Think Like a Marketer to Ignite Employee Engagement

10 Ten Key Marketing Tactics to Build a Culture of Learning
In today’s world where skills are outdated every 3–5 months, it’s critical for companies to offer the best learning and development programs to keep employees engaged and productive.

“Virtually all CEOs (90 percent) believe their company is facing disruptive change driven by digital technologies, and 70 percent say their organization does not have the skills to adapt.”

2017 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends

Deloitte.
In order to reverse this trend, organizations are reinventing their L&D programs and incorporating consumer-first learning resources. The critical next step for L&D is to use innovative marketing tactics to build excitement and momentum for learning. Employees must be drawn into learning in the same way marketers grab the attention of busy, distracted consumers.

At Udemy, we’ve become the world’s largest online learning marketplace using a proven marketing strategy that’s created 30 million+ loyal learning fans. Based on our experience promoting learning to consumers, we’ve put together a marketing playbook to help HR and L&D professionals build a culture of learning.
In this playbook, you’ll learn:

- How L&D can leverage brand positioning to get into the minds of employees
- How your L&D team can define its unique value
- A proven marketing framework translated for L&D to drive learning engagement
- 10 marketing tactics with hands-on advice you can use immediately
- Best practices from L&D leaders at BuzzFeed and Dollar Shave Club
- Your very own checklist to begin to think like a marketer

“Marketing skills are not just useful for those with marketing titles. Adapting key marketing tactics to L&D programs can increase employee engagement and improve HR or L&D’s internal brand. As leaders look to build a culture of learning, using modern marketing strategies can drive employees to learn consistently and more importantly, motivate them to recommend their organization’s learning programs to their colleagues and friends.”

Yvonne Chen
VP of Marketing at Udemy for Business
Using Marketing to Engage Employees to Learn
A great example of brand positioning at its best involves taking a closer look at bottled water. One may think that something as basic as bottled water doesn’t represent anything more than H2O, but marketers have found a way to make their bottled water meaningful through brand positioning. For example, Voss water boasts its upscale packaging and artisan water source in Norway, Ethos touts its socially conscious efforts, Smartwater markets its electrolyte enriched and vapor distilled water, and Aquafina offers fresh water for happy people. The list goes on.

**What does marketing bottled water have to do with L&D?**

L&D teams have the same opportunity to go beyond just function and define a meaningful place for themselves in the minds of their employees.
A marketing framework for L&D

To help you think like a marketer, here is a basic framework to create your HR or L&D marketing strategy and promote your learning initiatives.

1. Attraction
   Spark interest
   Build awareness for your learning programs and improve the discoverability of your learning resources. How will you ignite the desire to learn? Seek to understand your employees as people.

2. Acquisition
   Get them to learn
   Get your employees to actually engage with the learning program you’ve scheduled or created. Active participation lays the groundwork for building a culture of learning.

3. Retention
   Build a love for learning
   Entice your employees to come back for more learning. Retention is all about keeping your employees continuously engaged in learning.

4. Referral
   Create lifelong learning fans
   Employee evangelists are essential to making your L&D programs successful. Encourage them to share their learning experiences with their colleagues and friends.
Using the four key marketing stages – Attraction, Acquisition, Retention, and Referral – we’ve developed **10 key marketing tactics** to help you establish your L&D brand and drive engagement in your workplace learning efforts.

### Ten Proven Marketing Tactics for L&D and HR

**Attraction**
- Develop your L&D team’s brand positioning
- Stake out a unique position that elicits emotion
- Know your employees – build your learner profiles

**Acquisition**
- Craft key messages with a clear call-to-action
- Be strategic with how you reach your employees

**Retention**
- Keep people engaged post-training
- Reward your learners

**Referral**
- Create a grassroots learning movement through evangelists
- Make learning contagious
- Track, analyze, and optimize your learning promotion
Attraction: Spark Interest

Get your L&D programs in front of employees and start piquing their interest in what you have to offer. This is the first step to start acquiring loyal L&D fans.
Develop your L&D team’s brand positioning

The positioning you define for your L&D team is crucial to how employees perceive your learning programs and your overall value as an L&D or HR department. A captivating team brand enables your learning initiatives to stand out.

Coming up with a positioning statement is the first step to defining who you are as an L&D or HR team. Your statement will help you charter the key learning values you want to instill in your organization.

To get started, ask yourself these key questions:

**For Whom?**
Who’s your target audience? What do they care about?

**What Value?**
What’s the unique value your L&D team or programs offer your target audience?

**Why and How?**
What’s the reason your employees should believe in your L&D team? How are you uniquely equipped to deliver on those values? Have you won any L&D awards?

Then create your unique positioning statement using this simple framework:

For [target audience], our L&D team delivers [unique value claim] because of [your unique capability].
Stake out a unique position that elicits emotion

Take your positioning a step further by defining what your L&D promise is to employees. The best brands today have an innate, emotional customer promise. Coke markets happiness. Dove promises real beauty. State Farm wants to be your good neighbor. These brands are about more than just soda, soap, or insurance. Your L&D or HR team must promise more than just training to employees.

Unique propositions anchor brands and will help anchor your L&D team in its learning efforts. For example, M&M’s unique claim is “The chocolate that melts in your mouth, not in your hand.” Tide detergent states, “If it’s gotta be clean, it’s gotta be Tide.” What’s your L&D promise?

Many HR or L&D departments make the mistake of referring to their programs as “Leadership training programs” or “Training effectiveness programs.” Instead, focus on what you want your employees to feel when interacting with your learning programs. Perhaps you’re planning to offer leadership training for new managers. In this case, your promise could be: “The leadership program that will jumpstart your career to infinity and beyond.”
Building a Learning Brand at 3M

3M’s Catalyst Program is a leadership development program, but marketing it as a “catalyst program” sparks the notion of ignition, new beginnings, and being in the driver’s seat. All of 3M’s other training programs also use clever and well-branded names that convey more than just function — Amplify, Ignite, and Spark. This makes learning at 3M more meaningful, and develops employees of all levels.

Regis Courtemanche
Director of Learning & Talent Development at BuzzFeed

“It’s crucial to be genuine and speak the language of your employees. Our employee population skews towards younger professionals. We have many first-time managers that face the challenge of going from peer to manager, so we have content catered to them like “How to Adult,” a series that teaches financial essentials and a “BFF to Boss” class that focuses on how to manage your friends and earn credibility.”

Know your employees — build your learner profiles

It’s important to know your employees. They are your customers. You must understand who your employees are beyond basic demographic information like the office they sit in, their age, and gender.

Marketers often use surveys to research and understand their target customer. L&D can use the same tactic to understand employees. A well-designed survey will help you understand your employees’ personal and professional goals as well as learning interests. Get in tune with your employees’ struggles so you can effectively address the WIIFM, “What’s in it for me?”

Once you have acquired a deep understanding of your employees, create 3–4 learner profiles to keep top of mind. Learner profiles help you grasp the learning patterns unique to your organization and enable you to create personalized messages targeted at key groups of people.
4 Key Learning Profiles in the Workplace and How to Motivate Them

Recent research at Udemy for Business sought to understand what prompts people at work to learn. We distilled this research into 4 key learner profiles.

The new skills learner
These employees want to acquire new skills for a specific project or a new role. They’re excited and ready to learn. The new skills learner likes to receive recommendations from his L&D team and manager on what learning content is best suited for his role.

The constant learner
Constant learners have a passion for learning and are internally motivated to improve their skills regularly. These employees want to expand their realm of expertise and knowledge everyday. Constant learners need and want access to on-demand learning technology.

The anxious learner
Anxious learners are thrown into a new work environment where they aren’t familiar with the tools or framework in front of them. They’re nervous about performing well in their job, which is why they’re motivated to overcome these challenges through learning. They want access to on-demand learning and like to receive recommendations on relevant learning courses.

The change learner
Change learners are forced to learn due to an external change. Examples include businesses migrating to the cloud that require up-skilling the IT team or a regulatory change that requires re-training healthcare or legal workers. These individuals prefer set learning paths and direct manager guidance.
How BuzzFeed focuses on employees as customers

Regis Courtemanche
Director of Learning & Talent Development at BuzzFeed

Address real-life challenges
If we’ve created a learning program or course that genuinely addresses the real-life challenges of our employees, more than 90% of registrants attend. This is because the content is innately engaging and fuels the curiosity our employees already have. We diagnose these challenges through surveys, working with our HR business partners, and informal conversations in the hallway or local pub. Anytime we’ve had a “failed” program, we were ineffective at diagnosing the real-life problem the team was trying to solve. For example, it might be as a result of miscommunication between the team lead and front-line employees, or training a skill that the team was not incentivized to actually use with clients.

Disconnect your leadership goals from employee goals
Leadership’s business goals for a learning program are not always important to employees. I’ve seen disconnect during the program design process where not enough attention is paid to the WIIFM (What’s in it for me?). Why should the learners care about this program enough to leave work, pay attention, or show up? If you get this wrong, nothing else matters. Of course, you always need a top-down business reason for developing the learning program. But even more importantly, it’s critical to have the bottom-up buy-in from your employees so that they understand how your program can make them smarter, better, or faster at their jobs.
Once you’ve created an inspiring learning brand and understand what employees want, it’s time to roll up your sleeves and take your learning programs to market.
Craft key messages with a clear call-to-action

A great go-to-market strategy starts with messaging. People won’t respond to you if you’re not speaking to them in a direct, compelling way. Create key messages tailored to each learner profile you’ve defined and include a specific call-to-action (CTA).

CTAs are incredibly effective in getting people to take action, or engage in a particular activity. Marketers use them frequently in emails or on websites via buttons like “Click here” or “Learn more.”
Effective calls-to-action

Here’s an example of three messages with effective calls-to-action (CTAs), targeted towards the learner profile of new, first-time managers. Each message focuses on a relevant “pain point” that new managers often experience. Addressing real-life pain points will increase the chance that new managers will open your message and engage with what you’re offering.

Target learner profile:
New first-time managers who need to improve their leadership skills

1. Attraction
2. Acquisition
3. Retention
4. Referral
Crafting the best message won’t matter if it falls on deaf ears. You must reach employees where they are most likely to listen and respond to your messages.

Within your organization, you have a number of ways (i.e. channels) to reach people—from emails and internal social media channels to live announcements at company meetings. Figure out the right places to get the word out about your learning programs.

Keep in mind that different teams may respond differently to your messages. For example, if your sales team communicates regularly on internal social channels like Slack or Salesforce Chatter, make announcements in those channels instead.
It is a great accomplishment once employees take the training program you've created or use the learning resource you've been promoting. But don't rest on your laurels just yet, there's still more work to do. Next you’ll need to find ways to build a love for learning in your organization.
Keep people engaged post-training

Keep the learning fire burning. Don’t stop telling people about your learning programs just because you’ve launched a new course or completed an in-person training. Think about post-training marketing programs to get employees to engage with even more courses and learning activities on a regular basis.

Lean on employee success stories

It’s always more powerful when someone else highlights the benefits of your learning programs. Tap into the employees who had an exceptional learning experience with your content and programs. Did an employee attribute her promotion to one of the courses she took? Tell that story widely to show the benefits of your L&D initiatives.

Build an email marketing campaign to nudge employees to learn

One way you can keep learning top of mind is to rely on a proven marketing technique, referred to as a drip marketing campaign. A drip marketing campaign is a planned series of communications (usually emails) that encourage a singular desired action. Messages in a drip campaign are typically triggered by a specific date/time or based on key actions taken/not taken.
To develop a drip marketing campaign for your L&D program, have a clear point of view on what the desired action is. What do you want employees to do?

Here’s an example of a drip marketing campaign targeted towards a sales team.

**Desired action:** Get 100% of the North America Sales team to enroll in the intermediate Excel course following in-person Excel 101 training.

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<tr>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Trigger</th>
<th>Goal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email 1</td>
<td>3 days after in-person training is completed</td>
<td>Employees attended and completed the in-person training</td>
<td>Congratulate the salespeople who completed the Excel 101 training on a job well done. Invite them to continue building their skills through an intermediate Excel course online. Highlight how these skills will help them achieve their sales quota goals. Answer the What’s In It For Me? Provide a direct link to the online course via a call-to-action button (CTA).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email 2</td>
<td>7 days after Email 1 was sent</td>
<td>If the employee doesn’t take any action from Email 1</td>
<td>Get your sales managers to send a reminder about the intermediate Excel course to their teams. Use a catchy title that ties in with your L&amp;D team’s brand positioning so that your sales teams respond to your email. Provide a direct link to the online course via a call-to-action button (CTA).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email 3</td>
<td>10 days after Email 2 was sent</td>
<td>If the employee doesn’t take any action from Email 2</td>
<td>Generate word-of-mouth marketing and tap into a salesperson’s competitive spirit. Highlight a success story of another sales team member who surpassed her sales quota or achieved an important milestone because she improved her analytical skills. Provide a direct link to the online course via a call-to-action button (CTA).</td>
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Reward your learners

Incentives are core to any marketing program and essential for keeping your employees learning.

Here are a few ideas:

1. **Build in time to learn at work**: This is a reward in itself because you’re giving people time to develop themselves. Getting a monthly “Learning Hour” on everyone’s calendar is a great way to prioritize learning.

2. **Make learning part of career paths**: Build in learning as part of your employee career pathing and performance review cycle. How does learning reward them in their long-term career goals?

3. **Involve employees**: Involve employees to help design your training program or course and incorporate employee feedback into your development process. When people feel part of something big, they’re more likely to spread the word and engage.

4. **Run learning contests**: When promoting your training, give out prizes like gift cards or company swag to the employee or “Learning Crew” member that learned the most in a quarter, or recruited the most people to attend one of your training programs.

5. **Gain manager buy-in**: As an HR or L&D leader, you can’t promote learning alone. Work with the management team to promote learning behavior. Managers need to know which of their employees are avid learners. Nudge them to acknowledge these individuals as learning role models at regular team meetings or in internal team emails.

Incentives are core to any marketing program and essential for keeping your employees learning.
When you begin to see employees sharing your learning content with their coworkers, that’s when you know your L&D machine is starting to work.
The most trusted form of advertising is a recommendation from someone you trust. That’s why businesses always measure their Net Promoter Score (NPS) — whether a customer would recommend their product or service to a friend or colleague.

When it comes to HR or L&D, if an employee raves about the training he just completed and shares that experience with his team, you’ll likely see higher than average adoption rates for that particular course. And if your employee posts about his great learning experience on your company’s internal channels, that’s even better! That is the kind of viral marketing you want to build and amplify, and one that you cannot create on your own.

Create a grassroots learning movement through evangelists

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How to create a grassroots learning movement

Dinesh Thiru
Senior Vice-President of Marketing at Udemy

Build a Learning Crew

When you’re designing your training program, create a diverse internal “Learning Crew” comprised of your most avid learners. Your learning crew is your eyes and ears on the ground. Get feedback on what L&D programs went well, and which ones didn’t. Ask for their ideas on new learning programs you can invest in. A regular feedback loop will help you improve your learning initiatives in real-time and strengthen the presence of HR and L&D across the company.

Create heroes out of your most loyal learners

Keep your most motivated learners happy. Providing positive feedback and awards for excellent learning behavior are great ways to recognize people for going above and beyond. Listen and take action on their feedback. Your learning fans will create the most inspiring success stories.
Bake social media engagement into your training

What I have done that works well is bake social media engagement into my course content. If we do a case study on Twitter where we are looking for bugs, I ask the students to tweet them as they find them. One way L&D can generate more evangelists is to encourage employees to post questions or comments during L&D programs or training courses on internal company channels to stimulate discussion. This not only drives discussion in a new format, it can also help create visibility, curiosity, and buzz around learning at work, and motivate others to engage.

Encourage employee testimonials

I also encourage my students that complete a course to tweet their thoughts or their course completion and tag me in the tweet. For an L&D manager trying to get employee enrollments, I would suggest flipping this model and congratulating employees on internal social media channels for finishing a course or program. That kind of recognition is always appreciated and gets visibility for the L&D program or course internally. If an employee transfers to a new team or gets promoted as a result of one your L&D programs, share the story internally to inspire others to learn.
Make learning contagious

L&D Marketing Ideas from the Dollar Shave Club

Cleve McMillan
Senior Manager of Education at Dollar Shave Club

Create fun GIFs to get people’s attention and increase social sharing

We engage our employees by creating addictive email invites to our trainings. For example, we might take a piece of the training and turn it into a GIF—an interactive image. Ultimately, our goal is to get them to open the email, read it, and share it with their colleagues.

Humor and outtakes drive engagement

We use behind-the-scenes Instagram photos and video bloopers to drive engagement with our learning programs. We always produce video outtakes or bloopers during our product training video shoots. This brings our training to life, makes it real, and shows another side of training that isn’t as formal or buttoned up as usual. We’ll use these short, 20-second bloopers to drive interest and we’ll use them to promote our learning initiatives via email and internal communication tools like Slack. We’re always thinking, “what would make employees share this content?”
Marketers rarely reach perfection on the first try. They are always looking at engagement data and optimizing the customer journey. To be successful, L&D needs to do the same.

Not everything can be measured, but try your best to keep track of what you’re doing. Are people engaging with your L&D email campaign? Have you noticed an increase in course enrollments since the company announcement you made? Are people spending more time learning after you launched your internal Learning Crew? What L&D email message drove the highest engagement?

Know what worked so you can replicate it, and know what didn’t work so you can change and optimize your L&D marketing efforts.
This is the year that L&D must continue to push the envelope and innovate workplace learning. Leveraging key marketing tactics can help L&D teams keep learning top of mind and build a culture of learning. At Udemy for Business we’re always looking for ways to bring learning to the forefront by offering the best next-generation learning solution for organizations small and large.

Learn more about Udemy for Business:
Your L&D Growth Marketing Campaign Checklist and Workbook

**Acquisition**
- Define your L&D or HR team’s brand positioning
- How can you promote specific courses or training programs with innovative names?
- What key questions do you need to ask to understand your employee’s learning needs and goals?
- Identify your 3–4 target learner profiles.
- Pick one learner profile and map out their needs/problems.

**Activation**
- Brainstorm the key messages and calls to action (CTAs) for your different learner profiles.
- What are the main channels that your target learner profiles prefer? Email, Slack, Salesforce, the Company Wiki, others?

**Retention**
- Brainstorm ideas to keep learning top of mind for employees.
- Identify key success stories and testimonials from your most loyal learners.
- What messaging can you use in your L&D drip email marketing campaign for +3 days, +7 days, and +10 days post-training to keep people engaged in learning?
- Outline your learning incentives so you can say thanks to your most loyal learners.

**Referral**
- Who are your internal learning evangelists? Think of one person from each department that could be part of your core “Learning Crew.”
- What employee success stories inspire others to learn?
- Create shareable content that promotes learning. GIFs? Video bloopers? Others?

**Notes**
About Udemy for Business

Udemy for Business helps companies stay competitive in the digital transformation of the workplace by offering fresh, relevant, and personalized on-demand learning content powered by a content marketplace. Our mission is to help employees do whatever comes next—whether that’s tackling the next project, learning a new skill, or mastering a role. We do this by curating 3,000+ of Udemy’s top-rated courses taught by the world’s leading experts. Our content covers key business and technical topics ranging from development and IT to leadership, marketing, design, stress management, and much more. In addition to a curated content collection, organizations can host and distribute their own proprietary content on Udemy.

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