build relationships and capture sales for 90% of a US \$2.1 trillion industry – but only if their associates are prepared to deliver the experience customers want.

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SENIOR VERTICAL MARKETING MANAGER, D2L

excellent customer service,” says Andra Popescu, Senior Vertical Marketing Manager at D2L. “Companies like Starbucks and Apple have raised the bar – whether today’s customer is shopping for a cup of coffee, a laptop or something completely different, they have the same expectations for a personalized and high-touch customer service experience.”

With stakes higher than ever, perceptive retail brands are turning to modern learning solutions to proactively address recruitment, engagement and retention issues, and deliver better learning outcomes for associate training.

What Does Modern Learning Look Like?

Modern learning solutions focus your training efforts on specific aspects of employee development that support your retail organization's business strategy. But before you can make modern learning work for you, you'll want to understand precisely what the term means.


"Modern learning is about delivering learning and knowledge and expertise in the way the learner of today wants to receive it," says Andra Popescu, Senior Vertical Marketing Manager at D2L. "Today's learners are just as different as today's customers – they're used to learning on-the-go through video and mobile devices, and it's time companies acknowledge that."

Using diverse modern learning strategies such as social assessment, bite-sized learning, video content and gamification helps employees enjoy learning and development experiences more, leading to better learning outcomes. "Many of our learners have commented on how much they enjoyed the quizzes and

how they have helped them solidify their knowledge, while also making the learning process much more fun," says Quintin Fox, Director of Training Development and Capacity Resourcing at Gay Lea Foods. "There's also an element of friendly competition. We found that many of them were comparing their marks with one another, motivating each other to improve."

"Our modern learning solution really helped us utilize the power of gamification to bring learning to life and create engaging, teachable moments across the modules. Our users can explore new concepts via interactions with characters within the fictional dairy co-operative. For instance, in one module, the CFO avatar instructs learners about the ratios of a successful company and outlines how these ratios impact the fictional co-operative."

[Read more](#) about Gay Lea Foods' experience with modern learning.



Effective Learning That Delivers Effective Customer Service

Your organization's ability to meet and exceed the modern retail shopper's expectations for customer experience begins and ends with your customer service and sales representatives. But if you're like most retail organizations, you're spreading your time and attention thin recruiting entry-level employees with little or no baseline workplace skills, only to turn around and face sky-high turnover rates.

You're under constant pressure to get new employees up to speed in a reasonable time frame, a pattern that is equally as frustrating for employees who must

attempt to master soft skills such as empathy and conflict resolution while staying informed about an ever-expanding amount of product knowledge.

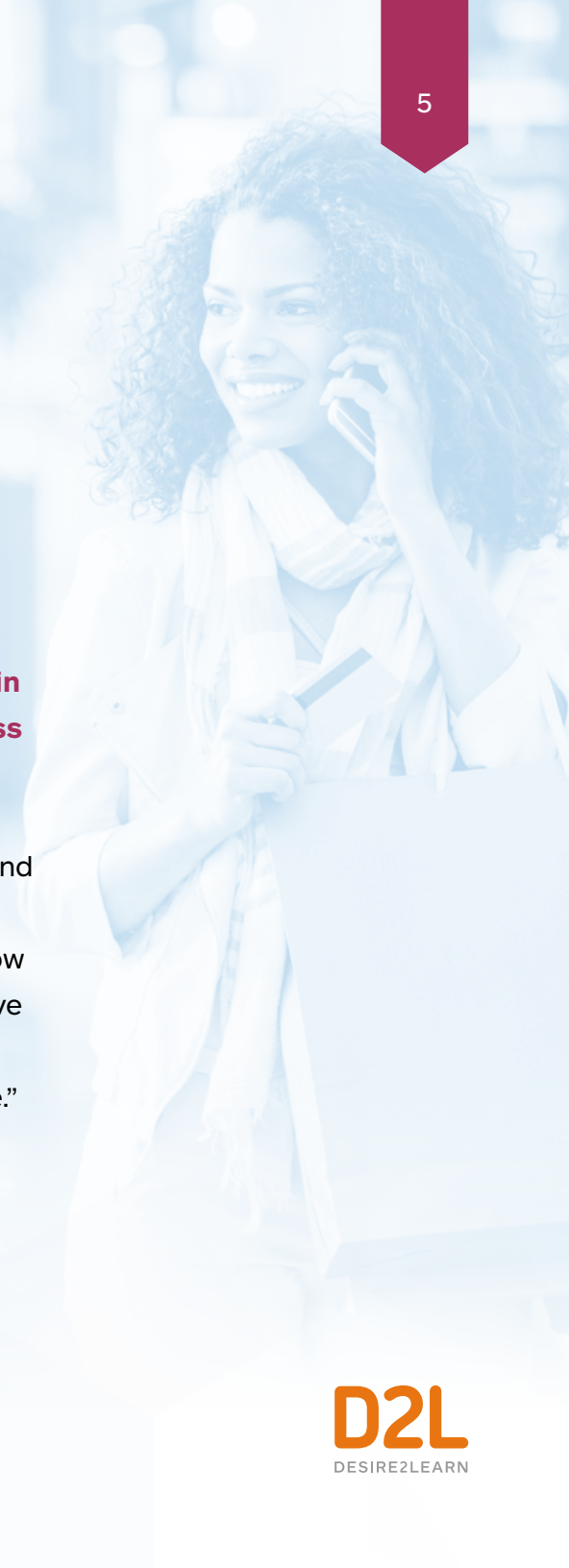
These challenges cannot be overcome by simply adding more training time to your onboarding process. Instead, you must reinvent the way you approach learning and development within your organization to pinpoint the learning outcomes that actually impact your employee's skill level, and then create a plan to measure and improve them.

Here's how to get started >

1. Define success in each role by tying essential skills to existing business goals.

It's a basic best practice to describe the responsibilities associated with each role when recruiting new team members. But for retailers looking to meet the business goal of delivering a superior customer service experience, you need to go a step further and identify the skills required to be successful in the retail associate role, such as empathy, relationship-building, critical thinking and conflict resolution. Defining success in such specific terms will allow you to design educational programs that promote learning outcomes directly associated with your business goals, leading to measurably improved skills and on-the-job behaviors that showcase those abilities.

“It can be challenging for L&D leaders to manage ROI because learning often isn't as tied to business metrics as it needs to be,” says Koreen Pagano, VP Corporate Product Management at D2L. **“It's critical to understand how different roles within your organization support your business goals because then you can identify which skills are important to your business strategy.** Especially as in-demand skills change and evolve so rapidly, tying those skills to existing business goals is how you'll be able to prioritize any gaps you have today while also preemptively identifying skills your workforce will need in the future.”



2. Assess baseline skills by creating unique skills benchmarks for each position.

Once you've identified how each role supports your business strategy and the skills required to succeed in the role, you'll need to set standards for how you'll determine whether or not an employee possesses those skills. These benchmarks will allow you to judge an employee's progress over time and, combined with yearly reviews, help you determine whether or not your program's learning outcomes align with real skills development.

"Being able to give skills evidence that an employee is excellent in empathy and relationship-building, but only adequate in conflict resolution, helps your management team understand what learning to deliver and how to rate the learning outcomes of a given program," says Popescu. "Your team can then prioritize and personalize

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the experience for the learner, focusing specifically on skills that improve their function in their role and help your business achieve its goals. The right combination of assessment tools, like video evaluations or a portfolio, allows you to identify when an employee meets a certain benchmark and when they require additional training."

3. Incite interest and earn engagement with immersive learning opportunities.

How you deliver educational content has a powerful impact on learning outcomes. Immersive learning experiences that deploy strategies such as [social assessment](#), [bite-sized learning](#), [video content](#) and [gamification](#) engage employees, improve learning retention and remove barriers to skills development. Social learning and assessment opportunities, such as making a video recording of a hypothetical customer service scenario and giving and providing peer and management feedback, allow employees to create communities of practice across the organization that share knowledge and expertise.

“A lot of business leaders expect employees to perform better after sitting through an eLearning module or a 60-minute training video,” says Pagano. “But merely providing the content is not an effective way to make the most of the time you have to deliver learning to the modern learner.

Today’s employees want to learn, but they need employers to meet them halfway by providing interactive, immersive experiences that help them improve their performance, not just memorize something.”

4. Use skills-mapping to support career growth and improve the lifetime value of employees.

Both employers and employees suffer the consequences of high turnover rates in the retail industry. Employers are stuck in a costly cycle of [hiring and onboarding new talent](#), while employees are caught in a discouraging cycle of [horizontal career moves](#). Imagine the time, money and effort that could be saved if employers invested in frontline workers to grow their skills and, in turn, those skilled employees were motivated to grow their careers within the company.

Skills-mapping, or the process of connecting skills and competencies of one role to other roles that use the same skills, is a powerful way for employers to recover their learning and development investment and increase the lifetime value of each new hire. It also provides a critical context for all of the skills-building experiences and assessments you're asking

your team to work through. When you close the loop for employees to show them how the skills they're learning map to different job roles, they gain valuable perspective about what they can do to advance within the company, improving both hiring and retention rates, [especially among Millennial workers](#).

“Painting a picture of what you have to offer as an employer is an increasingly important part of attracting and retaining top talent,” says Pagano. “It’s just not enough to provide learning opportunities. You need to be very clear about both what’s in it for your employees in their current role as well as the transferability of those skills for their career in the long-term. If you can show employees how the skills they’re learning map to higher level job roles within your company, they’ll appreciate and return that sense of investment.”

Retail customers have made it clear that the best way to differentiate your brand in today's competitive shopping environment is to deliver a superior customer experience.

So why leave your employee's ability to meet those expectations to chance?

If you want exceptional service and support to be your brand's competitive edge, give your employees access to modern learning opportunities that align learning outcomes to real on-the-job skills in an accessible format. Empowered with the proper training, knowledge and resources, your frontline employees will be able to put your brand's best foot forward both today and in the future.



At D2L, we are transforming the way the world learns. Our modern learning platform helps prepare and engage your retail workforce with a personalized learner experience, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, Social Assessment™, video assignments and more.

The retail industry today faces many challenges, such as high employee turnover, decentralized management, and a highly competitive market that includes online competitors and changing consumer expectations. To overcome these challenges, retailers need to change their approach to training and development by embracing a more modern learning experience.

Brightspace, our platform, is a world leader in content creation and curation, and enables employers to act in real time to keep workers on track. With a fully open API, D2L can easily integrate into your existing technology ecosystem.

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