Learning Activity 7
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Brief Description of Unit of Instruction:
I would like to create a unit of instruction on the topic of how to create and develop high quality content for a professional blog hosted on WordPress.com. The unit will cover how to choose a blog name, how to secure a domain on WordPress.com, how to choose a template for layout, how to customize layout, how to post content, and how to develop high quality professional content. For two weeks following a two-hour in-person course meeting, learners will work independently on their blogs and have access to an online discussion forum in which they can post questions, respond to their peers, and discuss topics related to the course content; a non-mandatory, synchronous online class meeting will be offered halfway through this two-week period. Learners will submit their final assignment via email.

Needs Assessment Statement:
The potential learners are adult public library patrons with an interest in using blogs to enhance their professional reputations or to promote their businesses or professional services. They are assumed to already have a basic level of skill in using computer hardware and software and the World Wide Web. They are also assumed to have a professional niche or area of expertise, which will allow them to focus their blog content on a particular topic or relatively narrow range of topics. They need to know how to set up their blogs and how to develop high quality content for publication in order to enhance their professional reputations and/or generate business in the online realm. A blog can be set up in a matter of minutes, but developing quality content takes time and effort, and this unit will equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to use their time efficiently and effectively.

This course will be designed with both an in-person and an online component. Learners will initially meet with the instructor in person for two hours, with the first 45-60 minutes dedicated to choosing a blog name, securing a domain, choosing and customizing a layout, and posting content, and the second 60-75 minutes dedicated to strategies for developing quality content. For two weeks after the in-person meeting, learners will have access to an online discussion forum in which they may post questions to be answered by the instructor or other students, discuss topics relevant to the course content, and post links to their blogs for sharing with their classmates; halfway through this two-week period, learners will have the option to attend a non-mandatory, synchronous online class meeting to allow them to ask questions and receive immediate response from the teacher and from their peers. The instruction provided in this unit will enable learners to apply the knowledge and skills they have gained as they maintain their blogs on an ongoing basis.

Various materials, tools, and learning objects already exist to support this instruction, including blogs, videos, and books. A Google search for "how to start a professional blog" retrieves approximately 153 million results, with several relevant resources listed on the first page.

The best person to design the instruction is someone who has previously created one or more successful professional blogs on WordPress.com—in other words, someone with subject matter

expertise. Since the outcome could potentially impact the learners' careers or businesses, it is important that the course content be of high quality. The best person to do the teaching is probably the same expert who designs the instruction, but it could also be someone who has previous teaching experience, or perhaps a team including the expert and an experienced teacher. It is important that the teacher(s) be able to answer any questions that the learners might have about the topic or at least point them to resources that will provide the information they need.

Instructional Goals Statement:
In today's competitive job market, individuals need to be able to distinguish themselves and sell themselves. Social media, including blogs, are powerful tools to do so. More and more people are turning to blogs as a means of enhancing their professional reputations, building their personal brands, establishing their authority, credibility, and expertise, and building relationships with their peers, their customers, and potential employers. Because of the power of blogs to help people achieve their professional goals, it is important to equip them with the tools to create and develop high quality content efficiently and effectively. This unit of instruction is a means of empowering people to utilize blogs to achieve their professional goals. After completing the course, learners will demonstrate that they have achieved the instructional goals by providing a link to the WordPress.com blog they created in the classroom, which will include at least three published posts developed using the content development strategies presented in the course. They will also be asked to complete an online evaluation of the instructional unit and to indicate their satisfaction with the instruction and their level of confidence in their ability to independently maintain their blog in the future.

Instructional Analysis:
1. If it isn't already on, turn on your computer.
2. Open a new document in Microsoft Word. In one sentence, describe the topic or range of topics to be covered in your blog based on your professional niche or area of expertise.
3. Below your topic statement, brainstorm a list of individual words or short phrases related to your blog topic which could serve as the name of your blog. You might choose to use your own name. Rank your list in order of preference.
4. Launch your Web browser.
5. Go to http://wordpress.com/.
6. Click on the "Get started here" button.
7. In the "Blog address" box, type in your first choice word or phrase (as a single word). Tab to or click in the "Username" box. If the word or phrase you typed in the "Blog address" box is already in use, you will see a message letting you know that; in that case, enter your next choice, repeating until you come to a domain which is available. Once you have entered a domain which is available, complete the rest of the form and click "Sign up."
8. After completing the registration process, go to your blog's dashboard.
9. In the vertical navigation bar on the left side of the screen, click on "Appearance."
10. Browse the available blog themes and select one for your blog.
11. Click on the "Widgets" link on the left side of the screen.
12. Select the widgets you would like to include on your blog by dragging them from the "Available Widgets" list to the sidebar on the right side of the screen.
13. Click on the "Settings" link on the left side of the screen.

14. Enter your site title, tagline, time zone, and any other customized settings that you wish and then click on "Save Changes."
15. You now have a basic blog set up. You can further customize your blog later on by exploring the other areas of your blog dashboard. Now click on the "Posts" link on the left side of the screen.
16. Click on the "Add New" button.
17. For your first post, you will write a short introduction to your blog and its purpose. You might introduce yourself and your area of professional expertise and why you are starting a blog or the type of content you plan to share with your readers. Enter a title for your blog post and type one to three paragraphs in the box. Add hyperlinks and images where appropriate.
18. On the right, add tags and categories reflecting the topics discussed in the post.
19. Click on the "Preview" button to see a preview of your post; when you are satisfied, click on "Publish."
20. Next we will go over an introduction to developing high quality content, including linking to authoritative sources, using images, generating discussion in the comments, developing a readership, etc.

Entry Behavior and Learner Characteristics:
Learners are assumed to have a basic level of skill in using computer hardware and software and the World Wide Web. They are also assumed to have a professional niche or area of expertise, which will allow them to focus their blog content on a particular topic or relatively narrow range of topics. I will evaluate whether they have the minimal level of knowledge or skills needed to begin my proposed instructional unit by requiring them to self-enroll in the course via the World Wide Web. The enrollment form will require them to state their professional niche or area of expertise in a succinct statement.

Performance Objectives:
By the end of the two-hour in-person session, learners will be expected to show that they have registered a blog on WordPress.com and posted an introductory post. They will be instructed to develop and publish at least two additional blog posts in the two-week period following the course meeting. At the end of the two weeks, they will be required to send a link to their blog via email to the course instructor and to complete an online form in which they will evaluate the instructional unit and indicate their satisfaction with the instruction and their level of confidence in their ability to independently maintain their blog in the future. Upon successful completion of these requirements, learners will receive a certificate of completion.

Instructional Strategy:

Preinstructional Activities:

❖ Motivation – Learners will be motivated by the desire to enhance their professional reputation and promote their business or professional services. They will be motivated by the potential for a professional blog to help them build their personal brand, establish their authority, credibility, and expertise, and build relationships with their peers, their

customers, and potential employers. They will be motivated by the prospect of a more fulfilling and lucrative career.

❖ Objectives – This course will enable learners to create and develop high quality content for a professional blog hosted on WordPress.com. It will enable them to develop technical skills needed to create and maintain a blog on WordPress.com as well as writing and communication skills needed to create high quality blog content.

❖ Entry Behaviors – Learners are assumed to have a basic level of skill in using computer hardware and software and the World Wide Web, which will be demonstrated through their self-registration in the course via an online registration form. They are also assumed to have a professional niche or area of expertise, which they will be required to describe in a succinct statement on the registration form.

Information Presentation:

1. If it isn't already on, turn on your computer.
2. Open a new document in Microsoft Word. In one sentence, describe the topic or range of topics to be covered in your blog based on your professional niche or area of expertise.
3. Below your topic statement, brainstorm a list of individual words or short phrases related to your blog topic which could serve as the name of your blog. You might choose to use your own name. Rank your list in order of preference.
4. Launch your Web browser.
5. Go to http://wordpress.com/.
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blog post and type one to three paragraphs in the box. Add hyperlinks and images where appropriate.
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Learner Participation:

The in-person component of the class will be conducted in a computer lab, with each student sitting at his or her own workstation. Learners will be working in Microsoft Word and in their Web browsers throughout the class session. Learners will listen to lectures and watch demonstrations on setting up their blogs and developing content, interact with the instructor and with one another, perform actions on their computers such as typing in a Word document and on the WordPress.com site and performing searches, and view Web content such as sample blogs, tutorials, and videos. They will also have the opportunity to participate in an online discussion forum and synchronous online class meeting during the two-week period following the in-person class meeting.

Testing/Assessment:

By the end of the two-hour in-person class meeting, learners will be expected to show that they have registered a blog on WordPress.com and posted an introductory post.

Follow-through Activities:

Learners will be instructed to develop and publish at least two additional blog posts in the two-week period following the in-person meeting. At the end of the two weeks, they will be required to send a link to their blog via email to the course instructor and complete an online form asking them to evaluate the instructional unit and indicate their satisfaction with the instruction and their level of confidence in their ability to independently maintain their blog in the future. Upon successful completion of these requirements, learners will receive a certificate of completion. An indicator of successful learning will be the ongoing maintenance and development of the learners' blogs in the future.

Developing Instructional Materials or Learning Objects:
This hands-on course will be conducted both in person and online. The in-person component will take place in a computer lab, with each student sitting at his or her own workstation. In addition to the instructor's verbal lecturing, learning will be supported through the use of:
- computer screenshots and screencasts displayed on a screen via a projector
- Web-based activities, including searching via search engines, registering and customizing a blog on WordPress.com, and posting blog content
- online readings, videos, sample blogs, and tutorials

- printed handouts (which will also be available electronically), one on the topic of creating high quality blog content and one a reference sheet of tips, tricks, and reminders

The online component of this course will take place in the two-week period following the in-person class meeting. Learning will be supported through the use of:

- an online discussion forum, in which learners may post questions to be answered by the instructor or other students, discuss topics relevant to the course content, and post links to their blogs for sharing with their classmates
- a non-mandatory, synchronous online class meeting in Elluminate to be held one week after the in-person meeting, which will allow learners to ask questions and receive immediate response from the teacher and from their peers

Formative Evaluation:
The evaluation will be conducted via a Web form. It will ask students to indicate the date of the in-person course meeting, what they expected to learn, what they actually learned, how well the course met their expectations, how useful they expect the knowledge they gained will be to them in their work, the quality of the instruction and the instructor's feedback and responses to questions, the quality of the printed and Web-based instructional materials, the usefulness of the discussion forum, whether they would recommend the course to others, whether they think the course is better suited to in-person or completely online delivery, and their level of confidence in their ability to independently maintain their blog in the future. They will also have the opportunity to provide any additional feedback that they wish.

Based on learner responses to the evaluation form, the course structure, content, or instructional materials may be revised before the course is offered again. If learners feel that the course could be effectively delivered completely online, it may be adapted for the online environment.

How I Will Implement My Instructional Design Plan:
In an ideal situation, I would be able to implement my instructional design plan exactly as described: in a public library setting, with an in-person meeting to be held in a computer lab at the library and with online activities taking place via a discussion forum and Elluminate in the two-week period following the in-person meeting. These choices would be ideal because learners would have face-to-face interaction with the instructor during the period of initial blog set-up, allowing them to ask questions and receive immediate feedback, and would also receive ongoing support as they complete subsequent activities that draw on the knowledge and skills gained during the in-person meeting.

In reality, due to considerations around budget, technology, and facilities, many public libraries may not be able to offer the instruction as outlined in my plan. Offering the course would be contingent upon the library being able to secure an instructor with the necessary experience and expertise to develop course content and teach the course, which may be difficult within the budgetary constraints under which many public libraries are currently operating. Moreover, some public libraries may lack the physical space—a computer lab—necessary to offer the in-person component of the course. Not all public libraries serve communities in which there would be demand for such a course. And the logistics of setting up and maintaining a discussion forum and providing access to an Elluminate session may lie outside the scope of many public

libraries' abilities. For these reasons, this course might be more successfully offered through a local business or professional association or in a continuing education program through a community college or university.