



# Content as an Experience

A Modern Approach for Enabling  
Customer-Facing Roles

# Executive Summary: Content as an Experience™ is the solution for accelerating the success of customer-facing roles

Fueled by technology, businesses are moving at the speed of now. In order to keep pace with heightened customer expectations and shifting markets, customer-facing employees such as salespeople, service reps, agents, or partners require new competencies and skills to be able to drive differentiation for their companies.

Executives give the green light to a variety of initiatives such as sales universities, onboarding programs, skills boot camps, and role plays. Yet these learning formats are missing the mark across a variety of dimensions: material is either too generic for the role, or too dense for that moment of need; assets are hard to find; and requests for peoples' time are out of sync with their on-the-job requirements.

In other words, today's enablement process for customer-facing roles, which costs businesses millions, presents content in ways that do not align with the pace of business.

In this paper, we discuss why Oxygen's Content as an Experience™ is the enablement solution that is in sync with the modern world, and is the best realization of a company's investments in their salespeople, service agents, and customer representatives.

Content As An Experience™ is a process based on understanding employees' day-to-day work experience and expectations. Our method accelerates learning by replacing static documents and long courses with multi-modal experiences that are engaging, easy to consume and retain, and helpful.

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## Data shows investment in outdated learning formats is fueling a content problem

According to the Harvard Business Review, “Not only is the majority of training in today’s companies ineffective, but the purpose, timing, and content of training is flawed . . . Today’s fast-moving business landscape calls for organizations and their people to adapt to changing circumstances rapidly, and to always be learning.”<sup>1</sup>

Executives, recalling their own experiences of learning, are often the first to suggest large-format training approaches. “IBM Sales School was one of the best-in-class, undisputed sales training programs of its time. We need to bring that type of immersion and rigor back,” said one VP of Consulting Sales. While the immersive bonding experience of programs such as what IBM offered from the 1970s into the mid 1990s was indeed effective, memorable, and transformative, the world of work then was conducive to doing training before someone started on the job.<sup>2</sup>

Today, there is far less time available to practice and master the complex skills of interacting with customers, and far more distribution of teams, partners, and customers across the globe. People must learn as they go, amidst a shuffle of cost pressures and the need for speed. Yet the format of content has not evolved. Employees are saddled with information-heavy experiences that try to cram a career’s worth of knowledge into compressed time frames. Little thought is given to the employee’s ability to retain information months later, when the knowledge is actually required, or when there is a moment of need in a conversation.

Oxygen has seen the tangible frustration of hundreds of front line employees. Supervisors were flown in for a week-long course, agents were taken off the phone to watch hour-long videos, or reps sat through off-the-shelf training that offered no insight about their specific customers. The message is clear: content must be designed to be helpful in the flow of work.

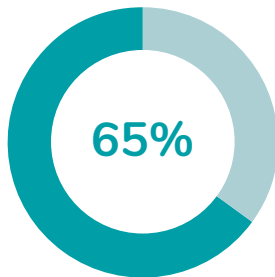
In spite of the intentions of executives to fund education for their people, research shows that the impact of the content created for customer-facing roles is minimal and fraught with hidden costs. People are caught up in the information overload and can’t locate content, don’t consume it, or end up re-working it to create their own material.

## Investments in training and learning fail to provide intended value

Organizations spent \$359 billion globally on training in 2016, but was it worth it?

### Not when you consider the following:

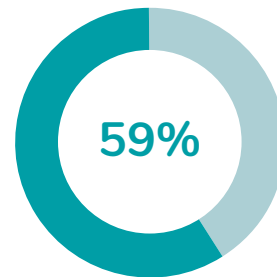
- 75% of 1,500 managers surveyed from across 50 organizations were dissatisfied with their company's Learning & Development (L&D) function;
- 70% of employees report that they don't have mastery of the skills needed to do their jobs;
- Only 12% of employees apply new skills learned in L&D programs to their jobs; and
- Only 25% of respondents to a recent McKinsey survey believe that training measurably improved performance.



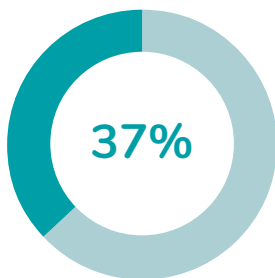
of content created for sales enablement is wasted.



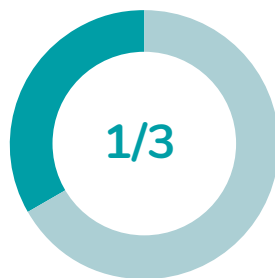
Annual cost to enterprise organizations when content is difficult to find and use.



of organizations fail to measure enablement with any traceable areas of impact.



of organizations report that reps spend more than 10 hours a month on finding or creating their own content.



of all organizations cite finding content as a top challenge with their technology.

The waste in creating sales content. Source: Sirius Decisions.





In addition to the data from research firms, Oxygen's own client work has revealed a staggering amount of wasted investment in content. One organization had spent \$2.5 million across different marketing and sales budgets to fund duplicate onboarding programs and materials for over 20 different complex offering groups. Reps in this organization didn't want to give bad feedback, so they withheld criticism. Instead their disengagement was apparent when looking at reported usage: for a sales force of over 1500 people, only 536 hours of consumption occurred in a quarter – amounting to less than one hour per rep of engagement with the content. Those who did provide specific feedback consistently reported that the information was too dense and overwhelming, or they found themselves searching for too long to find what might help them.

The trends and examples show that the dissemination and consumption of content for customer-facing people is costly to businesses, and has potentially far-reaching consequences, such as internal disconnects that lead to poor customer interaction.

### **More is not better: humans can only absorb so much at once**

The expectation behind the investment and deployment of classic learning methods is that people will assimilate the knowledge and the skills immediately. There is a commonly held belief that if a person goes through a single training or event, they will suddenly have the capabilities to do what was covered, without any further support or practice over time. Those who hold this expectation are missing the reality that the caliber of knowledge and skills desired in today's businesses is far too complex for human's to master in a short period of time.

In addition to the event-driven approach to training, there is also the expectation that people will just start using the content. We have encountered many client situations where something was created – for example, a sales playbook, new product information, or new systems training – and then distributed to employees via email announcement with the expectation that the audience could implement it upon reading.

“The onboarding process is always the tough part. In sales the goal is to get you ramped up as fast as possible. And the experience is usually drinking from a fire hose. It's too much information too fast, and frankly, most of the information is stuff that you wouldn't even need until you've been on the job for six months. You're given it in the first six weeks and you will have forgotten most of it by the time you got there.

– DAVE L., SALES LEADER

One client spent seven months creating a playbook for a highly complex digital transformation offering, wrangling agreement among different stakeholders. Their slick, beautifully-produced PDF was a great representation of what many people agreed to, but the information was in a bulleted format. This type of format was not supportive of how the audience would apply the information in their selling motion, so the team spent more time and money creating separate training for the playbook. Even still, the salespeople ended up creating their own materials from scratch for their customer meetings. For all of that work, there was no vision of how the seller would actually use the asset – no vision of taking that content and creating an experience that would help the seller succeed.

### Implementing Content as an Experience™

Companies have made heavy investments in strategies that yield growth by engaging consumers in great experiences. As consumers themselves, employees are familiar with both good and bad customer experiences, and they bring this knowledge to work with them, their expectations constantly raised by the world around them. Customer-facing employees are not only aware of the experiences made possible by thoughtful, empathetic design of technology. They are sensitive to the poor experiences they must endure at work, which can create internal disconnects that impact customers. This is why Content as an Experience™ is such a crucial part of closing the gap between customer experience and employee enablement.

Content as an Experience™ is a process that reimagines the conventional ways that content is developed and disseminated to customer-facing roles. The process starts with up-front work to define the business outcomes that are needed and understanding the day-to-day reality of the employees the content will serve. Content is then deconstructed, curated, and designed into an experience that is easy to consume, easy to find, and relevant to daily work.



## Define the outcome that is expected for the audience

The most critical aspect of creating more effective enablement for customer-facing roles is the up-front work required to define the outcome that each role needs to drive, and connect that outcome to employees' day-to-day interactions with customers. Outcomes must be measurable and quantifiable, such as increased conversion rates, higher customer satisfaction ratings, improved acquisition, or increased upsell and cross sell opportunities.

Outcomes on their own are not the most difficult part of the up-front definitional work for Content as an Experience™. It's the art of connecting the outcome to the role of the employee, and what that employee needs to know and do in their day-to-day interactions, that is most often overlooked, or over-generalized. One client thought their call center front line supervisors needed more time management skills to mentor effectively. But when Oxygen explored further, we found that they were excellent at managing their time. The true culprit: they were constantly bombarded with escalations that took them away from mentoring.

## Do more discovery about the customer-facing role and the employee's day-to-day work

Connecting a business outcome to the day-to-day work of someone's role doesn't need to be a heavy exercise, but it is critical to creating a great experience for the employee. These are some of the simple questions that enablement teams can ask as part of the Content as an Experience™ process:

- Who does this role work with?
- What kind of work does someone in this role produce?
- What seems to be the most important thing to them?
- How are they measured for success?
- What seems confusing about what they do?
- What are their go-to places for information?
- Which meetings do they attend?
- What technology do they use and how do they use it?
- How do they typically work, via technology, in meetings, a mix of both?

The playbook team from our earlier example, realizing that they had not done this type of discovery, took a step back and asked a top seller what kinds of materials and information worked best for her.

She gave lots of detail: "I need an overview deck for my first meeting that shows how we will solve their problem. I need more specific information about this CIO in my account, so I can make that mental connection when I look her up on LinkedIn. And when it comes down to the conversation, I'll need past examples to walk through or at least something we have done that is relatable to her need. I need to be able to find that information quickly. I'd prepare with my team to hear what objections they have encountered in the past, and even use those examples in the conversation with the client."

Based on these requirements, a static PDF of bullet points with separate training is not the experience that would make this seller successful. The next step in the Content as an Experience™ process is to design and build what's needed.

## Design and organize the content to be easy to find and use

Once the role of the audience and their path to business outcomes are understood and documented, enablement teams can then determine what content is available and how it needs to be used. Existing content must be deconstructed from heavier formats, and redesigned or broken down into more manageable components. Often these components need to be part of a digital experience, as this is a familiar and scalable mode for many types of customer-facing employees. Whether digital or live, enablement teams need to be mindful of just how much content is too much.

When the sales playbook team redesigned the experience, the content that was perviously in a large PDF document was rendered into a simple user interface that offered these types of assets and interactions:

- An overview of a conversation example as a short, 90-second video
- Live peer cohorts to discuss navigating internal customer politics
- A documentary-style video of peers discussing different objections they'd encountered and how they did or did not overcome them
- Customer meeting accelerators such as tailorable pitch decks, financial models, and solution details — to be used as needed.

## Results

There are many types of programs that are developed today which lend themselves being reimaged into Content as an Experience™:

- **Sales or agent onboarding experiences for new hires**, which are meant to be consumed in sequence and tied to a specific outcome (such as “enter first opportunity into CRM”)
- **Customer case plays**, an evolution of sales plays, in which content is organized according to the stages through which a representative customer solved their problem
- **Ongoing support**, in which information is easy to locate for new product launches or skill development
- **Front line manager development**, to provide support for managers in an easy, path-based format
- **Account planning**, in which to access tools, documents, and a planning cadence with a team

The impact of a Content as an Experience™ approach can move an organization into breakthrough performance. One Oxygen client created an online onboarding experience for six of their sales roles. They agreed that someone would be considered “onboarded” when the seller hit their quota. Sellers who went through the experience **decreased their ramp time from nine months to four months**. In addition, **these sellers averaged 139% of quota**; those who did not go through the experience only reached 89% of quota. This was a major impact for the company and their sellers.





When experiences are created with the audience in mind, not only are the business results significant, but also the adoption and support can radically shift. Time and time again, the sellers and front line employees who are provided a consumable and easy-to-find experience were eager to share their enthusiasm, and asked for more.

Content as an Experience™ is not a “nice to have” – it is essential to drive enablement of customer-facing employees, at the pace of business today.

### Quotes from the field

I’ve never seen anything this good at any company I’ve been at. It’s so much easier, makes so much sense!

The video clips were a big positive. Hearing from real individuals with real experiences was phenomenal. The way it’s done is a lot quicker and faster, gives you a good footing for prepping for clients than the conventional training I did at this company. Well done by everyone.

The sales onboarding experience was way more user friendly and it’s easier to know where you’re leaving off and picking up. This experience was pretty easy, specific to sales, there were things that I would go back to multiple times.

The old program dealt with technical themes, qualification review, deal review, governance. The new program was more practical for sales, for introducing me to the theme of the company. It mentioned sales skills and how to approach a customer, how to think about processes, and this was very helpful for me. It’s a different view than the other programs.

The episodes were short and easy compared to other stuff I’ve been through, and much more pleasant and easy to get to. It was just enough to make me feel like I got it, and could move on!



## About the research

As part of developing our point of view, Oxygen is continually conducting research. Over the past 10 years, Oxygen has surveyed more than 500 people in learning, training, HR, and enablement at the manager and director level. In addition, Oxygen has interviewed over 30 C-Level Executives and 25 subject matter experts in sales, customer service, and call center environments, across technology, telecommunications, health care, financial services, and retail industries.

## About Oxygen

Oxygen helps companies drive change by modernizing sales enablement and workplace education. We provide in-depth consulting services to initiate and execute transformation focused on sales and customer-facing teams. All of the education experiences that we produce are aligned to business outcomes and help employees excel.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Where Companies Go Wrong with Learning and Development," Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org/2019/10/where-companies-go-wrong-with-learning-and-development>, October 2, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> "There Is No Saturation Point in Education": Inside IBM's Sales School, 1970s–1980s. IEEE Annals of the History of Computing, James W. Cortada, University of Minnesota, January-March 2015.

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