Econometrica Pivots E-Learning to an Improved Platform

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Econometrica has pivoted our web-based training from a rigid, slide-based format to a more dynamic approach that results in a more fluid training experience for the user than traditional slide-based courses.

Despite dramatic technological improvements, most web-based training developed today does not look or feel much different from training developed a decade ago. These e-learning courses resemble interactive PowerPoint slide decks, and they are most often built on newer versions of the same software. Over the last 3 years, Econometrica beta tested a unique new technology as it matured enough to begin developing with in earnest. In 2020, our Learning Solutions Team—part of our Health Group—began releasing courses on the new platform. These trainings have been well received by learners and the client. This paper will discuss some of the advantages of our new platform and how our content developers, instructional designers, and e-learning developers have been able to collaborate and capitalize on the strengths of this new platform.

Why Did We Move to a New Platform? What Was Wrong With the Status Quo?

Most adults are accustomed to learning from the web, be it via phone, tablet, or laptop. We learn by reading news articles, watching embedded videos in blog posts, or listening to podcasts. Interacting with this content feels natural, and consumers engage with the content in a multitude of ways: Readers scroll through written content, whether they choose to read the full text or skim for elements of interest. Viewers and listeners can skip to different timestamps in video or audio. Often, consumers can engage with content producers by sending questions and requests or participating in real-time chats.

Despite this variety in adult consumption habits, virtually all web-based training being developed today (or at any time over the past two decades) is what we would describe as slide-based training—that is, content that looks and feels more or less like content developed in PowerPoint. Courses are a series of slides, all the same size, that a user must navigate through one at a time. Slides may contain audio narration, videos, or animation, and many slides may be interactive with buttons, layers, or even quiz questions; in the end, most slides will feel like a PowerPoint slide.

Slide-based training does not allow our content developers, instructional designers, and e-learning developers to lay out or "chunk" content in a logical manner. One of the core principles of instructional design is chunking, or organizing information into logically related but manageable segments to facilitate learning and reduce cognitive load. In a traditional slide-based training course, each slide can only fit so much text and information, and the resulting content chunks rarely correspond to those constraints well. The key problem with slide-based training, then, is that it forces the e-learning designer to try to negotiate this secondary, artificial type of chunking with the first.

Reasons for the Change
Content That Fits, Naturally

Econometrica's development style ensures that our trainings feel more like how most of us interact with information on the modern web. Our e-learning interface is intuitive and engaging, and content feels natural to the viewer. Each lesson "page" can be customized so that it fits the content and includes activities that feel appropriate to the information being presented. Because there are no unnatural size constraints, some pages may be short, while others may be long. Quiz questions may occur naturally within the context of a lesson-in-progress, rather than sitting between two content slides.
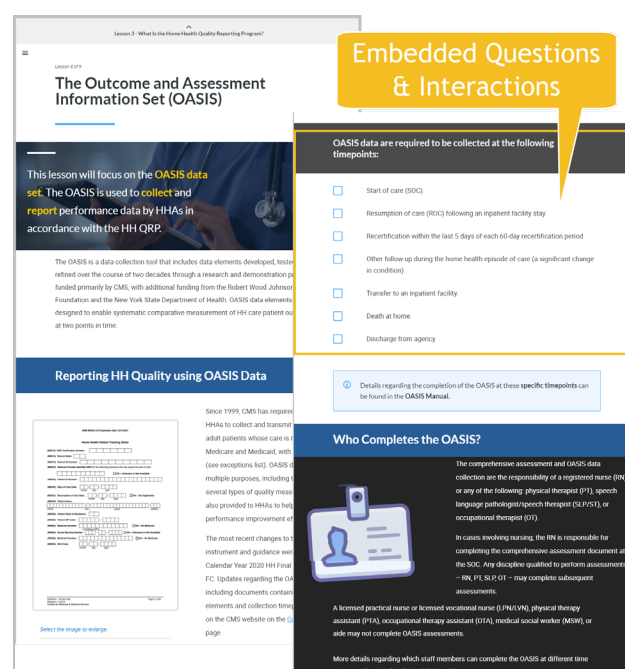

Figure 1. Example of Embedded Questions and Interactions

Great for Engaging Learners

Our new platform is much easier to use than the slide-based competition (such as Adobe Captivate and Lectora®) and does not sacrifice ease of use for power. Our platform truly excels at engaging learners in activities that allow them to engage with the content, apply their understanding of the concepts being taught, and receive feedback. We can easily integrate:

- Large media files (photo and video).
- Situation-based learning with realistic characters.
- Timelines.
- Process flows and step-by-step instructions.
- Interactive infographics.
- Flip panels.
- Quizzes.
- Embedded web content.
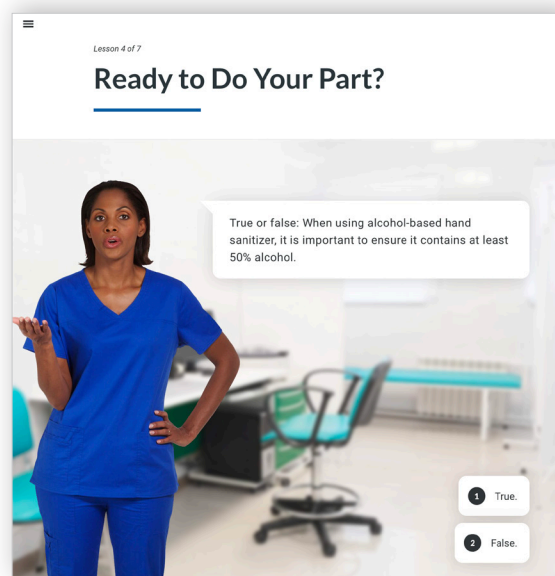- Tabbed and accordion-style content.

Figure 2. Example of an Engaging Series of Questions and Answers With Real-Life Characters

Low-Risk Content Maintenance

Each year, software makers such as Trivantis (Lectora®) and Adobe (Captivate) release new versions of their software. There are almost inevitably quality control issues that arise when a course developed in one version of this software is opened in another. This can make course maintenance an issue if changes need to be made after 2 years and none of the original design or build team has access to the original version of the software.

Our new platform is entirely web-based and developed natively in the cloud. Rolling updates are made to the platform as needed, but there are no major version changes to affect compatibility. When a change needs to be made to a course, the course is simply opened in the web interface, updated, and republished. With no further effort, the latest enhancements to the platform are incorporated into the new version with no issue.

Content That Works on Many Mediums

Econometrica's new platform ensures our content will display perfectly, no matter what device the learner uses. Many slide-based training platforms make only minimal adjustments to allow a user to view the training on their tablet or phone—scaling a slide to fit the available width or height of the screen. This can be difficult for our learners, who are often on the go and in the field. Our new platform is designed to appear professional and high quality on any device, as Figure 3 shows.
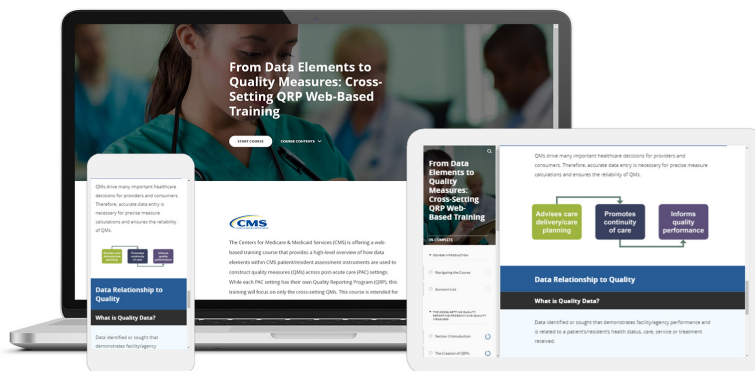

Figure 3. Example of How Content Naturally Adjusts to Fit Devices

The Lowdown

Econometrica's Learning Solutions Team can rapidly develop beautiful content in our new platform. We are ready to capitalize on all the great processes we have developed in our current contracts to produce exciting content for existing and new clients alike. We are proud to be on the front edge of training development for our clients. Get in touch with us to see how we can create something beautiful and engaging with you.

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About Econometrica

Founded in 1998, Econometrica is a research and management organization in Bethesda, MD, established to provide public- and private-sector clients with customized program support services. Econometrica works with multiple agencies to provide high-quality, cost-effective analyses, modeling, and economic evaluations. The company consistently receives exceptional scores from its clients and believes in three principles: technical capabilities, happy customers, and business development.

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