Broadland Council Training Services – Winning your e-Learning Spurs with Xerte/Maxos

Summary

Broadland Council Training Services have reined in their reliance on traditional learning methods by introducing Xerte/Maxos to their equine-based students. Learners who were once deluged by stacks of paper and unable to utilise an internet connection in a horse yard are now able to access interactive learning exercises using Maxos: Xerte on a memory stick. Students are now more engaged and focused on their studies, teaching methods are much more diverse, and success rates have improved.

About Broadland Council Training Services

Broadland Council Training Services offer a variety of apprenticeship and management training programmes.

As a Work Based Learning (WBL) provider, they regularly have over 250 learners working in a range of vocational apprenticeships in Norfolk.

Their apprentices usually have a work placement to fulfil the work based learning aspect of the Apprenticeship. The equine training centre uses many yards throughout Norfolk, covering all types of work, including riding schools, livery yards, competition yards, studs and rescue and rehabilitation.

The challenge

Before BCTS started using Xerte/Maxos they just gave paper handouts to their learners. However, many of the students were not at all engaged with this learning method.
“We wanted to use Xerte/Maxos with one particular learner who is dyslexic, and has problems concentrating. She has her own laptop and can now plug in the Xerte/Maxos to work on at home. I can then take it away and have a look at the work she has been doing.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

BCTS’s equine-based apprentices usually work on a small yard with one owner and a couple of other staff. These learners and their team are usually more focused on the practical side of animal care and less interested in the theoretical side of learning.

“We decided that we wanted to use Maxos as we are mainly travelling to places where we can’t access the internet. If we have to arrange to have an internet connection at these rural locations, it can cause a great deal of hassle as sometimes we have to ask to use the office at the site, and at other times the employers don’t have a connection anyway.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

**The activity**

BCTS were first introduced to Xerte/Maxos during a training session with RSC Eastern Technical Advisor, Thomas Rochford, in the summer of 2011.

The team had previously used a DVD by Warwickshire College, called ‘Under the horse’s skin’, which was full of interactive exercises for learners. This
inspired them to investigate Xerte/Maxos, which they wanted to tailor to their own specifications.

After the session, the team immediately understood the benefits of Xerte/Maxos and started using the system with a Horsecare student in the autumn of 2011 to coincide with an Ofsted inspection.

“I’m ‘horsey’ and not very technical, but it was so easy to use that I just sat there one night and muddled my way through it. I was soon able to do quite a few bits and pieces, including adding photos, drag and drop, hotspots, gap word fill, and much more.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

Although BCTS didn’t have any budgets or timescales when they first started using Xerte/Maxos, they jumped straight in when they first introduced the system to the learner.

“She started using it and took to it straight away. Xerte/Maxos worked better than I thought it would.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

It wasn’t difficult to introduce Xerte/Maxos to the learner. The team decided to introduce it to her in bitesize chunks and as a result she was engaged and much more able to concentrate.

Using Xerte/Maxos drag and drop to show the circulatory system of a horse

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Every three years BCTS has its Ofsted inspection, and in 2011 they decided that they would showcase the way they had been using ILT to help students with special needs.

“As a part of the project, Ofsted watched a teaching session on the circulatory system of a horse. We had a basic line diagram of the heart and discussed how blood circulated around the body. The learner was able to use the Xerte/Maxos drag and drop to show her knowledge, which met her learning needs. It was a successful session, and a successful inspection.”

The outcomes

“Xerte/Maxos is very easy to use for equine subjects as it’s interactive and visual. If I want to teach a learner about 20 metre circles I can get a picture, use the drag and drop, hotspots or wordfill, and then add a description, and we have an interactive activity.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

The BCTS team believe that learners are more interested in working on a computer screen than with a piece of paper these days.

“That’s the way she likes to learn. She likes to actually be actively doing something, rather than reading a piece of paper. When she’s working on the computer it calms her down and she can get on with her work.”

The Horsecare student likes Xerte/Maxos as it has the drag and drop function. This function is particularly useful for learning about the anatomy of a horse.

The learner is able to see a picture of a horse with various terms located at the side of the screen. She can then drag and drop the terms into the correct anatomical positions.

The variety and accessibility of the learning objects within Xerte/Maxos has enabled the learner to stay engaged, complete tasks and learn her subjects, which has also increased the learner’s confidence.

“She believes that she always fails everything, but with Xerte/Maxos she can’t really fail, as if she makes a mistake the term pings back and she can automatically try again. Xerte/Maxos has built up her confidence. Rather than having to go all the way through a task and getting to the end to find out she has failed, she is able to improve and build her confidence as she is progressing through.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

The learner has benefited from Xerte/Maxos in a number of ways.

- Easy to introduce and use;
- More interactive than traditional styles of learning;
- Suits her style of learning;
• Made her more engaged;
• Made her more confident in her abilities;
• Made her focus and concentrate more on her studies;

“Conducting the teaching session in front of the Ofsted inspector could have affected her confidence, but she succeeded and was able to do everything she had previously learnt through Xerte/Maxos. As she realised she could do it, this success has boosted her confidence even more.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

The learner has given her feedback on the benefits of Xerte/Maxos.

“When I was being observed by the Ofsted inspector I really enjoyed the session using Xerte/Maxos. I found the drag and drop interesting and even if I got it wrong I could have another go. This made me feel confident even though it was quite a complicated subject. In the future I would like to do further subjects for my diploma using this form of learning.” Level 2 Horsecare student

Xerte/Maxos has also benefited the assessors and trainers at BCTS as they are now aware of different methods of learning delivery, which has made teaching and learning more interesting for them and the learners. As they are

http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies
work-based trainers they are now more aware of using technology to their advantage.

"It has diversified and complemented their teaching, so they can now have more interactive lessons, rather than just using whiteboards and giving handouts." Sarah Abbs, BCTS

It has also been beneficial for subject revision. As BCTS wouldn’t usually be able to procure a real heart to examine, using activities in Xerte/Maxos is much more interactive and engaging than looking at a picture in a book.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

**The impact**

Although BCTS are only in the early stages of using ILT with their learners, they believe that using Xerte/Maxos will have an impact on achievement, recruitment and retention.

- BCTS believe that students are learning subjects quicker now. It’s taking two rather than the three to four sessions it took with traditional methods;
- Their overall framework success rates are just under 80% at the moment which is above the national average for equine apprenticeships;
- In their Ofsted report they received ‘Outstanding’, for ‘how effectively does the provision meet the needs and the interests of users’, which took into account the way BCTS use ILT tools, such as Xerte/Maxos, to assist learners with special needs.

“I think Xerte/Maxos engages the learner a lot more than traditional methods as we deal with learners who have chosen to go to work rather than study at college. The last thing they want to do is look through reams of paper, so having something interactive has engaged them a lot more.” Sarah Abbs, BCTS

BCTS believe that Xerte/Maxos makes learning more inclusive as people without access to the internet are able to benefit from interactive learning activities. Only around 1 in 10 of the yards that they visit have an internet connection.

“Once the Xerte/Maxos stick is plugged in we can just get going and I have never experienced any technical problems." Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

“Xerte/Maxos has certainly improved the opinion of e-learning with our learners and assessors. We’ve been able to tailor it so it is interactive, with little bits of text, lots of images, videos and lots of interactive activities. As a result everyone can see the benefits of e-learning here at BCTS.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

http://www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies
The lessons learned

BCTS would advise other providers looking to introduce ILT tools such as Xerte/Maxos to keep it simple.

- Learners don’t want or need anything too fancy;
- Keep activities simple, short and snappy;
- Multiple choices should just have 10 questions and no more;
- Use short film clips, short quizzes, and break text up into small chunks.

“Use simple, relevant terms and language when describing activities. If we are studying equine health, we won’t go into too many veterinary terms.” Rachel Bond-Green, BCTS

Useful links

http://www.broadland.gov.uk/bcts/

JISC RSC Eastern website – Portable apps

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