



Hogeschool Utecht's Rapid Course Development

400 digital courses
produced in a few
months and 1,700
courses in just three
years.

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How HU Created 400 Digital Courses in Just a Few Months (and 1700 in Three Years)

As the experience of this organisation shows, anybody can become expert in creating training content fast.

Hogeschool Utrecht faced a big problem. The Netherlands-based university of applied sciences needed to train a lot of teachers for their certifications—and fast. The challenge: These particular Dutch educators were situated 7,800 kilometres away on three Caribbean islands that had just become special municipalities of the country.

Fortunately, the institution was already working on a solution. With the use of the Eureka learning management system (LMS) subject matter experts set to work building online courses. Armed with the right processes and technology, the university accomplished the production of 400 digital courses in a few months and 1,700 courses in just three years.

This article lays out the journey my university followed to develop those processes, describes the technology needed to achieve the project

and provides advice on how to emulate the success. What's important about Utrecht's example is that it's easily translatable to the rapid creation of learning content in any type of organisation.

Getting Started

Utrecht's School of Education had already been testing the use of online learning to reach two groups of students.

The first was made up of those who lived elsewhere in the Netherlands and couldn't move to Utrecht for their master education, being actual teachers. The students didn't want to come to Utrecht each week, so we had to find a different solution for teaching them. There was demand from the market.



The second group of students were those enrolled in specialized degree programs that had too few students to sustain on their own. For example, there weren't many people pursuing careers as German-language teachers. But by collabourating with other universities, those small programs could be brought together to make a group of learners sufficiently large to sustain and support.

In both scenarios, digital learning provided an alternative to the expensive and time-consuming travel burdens of in-person instruction. Most important was that the learning process of the students was supported, not disrupted, by the digital component.

If Utrecht had been a company instead of a university, that first group of students might represent employees in remote offices; and the second group could be employees from outside the organisation that need the same training as employees inside—such as individual franchisees, customers, sales representatives and support and maintenance service providers. It's

logistically and financially difficult to bring those individuals to a single location for instruction on new products, procedures and regulations. With the right technology in place, you can deliver online training to them and bring them up to speed anytime, anywhere.

While a few people had been dabbling with digital course creation, the university had been struggling with a Microsoft SharePoint deployment to make those training modules available to students. But the pedagogical concept of the teacher training department was not at all supported by this SharePoint solution. To promote “lifelong learning,” we developed an educational concept at Hogeschool Utrecht that used blended learning and strong social interaction between teachers and students.

At that time, I served as consultant for educational innovation. The university asked me to design a digital learning platform based on our pedagogical needs that used video content and other learning materials and could support learning teams. Nick Erikson, the chief technology officer and

co-founder of Eurekos who worked with me in that first phase of the project, understood very well what we needed and was able to translate my instructional design into real working digital solutions.

Sure, teachers were used to standing in front of students and delivering the content in person. As they told Nick and me, “You can't do my material digitally.” Working together, however, we created 15 weeks of classes in a matter of days.

Those of us who were early “test pilot” faculty members developing digital content for the digital learning courses served as ambassadors among the other instructors at the School of Education. Suddenly, faculty were very willing to make courses. We told many teachers, “You can do this next year.” But they lined up in front of my office saying, “I want to do it now.”

About that time, those three Caribbean islands, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, became special municipalities of the Netherlands. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science dedicated



funding to recruit and train educators for island schools, which were facing a considerable teacher shortage. Suddenly, Utrecht, which is one of the major universities for training teachers, was called on to expand its pedagogical concept and make it available immediately.

The university administrators understood what we were doing and supported the implementation with time and resources. That enabled us to develop what now is known as Eurekos, a real Next Generation Digital Learning Environment. Because the courses have been developed in an inductive way, support from teachers and students is very high. Both roles are involved in the development of the platform. After all, both the teachers and the students wanted those courses. And the technology was supporting it. In short order, students were taking courses online and meeting with university instructors once every six weeks to complete their training.

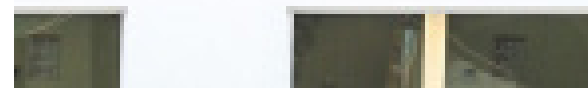
While the university set up on-campus production studios where faculty could go to create the videos and other kinds of

content for their courses, many instructors chose to do it from their office or home in spare minutes.

Within a few months, the original 20 or 30 courses grew to become 400. Within three years, that count had more than quadrupled. Each course consists of instructor videos lasting between 5 and 10 minutes, videos produced externally and made available to students, as well as animations, gamification, quizzes and textual content, among other components.



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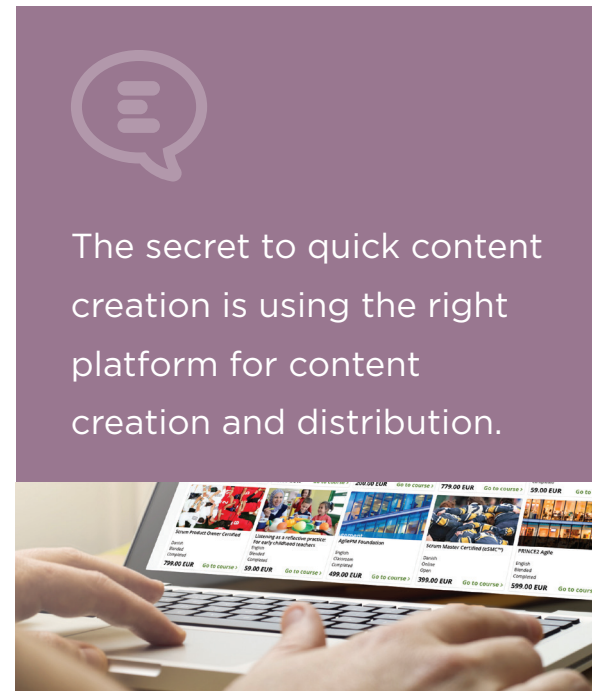


Now the students who took those courses from the university are using the same technology and processes to create lessons to use in their classrooms too, as they work as interns. Their students can watch videos on their own and come to class ready to join in on discussions, projects and other learning activities, all within our scope of personalized, blended learning.

In business and government, new programs are continually being introduced. While the largest corporations may be able to turn to an in-house learning and development unit to develop training on those new programs or contract that work out to a training production firm, most companies don't have access to those high-priced luxuries and sometimes it takes much longer. However, every organisation has internal experts, people who would be willing to help their fellow staffers learn how to follow the new procedures or use the new equipment if they just had a little bit of training on how to do it, along with the right technology.

The Secret to the Fast Production of Training Content

The secret to quick content creation is using the right platform for content creation and distribution. For Hogeschool Utrecht's School of Education that was Eureka, an LMS that specializes in helping people do rapid course and content creation. It takes



just a few minutes to set up the course structure in Eureka and then add the content—those videos and other elements—that learners will interact with. Among the features of Eureka that have proven most useful to us:

Collaborative content creation. Sometimes content needs to be created by people working together from multiple locations. Eureka enables them to co-create and maintain learning content with page locking and version tracking.

The ability to clone courses and modify them with localized information. One of the advantages of the way Eureka works is that you can easily make copies of an existing course and work with that copy. If you have one course that fits, you can make a copy of it and continue working on that for subsequent courses.

The capacity to keep courses fresh. Maintenance is an issue with content. It can go out of date quickly and for all kinds of reasons—regulatory changes, new processes, new management preferences. With Eureka, users can make universal



Five Ways to Speed Up Course Creation

1. Find enthusiasts to help spread the word.

Identify those people in your organisation who are willing to create training modules for their purposes and then serve as beacons to let others—who might be sceptical—know that it's doable. Once you realize that subject matter experts are all around and you don't have to wait for training professionals (or actors) to tackle the work, your content creation will accelerate dramatically. People will teach each other and start to utilize each other's content. They don't all have to start from scratch. Then it will spread like rings in the water.

2. Consider auditions.

You may need it. People don't have to be instructional designers to know how to teach others. Some people have a knack for it and they have an excellent view of what content is meaty or meaningful, based on their subject matter expertise. Or they might have a knack of presenting things in a specific way. Your goal: to unleash the potential of your organisation by finding those people who want to make that effort.

3. Monitor the data to avoid wasting time.

The best learning management systems provide reporting on what's being used and for how long. Focus on creation of those items that gain traction among your learners. If nobody is watching the introductory video that explains what every other lesson contains or few people are participating in the discussion forums, dump those from your courses and move on.

4. Use integrations.

For example, H5P is a set of standards that simplifies the sharing of interactive lesson modules that can be easily integrated into eLearning to make training much more engaging. If you have a source for learning content that you can bring into your own courses, using an application that supports integrations will save you the effort of having to create it yourself.

5. Choose a partner wisely.

There are large companies that promise their learning management system will work in any situation—as long as you change your processes to fit with their technology. It's better to identify a learning management system provider that is responsive to user needs and will jump on good ideas and make them a reality as quickly as possible.



changes throughout the content as required. Here's a simple example. At Hogeschool Utrecht, many instructors share YouTube videos with their students as part of their course materials. When YouTube changes how it presents links to videos, it would be a tedious job to have to update every link manually that was posted in the course. Eureka allows changes to be applied universally.

A user-friendly interface. Users just point and click to set up their lessons. That is, of course, a great advantage of this platform. Instructors could do it easily, and it was fun to do, and they had good results. That's why it was easy to get big numbers of courses created.

Support for social learning. It's very hard to sit at your kitchen table and do learning all by yourself. It's better if you can meet people and learn together. Eureka facilitates social interaction through standard LMS features, like discussion forums, and takes it a step further by offering seamless access to Twitter and Facebook within courses.

Mobile-readiness. Content that's created in Eureka works with any display size immediately. There's no need for users to worry about technical details. And learners can use whatever mobile device they have available—laptop, tablet or smartphone—to do their training on the go.

Solid administration. On the back side, the learning management system includes administrative tools, such as the ability to lay out the path of learning for a particular student based on level of expertise, role, or interest. A learning analytics component enables the student to track his or her progress and address specific skills gap. For instructors or managers, the system also reports data about progress and performance.

The advantage of Eureka is that if you have an idea, you can realize it quickly. People are enthusiastic about creating their own online courses because technology is not hindering them.



Hans van Bergen specialised in the use of IT in education for more than 25 years. First, he created e-learning courses in music for primary school teachers. Then he was involved in developing and implementing a digital portfolio in teacher training for many years. And finally, he was a consultant for innovation in education at Hogeschool Utrecht. Hans has presented his ideas on blended learning at Dutch universities and other educational institutes all over the world. Recently, Hans retired from Hogeschool Utrecht and is now senior partner at Creblz International.



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