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**Managing and Repurposing Learning Content:
Proven Strategies and Techniques**

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**What Instructional Designers
Can Learn from Clutter-busters**

Susan Horsey, Horsey Communications

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What Instructional Designers Can Learn from Clutter-Busters

Instructional Designers seek to provide their audience with the right information at the right time. But are we super-sizing the information options that we offer? And when we offer too many options, are we creating information clutter?

We can see similarities between information clutter and the clutter of objects in homes and offices. Studies show that when people reflect on clutter in their homes, their stress hormones rise. Information clutter has similar effects, making people feel stressed and overwhelmed. Faced with too many options, they may have difficulty making choices, while feeling frustrated with the quality of choices. Ultimately, clutter distracts the audience, reducing their engagement with important information.

If we take steps to reduce information clutter, we can reduce the drain on the audience's time, energy, and will to make decisions. The goal: freeing up space and energy to increase engagement with the information that is most important.

The following pages offer tips from home clutter-busters that we can consider when tackling information clutter.

Related Books

Happier at Home by Gretchen Rubin. See *September: Possessions*

The Art of Choosing by Sheena Iyengar

It's All Too Much: An Easy Plan for Living a Richer Life with Less Stuff by Peter Walsh

Life at Home in the Twenty-First Century: 32 Families Open Their Doors by UCLA's Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELFL)

For related videos, see <http://bit.ly/1shjKvq>

"The press of superfluous possessions made me feel unsettled and harried, and the demands required by acquisition, use, maintenance, storage, and even relinquishment ate up my energy and time."

Gretchen Rubin

"Questions float, unanswered, upon an ocean of information. Human beings have never before faced such a deluge of information."

William Horton

"Cultivating my possessions, then, wasn't a simple matter of organization, elimination, or accumulation; it was a matter of engagement. When I felt engaged with my possessions, I felt enlivened by them, and when I felt disengaged from them, I felt burdened."

Gretchen Rubin

How to Reduce Information Clutter

Don't just re-organize clutter.

Most clutter-busters warn against the pitfall of buying new systems for organizing and storing possessions. Reduce clutter first, and then organize, label, and store what is left.

Establish your guiding principle.

William Morris's famous advice is a rallying cry for many clutter-busters: "Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful." Can you establish a guiding principle for the information that you offer?

Use it or lose it.

What is useful now, not in the future or at some point in the past? Audience feedback and use statistics can provide guidance.

Eliminate duplicates.

Clutter-busters look for duplicates in closets, such as four pairs of black dress pants when only two pairs are worn frequently. Do you have multiple information resources that repeat similar information?

Don't over-simplify.

While this seems to contradict the other guidelines, "simple" isn't necessarily the answer. While clutter is unproductive, so is the impulse to throw out everything to start with a clean slate.

Strategies for Ongoing De-cluttering

Re-use, re-purpose, repair.

Be familiar with the resources already available. Instead of creating a new resource, can an existing resource be revised or re-purposed to fill the need?

Be mindful about what you create or add.

Any new resources in your learning systems will require cataloging, storage, and ongoing maintenance. For your audience, this becomes one more option to consider when they make choices. Recognize those costs when you create something new.

One In/One Out.

If you introduce a new learning resource, is there another resource that could be retired?

Schedule time for de-cluttering.

For information clutter, your regular de-cluttering can involve: reviewing resources, checking use statistics, updating resources, retiring resources, or making plans to promote the most valuable resources.

Set and check expiry dates.

When de-cluttering a bathroom cabinet, tossing items that are past their expiry date makes a big dent in clutter. Some information resources should also have an expiry date. When you create new resources, identify the expiry date and/or maintenance date. When you de-clutter, check those dates and take action.

Working with SMEs

Stop nagging.

Nobody enjoys criticism about their cherished possessions, and the same is true for cherished information. Statements such as, “Why are we keeping this?” and “This is too much information,” are rarely persuasive.

Agree on a common vision.

Make sure that everyone understands the goals for the learning resources—or common vision. Frame conversations about content in the context of that vision.

Set restrictions.

Restrictions can provide objective rules for deciding whether to keep or discard resources. When you de-clutter books in your home, the knowledge that each bookshelf can hold no more than 30 books can help the household reduce clutter.

Use analogies to physical clutter.

Example: “Moving to the new LMS is a bit like moving to a new house. It’s a good idea to clear out things you don’t need before you move.”

Check with your audience.

You and your SME may have different opinions about resources; your audience may have a different opinion altogether. Check in by meeting with selected users or reviewing feedback surveys, use statistics, or crowd favourites.

Contact Information

Susan Horsey

Email: shorsey@sympatico.ca

Twitter: @SusanHorsey