Lifetime Health & Fitness: Simulated podcasts helping apprentices to prepare for exams

Summary

Lifetime Training in collaboration with Fresh Air Studios has produced a series of exemplar audio-only learning objects as podcasts in a variety of formats, to support fitness apprenticeship level 2 learners. The podcasts are enabling learners to be more prepared and helping to give them more confidence before they go into their practical assessments.

About Lifetime Health and Fitness

Established in 1995, Lifetime's founding principle was to support individuals and businesses to perform better through the delivery of outstanding training programmes.

Lifetime Training offers pre-employment training, apprenticeship programmes and training courses. They have developed the skills and careers of thousands of individuals and have improved the performance of some of the biggest, and smallest, employers in the UK across a wide range of business sectors:

- Fitness and active leisure Food service and hospitality Business support services
- Children and young people’s workforce
- Adult and elderly care

The challenge

Traditionally apprentices at Lifetime Training are assessed on their competence of using gym equipment and their practical knowledge of health and fitness during examinations. When faced with these high-pressured activities apprentices can find it difficult to perform to their own expectations. Emma Barrett, e-Learning Manager at Lifetime Training wanted to find a way to enhance e-learning and the use of technology to try and provide apprentices with more ways of accessing and using resources.

David Rowe, e-Learning Adviser, Jisc RSC South West identified the potential to create a set of highly informative audio podcasts that could be used to enhance access to resources at Lifetime...
Training.

One of the biggest challenges for the new project has been raising the awareness of the podcasts with apprentices and tutors. To deliver new styles and methods of teaching and breaking the mould between what staff are used to delivering and providing training via podcasts, has been unfamiliar ground for staff.

“People get very used to using the same resources that they have used all the time, so getting them to change their practice in terms of taking up a new resource and using it with the learners has been our biggest challenge.” – Emma Barrett, e-Learning manager

The activity

David first contacted Emma with the proposal for the production of a series of exemplar audio podcasts. The idea being that the podcasts could represent a point of excellence that all providers, particularly from WBL (work-based learning) and ACL (adult community learning) could use to inform their delivery and practice.

In order to facilitate the production of the audio podcasts David already had knowledge of a company called Fresh Air Studios, who he knew could potentially produce professional podcast resources.

“We jumped at the chance to get involved and David put us into contact with a professional company, which was really exciting for us.” – Emma Barrett, e-Learning manager

Jisc RSC South West provided a small amount of seed corn funding to support the creation of these exemplar learning objects. They also provided support, guidance, advice and an upload facility to enable the learning objects to be downloaded and used by any other provider.

Lifetime Training primarily used text-based resources with their learners, so the opportunity to develop audio resources was something that Emma really felt would be a benefit for their organisation.

“We are aware that our learners often have different learning styles, so we were really interested in getting a wider variety of types of learning resources.”
– Emma Barrett, e-Learning manager

Once Lifetime had secured the funding, they discussed with key staff in the fitness team the kind of ideas that they wanted in terms of the audio podcasts and what would be most useful to their learners.

Vicky and Paul developed a script, based on previous paper-based resources and once they had agreed a concept they worked with Fresh Air Studios to amend the script before they selected suitable voice-over artists to record it.

“I went through the different components of what the learners do in their practical assessment, such as the introduction and the warm-up, I then divided it up into the different sections and wrote the scripts from there.” - Vicky Tester, Fitness Technical Writer

The audio podcasts have additionally been uploaded to the Excellence Gateway and the Jisc RSC SW websites and can be accessed directly or downloaded.
The project outputs consist of 8 audio learning objects in MP3 and WAV formats, PDF versions of the scripts, plus a Guide to How to Produce Audio Only Resources.

The modules available for download are as follows:

- Session 1 Introduction
- Session 2 Warm-Up
- Session 3 Cardiovascular
- Session 4 Free Weights
- Session 5 Resistance machines
- Session 6 Cool Down
- Session 7 Core Stability
- Session 8 Post Workout Stretching
- Session 9 How not to create a podcast

Example screen shot of the downloadable audio podcast resources available from the Lifetime Health & Fitness website

The outcomes

The audio podcasts have already proved to be very useful for the learners and although it is still early days for the project many tutors are using the podcasts for their face-to-face meetings.

“When they actually get to hear something it helps them to visualise it a bit more and gives them more confidence, as opposed to just reading something on a piece of paper.” - Emma Barrett, E-learning manager

One of the important points to get across through this project is that the podcasts have been produced professionally and represent a bank of resources that act as an exemplar for other providers.
There are a number of important factors to bear in mind to ensure the effectiveness of the learning resource, perhaps the most important is that:

- **Audio quality is high**
- **There is no background noise**
- **Words should be read carefully, without ‘ums and ahs’**
- **Preferably scripted for consistency and accuracy**

If the above key aspects are not followed then the listener will quickly switch off and their interest will be lost.

"People get very used to using the same resources that they have used all the time, so getting them to change their practice in terms of taking up a new resource and using it with the learners has been our biggest challenge." - Emma Barrett, E-learning manager.

The ability for learners to reflect and use the podcasts as a 24/7 available resource is something of a major benefit to them. Learners are better prepared with the podcasts than they were before and they will prove to be an invaluable resource for their assessments and exams.

"Just by listening to the podcast I am more confident in my approach to the final exam." - Jan Haggerman, Lifetime Training Apprentice.
Learners can also access the podcasts through their own mobile devices so that they can listen to them at any place and any time to suit them.

“I think it’s brilliant for our learners, because it’s something that a lot of people find quite difficult being in that position – for example taking someone around their assessment – so it’s just giving them another way of learning and understanding what they need to be delivering on that day." - Paul Waters, Curriculum Delivery Manager.

“They cover all aspects of the final exam and are a great insight into what to expect. I have found these podcasts to be a great study tool as being someone who’s method of learning is preferably audio / visual.” - Jan Hageman, Lifetime Training Apprentice.

**The impact**

Despite the project infancy, there are already excellent examples of how Lifetime Training has been using the podcasts with their learners.

"I think they are very informative and a great tool for preparing for you physical exam," - Jan Haggerman, Lifetime Training Apprentice.

One learner, who has dyslexia, has found the resources extremely useful because she finds it difficult to read text and engage. With the podcasts she now has access to something that she can not only reflect on in her own time, but something that is much easier for her to use. The usability of the podcasts will really make a big difference in terms of providing something for learners with dyslexia.

“I think it is great that we are embracing new technology and new ways of working in order to provide the learners with a better and more familiar experience. The content of the podcasts is very well detailed and gives all the opportunity to experience best practice, it also helps them to know what to expect. This can make a huge difference to how apprehensive learners may be. In my experience depending on how nervous learners are, this can have a direct impact on how well they perform in the assessment, anything we can do to alleviate their fears can only be positive." - Ian Barry, Regional Trainer.

“It was great because the learners could hear the level of enthusiasm that was needed, because you need to sound enthusiastic when you’re involved in an assessment.” - Emma Barrett, E-learning manager.

**The lessons learned**

“Just go for it – choose a subject, it was fairly easy for us to do – the most important thing is to choose a subject that you feel learners will understand and can visualise if they’re listening to it.” - Emma Barrett, E-learning manager.

**Useful links**

[Lifetime Training website](#)

[Jisc RSC South West website](#)

[Jisc Digital Media website](#)
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