KNOWFULLY
Attracting Younger Accounting Learners By Redesigning Continuing Education to be Interactive
KnowFully provides continuing professional education, exam preparation courses, and education resources to the accounting, finance, and healthcare sectors. Through a suite of learning solutions, KnowFully delivers high-impact education that launches careers, helps professionals thrive, and empowers people and enterprises to perform at their peak. Learners use KnowFully to become credentialed, satisfy required credit hours to maintain credentials, and stay informed on the latest trends and critical changes in their industries over the course of their careers.

Challenge

KnowFully is recognized for its engaging, innovative, and timely learning solutions. As the profile of its learners changed, the company sought ways to evolve its approach to create the best on-demand experience for current learners and attract a younger audience. To reach their goal, KnowFully engaged the research, learning science, and learning design experts at WGU Labs to redesign the learning model of one of its learning platforms, Surgent CPE and specifically the Best Federal Tax Update (BFTU) course.

- **OUTDATED CONCEPTS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**: KnowFully wanted to move beyond traditional pedagogical approaches to continuing education courses, which have historically focused on knowledge-based sessions that don’t necessarily translate into practical skills. Instead, KnowFully identified the need for content that learners can easily apply to their day-to-day work.

- **RAPIDLY CHANGING CONTENT**: To meet the continually shifting needs of professional accountants, the content KnowFully developed was varied, extremely complex, and changed from year to year. These rapid changes posed particular problems for developers and left minimal time to develop a course that is truly interactive while achieving the learning objectives that learners have for this type of content.

- **FORMAT LIMITATIONS**: Another challenging aspect was the format of some of the learning experiences, especially the self-study format. Due to the development challenges listed above, KnowFully adopted a PDF format for the self-study course. A PDF format has advantages, especially in terms of accessibility, searchability of different topics, and distribution. But the approach also has some areas that can be improved, such as the organization of topics and modules to aid in the search of specific information or resources and modernizing the format to be more interactive and meet the expectations of today’s learners.
WGU Labs’ Approach

The WGU Labs learning design team is experienced in creating learner-centered experiences through evidence-based learning strategies grounded in the principles of competency-based education (CBE). To help KnowFully redesign their accounting learning experience, the team included user research and learning model maps as part of their strategy.

USER RESEARCH STUDY

WGU Labs deployed surveys and interviews through a user research strategy to understand how the younger population of accounting and finance professionals (25–35 years old) engage with continuing education, what motivates them to learn, and how they believe the learning experience in the field can be improved. This approach enabled the team to engage in a co-design partnership and reimagine the learning model for KnowFully platforms to better suit these younger audiences.

LEARNING MODEL MAPS

To clearly identify the connection between the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to meet competencies in the field, the WGU Labs team created two learning model maps — a skills-based map and a knowledge-based map.

The learning science experts at WGU Labs used backward design to create each map. They started with the competencies that are needed, as determined by the main requirements of the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) certification. This approach made it possible to write learning objectives and then make sure the instructional materials cover enough content and activities, as well as help learners be successful in the evaluation.
Solution

From the user research and learning model maps, WGU Labs produced activities that KnowFully could pilot in the BFTU course. The general structure of these activities will also be used as the foundation of the proposed learning model for KnowFully learning products.

MORE INTERACTIVE FORMAT

One of the most significant changes included moving to a more interactive format that provides learners with opportunities to practice concepts and experience hands-on learning that will help them apply and transfer knowledge. The new formats for the course include live webinars and self-study courses.

BETTER LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Moving the content to a different format that enabled interactive activities, visual aids, and a more digestible structure was beneficial for the learning experience. A different authoring tool and output provides more opportunities for learners to interact with the content in a meaningful way and engage in hands-on exercises. It also provides more data on the backend of the platform to better understand learners' patterns and improve the learning platform. By aligning learning activities with learning goals, WGU Labs was able to provide a smoother learning experience.

STREAMLINED CONTENT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In regards to content, WGU Labs helped KnowFully develop new content around main concepts in the BTFU course — starting a library of media clips, animations, short videos, etc. that explains common foundational concepts that can be reused and save development time in the future. Updated content also included new resources that provide learners with a “library” of aids they can access while completing work. WGU Labs partnered with KnowFully to redesign the learner experience, including breaking down content into bite-size pieces to help learners digest new information (also called “chunking” content). Other aspects of the redesign included the introduction of knowledge checks in strategic parts of the course, modeling what type of interaction learners should have while completing the BFTU course and providing information to learners that will help them advance or shift their strategy to maximize learning effectiveness.