

focus

eLearning Plus+

A fresh approach to online learning

GM Business Connect recently met with Terry Simmons, Managing Director of Trafford Park-based eLearning Plus+, to share with us how the business evolved and how the introduction of their new initiative, the 'Pay it Forward Learning Project', will help individuals to thrive in these challenging times:

Terry - many thanks for talking with us. Please can you describe how eLearning Plus+ developed as a business?

"eLearning Plus+ was actually born out of iDigital Marketing which was started in 2011 to focus on creating interactive digital content that organisations could use to build strong relationships with their target clients. iDigital Marketing continues to support blue chip clients and SMEs, creating innovative digital content to drive their marketing engagement, so there's still great synergy between the two businesses.

"One of the services iDigital Marketing offers is overhauling PowerPoint Decks so they connect better with the audience through strong visuals and interactive elements, which led to us getting involved in converting internal training decks for organisations.

"As our success in this area grew, we decided to upskill using professional online authoring tools to create compelling online learning experiences. Along the way, we also found that many organisations were unhappy with their Learning Management System, so we decided to build our own, which now helps support thousands of learners.

"All of which leads us to eLearning Plus+ today, which has a creative and passionate team of experienced specialists covering instructional design, graphic design, video, animation and platform development, so we can literally create and deliver any kind of learning content."

How do you help businesses with their people development and what are the current issues you see around training?

"Our total focus is on transforming individual performance within the workplace to introduce

clear business improvements and enhance company results. The one thing I truly believe is that great people make a great company, and if you want great people you need to develop and nurture them, so they deliver to their full potential.

"But we recognise for this to happen, we need to help organisations reconsider how they train their employees. After speaking with a wide range of organisations about their training activities, a clear picture began to emerge outlining the training issues they faced. For example, much of the existing training doesn't engage or inspire learners, lacks motivational support or is obviously a tick box exercise and is therefore under-valued.

"We also see that many learners are time starved, so they need training that works around their role. That's why our off the shelf courses are around 60 minutes. It enables the learner to develop new skills and knowledge, but they can still get on with their day to day job and start using this newly acquired knowledge at the same time.

"Interestingly, we've also found that trainers are recognising they have confused gimmicky activities with effective learning, and whilst gamification can of course introduce a level of fun and interest, this needs to be carefully thought through, otherwise you end up with training courses that are more of a distraction than a true knowledge tool.

"On top of this, we found learners don't want a set of talking head video courses, as they're not a great learning experience. They want relevant and engaging interactive content that targets their learning needs and can be used when and where they need it."

So having identified the issues, what do you offer to help businesses train better and overcome them?

"Businesses want to get better at delivering training that is focused on measurable learning outcomes, so we focus on three main streams to support engaging and effective learning.

"Firstly, by fast tracking their learning delivery with our off-the-shelf eLearning, which consists of over 120 pre-built online training courses covering the majority of workplace roles and needs. This means businesses don't need to create their own online training content from scratch but can immediately offer device friendly content that can be used at a time, place and pace that best suits the learner.

"Secondly, by supporting existing L&D teams with our bespoke content creation service, helping with everything from micro learning, interactive video and animated explainer videos through to fully immersive and interactive courses that use scenarios and role play. Most in-house L&D teams are already over stretched, so supplementing their content creation using our friendly team frees up this resource to focus on their existing projects.

"And finally, by providing an effective way of managing learners and learning content, by helping handle course registrations, tracking and reporting with SmartLMS, our powerful Learning Management System.

"Perhaps most importantly, we help our clients by clearly defining the results or KPIs required from their training initiatives and then delivering the cost effective learning experiences that achieve these results."

Tell us about where you were and what you were doing as a business up to March this year. How has Covid-19 affected yourselves?

"Our plan was to launch our new off the shelf catalogue of workplace courses in April and raise awareness of how we help organisations meaningfully improve their training delivery. We were focusing on networking as well as exhibitions and events to promote both eLearning Plus+ as a learning content developer and our new off the shelf courses.

"Clearly this all came to a grinding halt and at the time, it really felt like one of those rabbit in the headlight moments. It had an impact on all the work that had been put in by the team, and the months of preparation and planning, but we knew we had to find alternative ways to show organisations how we can empower their training delivery, so we took stock and set out a new action plan.

"We started attending virtual events across Manchester and have made some great connections with individuals and organisations that are both innovative and bold in wanting to move their training forward. Then, as many others have done, we embraced video conferencing tools rather than face to face meetings and to be honest, this has worked really well for us.

"It's been so effective for both sides to schedule a discovery call and find out what kind of help a business requires. At the same time, we can demo any of the solutions we offer, which helps us better understand the training needs and therefore suggest an appropriate way forward.

"We've also been running webinars and focused discussions covering areas like effective learning for remote workers and what training might look like in the longer term, and we'll continue to run these as we've had such great feedback.

"Please check our website to book onto future webinars."

Your new initiative 'Pay it Forward Learning Project' has now been confirmed. Please tell us about this?

"The whole team at eLearning Plus+ are really excited to launch the Pay it Forward Learning Project which provides free workplace based online learning for individuals (via an appropriate charity) who are trying to find their way back to employment. This includes ex-offenders, the homeless, veterans and the unemployed who want to demonstrate to potential employers that they have made the effort to show a level of personal commitment to grow their skills and enhance their employability.

"Demonstrating that they have the right attitude is challenging for many of these individuals as they often have to work harder to prove they should be considered for the role. To help improve their chances of securing employment, these learners can obtain a Certificate of Achievement from the course, which they can present when they attend interviews.

"This initiative might be something that organisations with a social values/responsibility aspect to their business could consider and their support would really change peoples' lives. We're proud to say that the Salford Foundation is one of the charities we are working with and who are supporting those in real need.

By the way, it's really simple to support. Individuals or organisations just visit our online course store and buy the Pay it Forward Learning Product. It costs just £20 and for each one bought we will provide one of our charities (or the charity they nominate) with any of the courses from our Business Essentials Catalogue up to the numbers purchased.

If anybody wants to find out more about the project, just visit our website: www.elearningplus.co.uk or get in touch with me directly on: terry@elearningplus.co.uk"

What are your future plans for eLearning Plus+? Have you any new projects or offers in the pipeline?

"Although we're in challenging times, we're currently planning for significant growth over the next few years and are keen to help those organisations that have the ambition to take their learning to the next level.

"We'll continue to add further courses into our Business Essentials Catalogue and we would love to hear from organisations about the courses they would like to see us introduce. Next, we're looking to change the way organisations deliver training, by helping them create course content that truly connects with the learner through the development of captivating learning experiences.

"And we're also finalising a range of fast track services that support more of a blended learning delivery for Training Organisations, by helping them introduce unique digital learning modules alongside their face to face or virtual delivery."

How do you think Covid-19 will affect your business in the near and medium term?

"We're now seeing a lot of interest from the more flexible and forward-thinking businesses that are using this time to upskill their staff and get them ready (future-proofed) as lockdown is increasingly lifted.

"There's also no doubt that the nature of training has changed considerably in the last few months and will continue to do so.

"We've always advocated blended learning to combine the effectiveness of instructor led interaction with online digital modules to boost the effectiveness of the training.

"So, we'll continue to create supportive learning solutions for those organisations that recognise the impact that great training has on helping their people become truly great."



Terry Simmons, Managing Director, eLearning Plus+

If you would like to learn more about the Pay it Forward Learning Project and the support eLearning Plus+ offers visit: elearningplus.co.uk or phone **0161 669 4418**