MAAS
MARKETING

EVERYTHING L&D LEADERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MARKETING.

(YEP, EVERYTHINGGGG!)

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CONTENTS

OK, we get it, you want to implementing marketing for learning into your L&D function, but you've got no idea where to start. But have no fear, like your favourite superhero, we're here to save the day. This ebook will walk you through every single thing you need to know about marketing as an L&D leader. So, let's get started!

STEP ONE: ADOPTING A MARKETING MINDSET

"L&D are seen as order takers."
"L&D needs a seat at the table."
"L&D are treated as a cost centre."

You've heard it all before, right? Over the years, learning teams have been seen as a support function, delivering training when requested and operating reactively rather than proactively.

But the tide is turning. Perception of L&D is changing. As businesses face increasingly complex challenges – from tech advancements (hello Gen AI) to changing working expectations (are we WFH or not?!) – there's growing recognition of the role L&D plays in organisations.

L&D leaders must embrace this change. It's time for L&D to transform from a support function to a critical driver of business strategy. So it's time to prove our relevancy and value to the business. Instead of being reactive providers of training, we must become proactive, strategic partners to enable the business to achieve their goals.

And I have the secret that will help you get there: Marketing.
pretends to be shocked

LET'S START WITH THE COLD HARD TRUTH

Here's a radical notion: your audience doesn't actually want to learn. They don't open their eyes wide in the morning, jump out of bed and scream to the world: "I wanna upskill myself today." Heck, you work in L&D and I bet you don't do that either.

Your audiences is the employees of your business, yes. But first and foremost, they're human beings. They're living their lives, working to eat and be merry and generally aren't focused (or indeed interested) on the new learning initiative that you're rolling out.

It's not that they don't necessarily want to learn, but they aren't – for the most part – intrinsically motivated to learn. They are pulled in 1000 different directions every day, and without understanding the benefits and value of your learning, are unlikely to prioritise professional development.

Here's the thing, marketers know that their audiences are, at their core, mostly disinterested in the products or services they are selling. At least at the beginning. Marketers know that it's their job to build trust with audiences, to prove value and to keep front of mind. But L&D doesn't think that way. Instead we seem to believe that the simple fact that someone works at our organisation creates some tacit contract whereby they're committed to learning at work and upskilling themselves. "They work here, so they should want to learn", right?

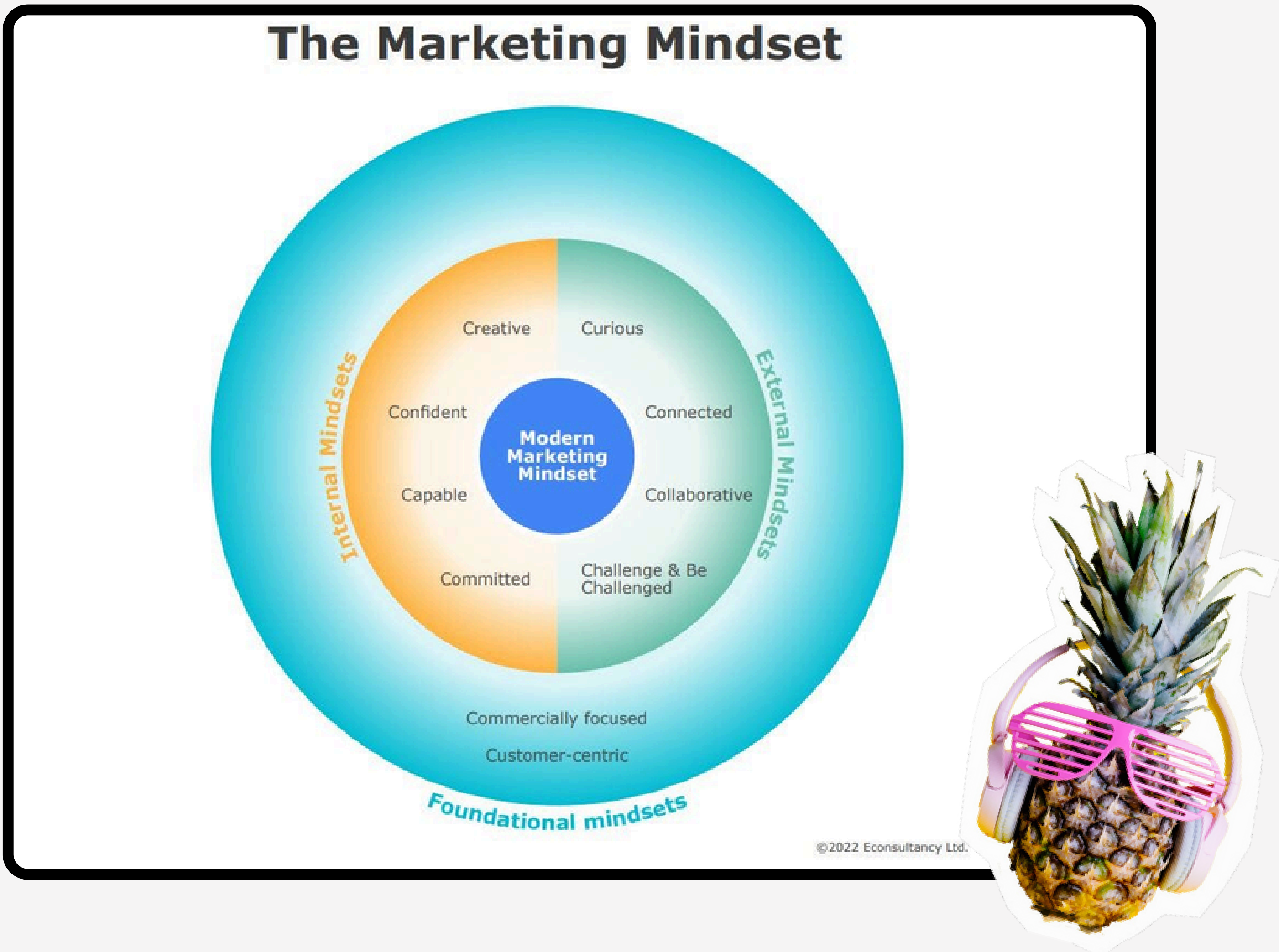
Wrong.

The problem with this attitude is that it fundamentally affects our approach when we are building out marketing communications and content. Let me show you what I mean:

MARKETING MINDSET	**L&D MINDSET**
"No one knows about my product."	"Everyone that works here should already know how important L&D is."
"It's my job to build trust with audiences."	"Learners already trust L&D because it's part of the company they're employed by."
"I must focus on benefits and the 'what's in it for me' if I want my marketing to be effective."	"Straightforward comms that tell learners what is available to them, and where to go, is sufficient to increase audience engagement."

ADOPTING A MARKETING MINDSET IN L&D

You've probably got the gist by now, but in a nutshell: having a marketing mindset boils down to our approach to challenges. Simultaneously prioritising audience needs and business objectives, while always remaining profitable and impacting the business bottom line. Here at MAAS, we love the Econsultancy 10 C's of a modern marketing mindset model:



And I happen to think that five of these are incredibly important for L&D, so let's look at them in more detail, shall we?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR L&D TO BE...

...CUSTOMER CENTRIC?

I get it, you have stakeholders putting demands on your time, business objectives to meet, and budgets to take care of. But this focus means we aren't prioritising our most important stakeholder: our audience (or your learners, as you might call them!) You should be the biggest champion of your target audience, putting their needs first always. This means always going the extra mile – and interrogating the 'why' of learning interventions, and always ensuring that you are answering the "what's in it for me?" question.

What's the 'What's in it for me?'?!

The 'What's in it for me?' (WIIFM) is a task of empathy. It's defining exactly what your audience will get from getting involved in your learning intervention. And although it sounds simple in practice, in my experience L&D often struggle to do this.

All too often L&D focuses on business mandates and agendas – compliance tick boxes, capability planning, making stakeholders happy – and leads to marketing efforts falling short. And that's because your audience are not motivated by business mandates – they're motivated by themselves, their personal goals, their wants and needs... So if you want to instigate real motivation in your people, sit back and answer "what are they going to get out of this?"

...COMMERCIALLY FOCUSED?

What's your impact on the business bottom line?
Cue rummaging around desperately trying to find the relevant data to prove a point

L&D Leaders that are commercially focused are the ones that can answer this question, demonstrating to the business that L&D is more than a cost-centre. It's looking at performance change instead of smile sheets. It's showing the tangible impact we, as learning teams, can have on an organisation.

...CURIOUS AND CHALLENGING?

I've grouped these together, because I think they go hand-in-hand, and are two of the most critical qualities of great marketers. As learning professionals, we know the importance of curiosity, right? It's the backbone of having a learning mindset; and great marketers are always ready to learn more and explore new topics. But that typically starts with one question... "why?"

The best marketers are always ready to question why something is happening, and whether it's the best course of action. A great antidote to the historic order-taking style of learning teams. But that comes with being challenging – in a multitude of ways. A marketing mindset allows us to challenge others and ourselves, to determine the best solution on behalf of our audience. But it also means that we're open to being challenged – and we must welcome that with open arms!

...COLLABORATIVE?

Fostering a collaborative mindset is the key to overcoming one of the key challenges I see repeatedly in L&D teams: silos. In almost every organisation I've worked with; there have been artificially placed silos within the L&D team – and it's limiting the business impact L&D teams can make.

Working in silos can lead to inefficiencies, duplicated efforts, and a fragmented learning experience for employees. For example; if you have different learning professionals focusing on different business units – they might be coming up against the same challenges as one another, but working hard in isolation to overcome these challenges. This wouldn't happen if your team operated more

collaboratively, you know what they say – a problem shared is a problem halved!

Fostering these five elements of a marketing mindset has a phenomenal impact on learning teams. Not only does a marketing mindset improve the efficacy of your marketing efforts, it also improves the efficacy of your entire learning department. It transforms how L&D leaders think about processes and practices – and sets L&D on the right track to becoming a valuable contributor to business success (and say bye to the 'order taker' reputation, once and for all!)

But now you know the importance of a marketing mindset... What comes next? Well to be customer-centric and commercially focused; we need to know a lot more about our audience and business, right?

Enter: **market research.**

STEP TWO: USING MARKET RESEARCH AS YOUR LAUNCHPAD

I can hear you now... "Why do I need to do market research? I'm only operating within my organisation, I don't have a market". And of course, that's technically true. But actually there's a lot that influences your market and your audience, and to get this marketing for learning thing right, we have to conduct some market research.

Market research is the process of gathering, analysing and interpreting information about a market, its consumers and competitors. So let's dig into these three buckets in a little more detail:

WHAT IS L&D'S MARKET?

For most readers of this eBook, your market will be your organisation. Of course, it's not as simple as that – you have different business units to cater for, a variety of proficiency levels, and a range of individual personality traits. And as an L&D leader, I know you'll have a keen eye on the business strategy and objectives.

But when considering market research; I see a lot of L&D leaders attempting to compare themselves to other organisations. This is, in my opinion, a big no no. When it comes to learning, no two organisations will be exactly the same. Each organisation will have unique employees, objectives and strategies. So with all that in mind... What's the point in comparing your L&D function to another? How is that going to be beneficial for you? Instead, focus on comparing your L&D team to the position you were in last year. What have you improved? How has your culture developed? And most importantly... How are you servicing your consumers?

WHO ARE L&D'S CONSUMERS?

I am a huge advocate of L&D ditching the term 'learner'. Instead, I want you to think about your target audience as your consumers. They are the people consuming your learning offering, and you have to persuade them to do so! And to persuade them, you have to understand them deeply. This goes beyond basic demographics; it requires a nuanced view of your audiences' needs, preferences, challenges, and motivations. This is such a critical step of marketing for learning that it has its own dedicated step (step three, we'll get there soon!) But just before we get there...

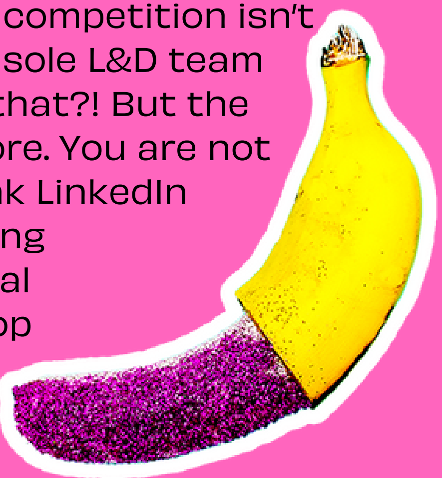
They're not Learners, they're humans!

Have you noticed I've avoided using the dreaded 'L' word all the way through this eBook so far? I truly believe that as an L&D Leader, you should remove the word 'learner' from your vocabulary. Thinking of our audience as 'learners' implies that they care about learning, that they want to be learning, and that their primary purpose is to learn! And we all know that isn't the case.

If L&D started thinking about our audiences as consumers or customers, it would immediately change our narrative and mindset around our audience. And we'd start thinking about how we can convince them to get involved, rather than assuming they will!

WHO ARE L&D'S COMPETITORS?

A lot of L&D professionals I speak to assume that competition isn't something they need to think about. They are the sole L&D team within the organisation; who could compete with that?! But the truth is, L&D has more competition than ever before. You are not just competing with other learning providers (think LinkedIn Learning and so on...). You're competing with learning from Google (hello instant answers), YouTube, social media platforms, Netflix, and so on. And then on top of that... you're competing with non-learning



demands on your audience's time (their phones, their children, their day job and so much more).

To be able to grab your audience's attention effectively, you must know what's competing for their time and attention. It's only then that you can cut through the noise and motivate your audience to get involved with your learning offering.

CONDUCTING YOUR OWN MARKET RESEARCH

So now we know the three components of our market; how do we go about conducting research?

LEVERAGING EXISTING DATA

We are incredibly lucky in L&D to have a plethora of data available to us, from our learning platforms to HR and the business strategy. But what are we looking for in all of these places?

DATA FROM YOUR LEARNING PLATFORM

Learning platform data is often controversial, because at face value it doesn't tell us whether people actually learned anything! But it does tell us a lot about how people are interacting with our online offering. So it's a good idea to measure data such as:

1. Course Completion Rates: How many people start and complete courses?
2. Engagement Metrics: How frequently do people access the platform, and how much time do they spend on it?
3. Feedback and Satisfaction Scores: What are people saying about the courses and resources available to them?

Why do we want to measure this data? Well it gives us great insights into what is working and what isn't, helping L&D teams to identify areas where engagement is low or where your audience is dropping off. Which ultimately helps to identify improvement opportunities within the overall learning experience.

HR DATA TO LEVERAGE

HR are the custodians of the most detailed information about our target audience. And of course, most of that information is completely confidential. However, your counterparts in HR can absolutely give you generic, anonymised insights into employees at your organisation. So what should you ask for?

1. Performance data: Your friends in HR are privy to information about KPIs and goal attainment. And although they will not give you insights into individuals (obviously...) they will be able to tell you any trends that are arising. This will help you get a deeper understanding of your audience, but also identify how you can help improve performance across the business.

2. Pulse surveys: Understanding employee sentiment in the workplace is incredibly important for our engagement strategies. Utilising pulse survey data will ensure that you can get a real understanding of how the workforce is feeling – and any patterns within that data.

3. Demographic data: Although we do not advocate for segmenting based on demographic data, it is still a valuable dataset to be aware of. Information such as age, tenure and experience levels can help us understand our audience on a deeper level.

INSIGHTS FROM THE BUSINESS STRATEGY

Ultimately, we are employed by the business, and we have to make sure we're helping the organisation reach its goals. So it's important to understand the business strategy and translate it into your own L&D strategy. So, make sure you find out:

1. Key business priorities and goals: Understanding the company's focus points is paramount to ensuring we are developing and delivering an L&D strategy that makes an impact.
2. Strategic initiatives: Major initiatives like product launches, mergers, or new systems implementation often require targeted training. It's important that you, as an L&D leader, are prepared for these instances throughout the year.
3. Resource allocation: Understanding how the business is performing, and how they want to perform is critical for L&D leaders. It's a sad truth that L&D is perceived as a nice to have, so being one step ahead and aware of financials is only going to benefit L&D leaders.

ACQUIRING FIRST HAND INSIGHTS

With so much data available within our organisation, why would we go to the effort of conducting our own market research?

Well the answer lies within the gaps that business data has. It's very rare that employees are asked specific questions about their wants, needs and fears. And to get people engaged with learning, we have to know this information. So now's the time to flex your research skills, and conduct your own focus groups and surveys to find out this critical information about your audience.

When conducting your research, you have to ensure that:

- You are surveying or talking to a fair representation of your target audience.
- You are hearing diverse opinions from across the organisation.
- You leave your own biases and assumptions at the door.

It is only by following these principles – with both focus groups and surveys – that you will ensure an accurate and fair representation of your audience.

So with that in mind… What questions should you ask during focus groups or surveys? To give you a really accurate answer to that question, I'd need to know a lot more about your team, organisation and the data you have available already. But here are 7 questions that I always ask when conducting focus groups:

1. What is your single biggest challenge at work?
2. Have you tried to solve this challenge before? Tell me about that.
3. What alternative resources do you use to learn?
4. What's vying for your attention while you're at work?
5. What is your biggest fear when it comes to work?
6. What's your biggest motivation to come to work each day?
7. What is your biggest inspiration in life?

Okay, so now we have a better understanding of our market, audience, and competition, what do we do with it?

Well first things first… **it's time to create some personas.**

STEP THREE: CREATING PERSONAS

You may have heard the word 'persona' bouncing around the L&D space quite a bit lately. But trust me when I say: this is not a new 'buzzword'. In fact, personas are hugely important for understanding your audience. They lead to better marketing and learning approaches which lead to better engagement. Ultimately improving performance over time. Sounds great doesn't it?!

WHY DO WE NEED PERSONAS?

First things first. Let's just make sure we're all speaking the same language here. This is our definition of a persona for L&D:

> "A persona is a semi-fictional representation of your target audience, combining market research, qualitative and quantitative feedback from employees and YES! some assumptions to provide L&D teams with an actionable audience segment designed to improve both learning design and communication approaches."

The concept of a persona is not a new one; it's been used in marketing for years to enable marketers to determine who their target audience is, what channels are going to be effective as well as highlighting key emotional drivers that really help to answer: "What's in it for me?". Answering WIIFM is the lynchpin of any successful marketing engagement and it will absolutely be the key to your success when it comes to getting better engagement.

PERSONAS BOOST ENGAGEMENT

We all want a hyper engaged audience, don't we? People who constantly go out of their way to log into your learning platform and learn. People who just can't get enough of learning. People who undertake more learning than their brains have room for. OK. That might be a bit hyperbolic, but at a minimum you really do need your audience to connect better with your learning programmes. After all, that's why you're creating learning opportunities for your people in the first place right? Because your business needs them to be better at their jobs, and you need them to learn stuff in order to improve their performance.

Changing behaviour requires a change in tactic.

That business mandate for improving performance may well work for getting L&D to shift into action', however it's incredibly ineffective at motivating your target audience. They literally couldn't care less about what the business wants them to do or why they want them to do it. Yeah you might be able to instigate 'learning activity' through fear but this is very shortsighted. So remember, just because it's important to you, does NOT mean it's important to them.

Instead, your audience cares about making their working lives better and easier. They care about getting more time back in their working day. They're selfish. And so they should be. For some reason though, we always see L&D constantly trying to motivate their employees to learn by using business-mandated reasons. And it just doesn't work.

If we really want to make them move, we have to capture their hearts and minds. We need to understand who they are, what they want and when they want it. Personas help us understand that and enable us to change how we interact with them as a result.

BENEFITS OF CREATING PERSONAS

As far as we are concerned, there are bags of benefits to developing personas and better segmenting your audiences. However here are our favourite three:

- Helps you to improve the targeting of your audiences to make both marketing and learning more effective.
- Have more meaningful discourse with your audience, helping you to build trust and better establish the learning culture you strive to establish
- Better meet audience needs and expectations through understanding them deeply and improving how you personalise their experience

There's other perks too. Perks like helping you deduce where you should invest time and energy. Perks like improving the efficacy of your learning. Perks that help you enhance the perceptions of your learning and positively influence sentiment around your learning brand.

Still asking yourself why you haven't built out personas yet?
Yep. Us too.

HOW TO BUILD A PERSONA

We've borrowed (*cough* stolen!) some of the key ideas of a marketing buyer persona and adapted them so that they work for an L&D environment. So here is our tried and tested approach to creating a persona for L&D:

1. UTILISE YOUR DATA

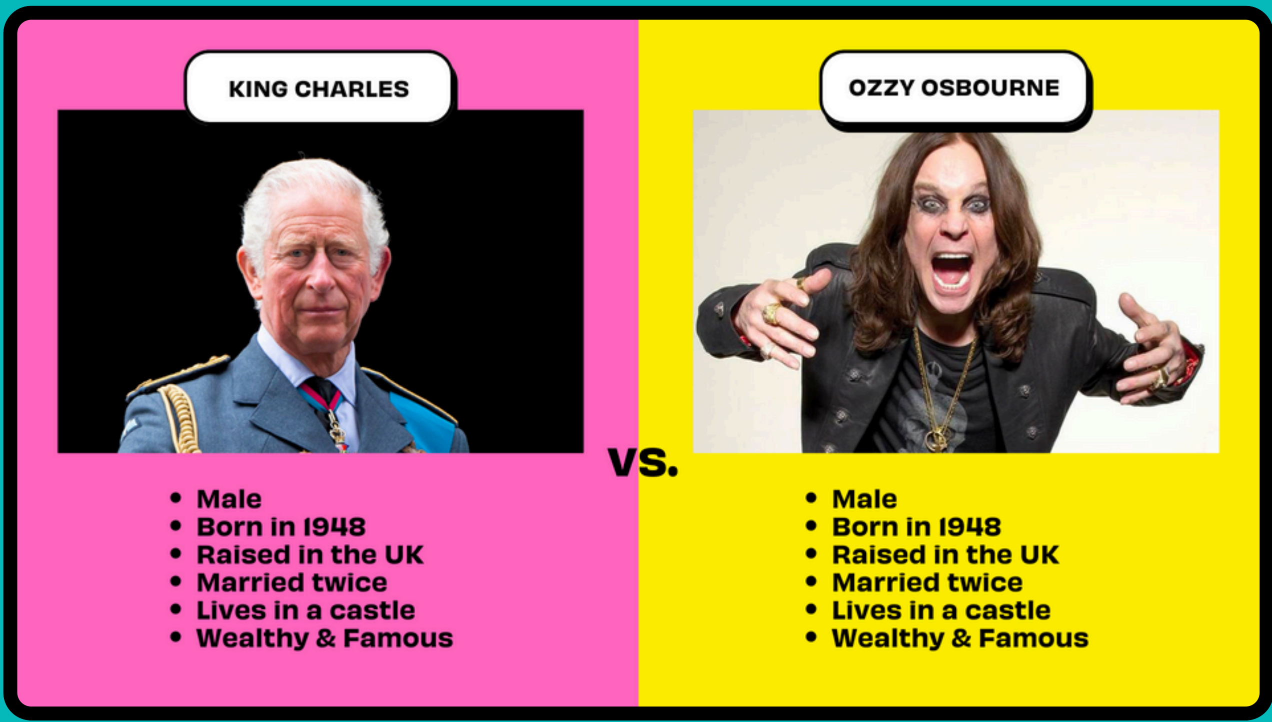
In chapter 2 of this ebook, we spoke about market research. And now is the time to leverage it. To kick off your persona development process, you need to find three key buckets of information about your audience:

- Demographics
- Psychographics
- Behaviour

SEGMENTATION TYPE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

The truth is, here at MAAS, we don't really like demographic data. Although demographics are a very normalised way of segmenting audiences, it doesn't make them any good. Demographics give us super basic information, such as age, location, marital status, job title, income. And these aren't good indicators of who someone really is, or their challenges, wants and needs. If we think about what's in it for me (WIIFM) and answering that, knowing how old someone is doesn't provide any actionable information.

We'd explain it further, but we think Ozzy Osborne and King Charles do a fairly remarkable job of doing just that:



Nevertheless, demographic data tends to be one of the more common segmentation tools that we see L&D use, if they are indeed segmenting at all. In these cases, we believe most revert to this approach because they KNOW they have access to this data and is therefore readily available. But that doesn't mean we should use it.

Now – we love to see that people are attempting to be more targeted with their communication and learning approaches. But our concern is that using just demographics may well put people into different 'buckets' to target. So yes, you are undertaking some level of segmentation; but the messaging will still lack resonance because the buckets are wrong. Basically – your efforts just won't resonate if you target people exclusively on demographic data.

My advice – steer away from demographics when segmenting.

They can be a trap, especially when looking at basic data like age or job title. Not everyone thinks the same, wants the same things or feels the same way, so for our efforts to be effective we need to dig a bit deeper and leave this pointless data firmly out of our personas efforts.

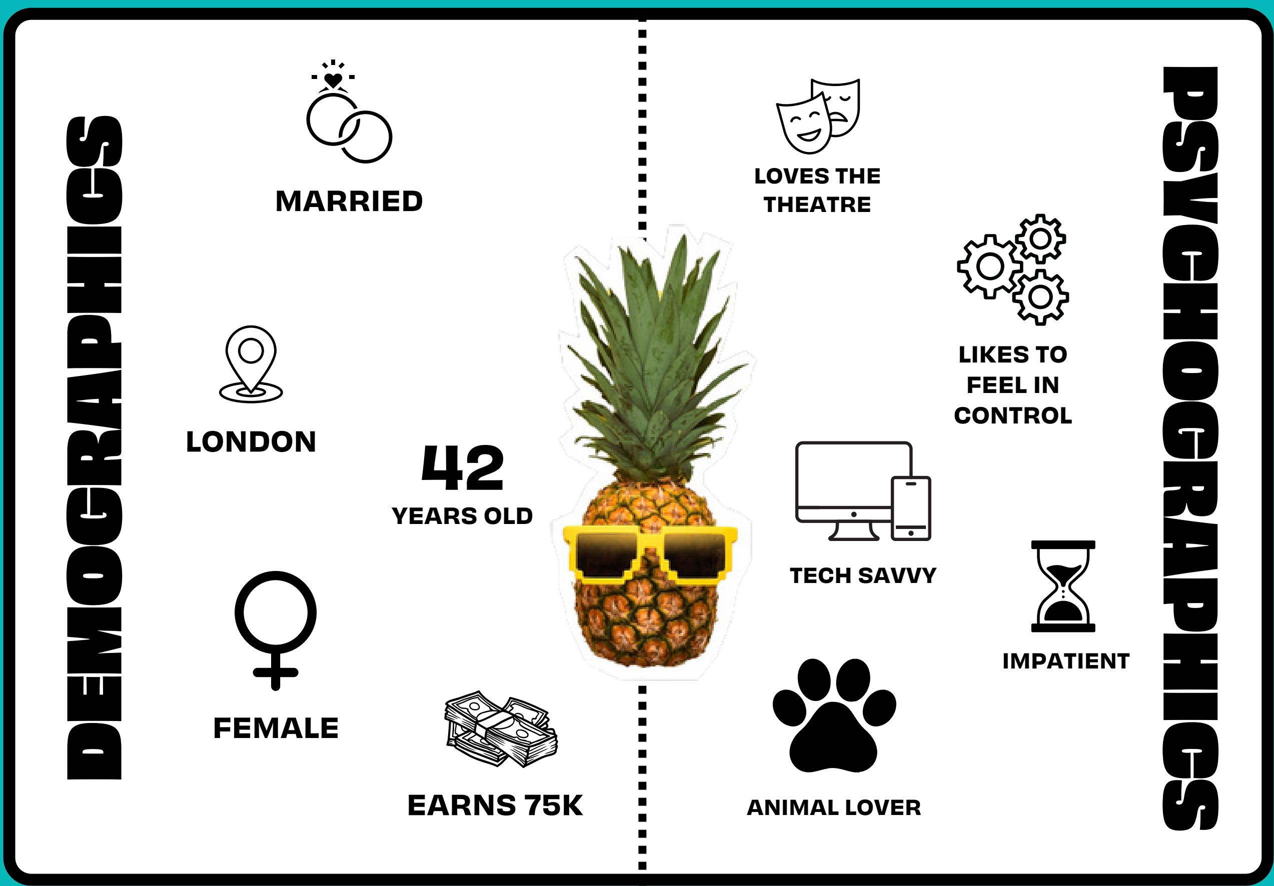
SEGMENTATION TYPE 2: PSYCHOGRAPHICS
Psychographics is the study of consumers based on their activities, interests, and opinions. Yes. Your audience are consumers.

Our whole digital world uses this data these days. The likes of Facebook and Instagram leverage psychographics (as well as behavioural data) to allow advertisers to target audiences with an incredible level of granularity. The result is higher conversion rates and increased efficacy of marketing.

Psychographics extend way beyond the realms of segmenting people based on general demographic data (the data we know isn't useful). Instead, we're seeking to understand the cognitive factors that drive audience behaviours such as emotional responses and drivers, their morals and ethics and also their inherent attitudes, biases, and prejudices. Essentially, we want to understand their hearts and minds.

Psychographics are, in our opinion, much more useful for us because they help us to understand the WHY. Why would someone be motivated to learn at work? What are their beliefs around professional development? How can you best position yourself to talk to these angles?

Just look at this simple image we created; here you can see how much more actionable information psychographics give us about our audience.



Suddenly we're looking at audiences as people. Suddenly, we know how they feel and think. And suddenly, we're communicating with them a hell of a lot better.

GETTING PSYCHOGRAPHIC DATA ON YOUR LEARNERS

Yes. I know you are sitting there thinking "Pfffttt. I don't have this data".

Maybe not, but that doesn't mean you can't get it. If you're really, really serious about improving the impact of your learning and the marketing communications that support it, then you MUST understand your audiences better.

Getting psychographic data isn't actually that hard; but it can take a bit of time.

Some of the key ways you could seek to get more information about your target audience are:

- Interview your audience and ask them questions about their wants, needs, desires and more
- Create focus groups and ask them the same questions
- Use online surveys/questionnaires and quizzes - if getting your audiences to complete a whole survey is proving challenging, why not send emails with a single question in them, or embed a single question in your intranet? You're still asking the same questions, but over an extended period of time. Loads of online survey tech will let you do this such as Typeform, SurveyMonkey etc.
- Interview managers - this sounds weird but these people will have a very clear understanding of what is most important to your audiences, what are their blockers, drivers and what's really grinding their gears. They might even be a persona in and of themselves. Two birds, one stone.

Whilst getting this data may be cumbersome and time consuming for you, the treasure trove of information that you will have to improve your targeted efforts will be worth it. We promise.

SEGMENTATION TYPE 3: BEHAVIOUR

What on earth are your people doing when they're learning? Do they ever visit the LMS? If so, what are they up to when they get there? What times of day do they learn? What topics or content gets them interested?

You'll likely be familiar with the idea of using behavioural data to more effectively target audiences and provoke a desired response. Many brands use them in the same way as psychographics and for the same reasons; these quantitative insights get results.

According to McKinsey, businesses that leverage customer behaviour data to generate behavioural insights outperform peers by 85% in sales growth and more than 25% in gross margin. So what we're saying is, it works.

For example, did you know that Netflix even adjusts the covers for their movies and TV shows based on your previous viewing history? So say you watch a lot of horror and crime documentaries, the cover for something like 'Stranger Things' will be very different to someone who is watching reality TV shows and Bridgerton. Oh yeah, that blew our minds too.

That's not all. You'll have likely experienced re-targeting as a form of behaviour-based marketing in your online pursuits. If not, we'll share a great example with you, from Ashley (our MD): "I was recently deciding on my dress to wear to the Learning Awards, so I sent my friend Lori Niles-Hofmann a link to a dress I was considering. Poor her. After she looked at that dress, she was followed around the internet with paid advertisements promoting the same dress. Over and over again. For weeks. Sorry Lori!"

Even though it is annoying, this consistent presentation of a product you have ALREADY looked at continues to push you through your buying cycle, forcing you to consider the product again and again and in many cases, eventually buying it. In Lori's case she wasn't interested, but that's because they were unwittingly targeting the wrong person.

So whilst you can't follow your audience around the interwebs promoting your latest leadership programme (imagine!), you can still use their behaviours to target them differently. Depending on the level of sophistication of your learning platform, you may be able to get some behavioural data from it. However we strongly recommend you consider how you can also gather behavioural data outside of the LMS silo. Check out things like Google Analytics, to get really deep insights into your audiences behaviour. You'll thank us later.

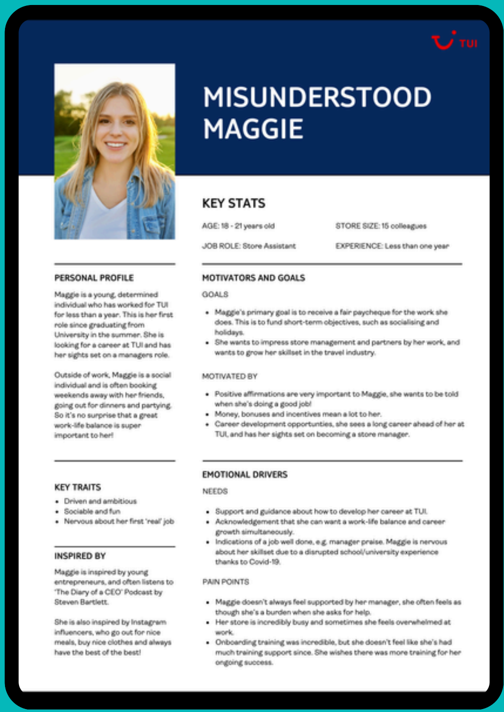
2. MAKE SOME ASSUMPTIONS

Yes, we all know what they say about assumptions... and in many cases they can be dangerous. But unfortunately when it comes to people, humans and their behaviours, we just cannot know everything. Even the likes of Facebook and their limitless tap on our personal data will still have gaps in their understanding of us.

So when you are building your personas, use assumptions to plug the gaps. And we promise, this is ok and will not invalidate your persona, as long as the entire persona isn't built on assumptions alone! When there is a clear lack of information on your persona that you just can't get, use your common sense to ask yourself: "Knowing what I know about this persona, what do I think is the most likely reaction/response?" Asking this single question, and validating the answers with several others in your team will help you pad out the missing data. And then you are ready!

3. BUILD YOUR LEARNER PERSONAS (DUH!)

Once you've gathered your data and plugged the gaps with your assumptions, it's time to bring it all together in one document. You can design your persona doc however you like, but we prefer to make it look like a sort of visual CV. That's just our preference though, so go bananas and create a look and feel that's appropriate for your brand. Just make sure the layout you select allows anyone who needs to use the persona to easily interpret and understand the data.



A fictional person I created for our marketing for learning training course. Just to give you some inspo! (It has no affiliation with TUI, I just clearly fancied a holiday!)

In many cases, you may well include some demographic data within your persona (such as job title, age and gender) but these are purely used for context for users of the persona and shouldn't play a critical role in their overall character.

What we'll typically include in a persona:

- Personal profile: who are they? A broad overview of their personality can be useful
- Wants and needs
- Key professional challenges & pain points
- Personal interests

Some people like to include a picture of the persona and maybe even give them a name. That is completely optional, but we have found it helps our clients remember their personas! The important thing is you do whatever you need to in order to make this persona feel alive and real in your mind. You'll be holding this persona in your mind's eye A LOT, so make sure you totally understand who they are.

4. TEST, TEST, TEST (AND NEVER, EVER STOP)

Here's where the real fun begins - putting your persona into practice. Before you start using your persona, manage your own expectations and be real about what you've created. Chances are, you haven't created the perfect persona on the first go (kudos if you have, you little one take wonder, you!)
So, rather than just releasing your persona out into the wild and thinking you never have to worry about it again, consider what steps you can take to stress test your persona. How can you really see whether it's accurate and working as well as it should?

Make sure you are doing everything you can to get data on your persona's performance, so that you can carry on with step 5.

Not clear what we mean by testing your persona? Here's a simple example using a basic A/B test in an email:

- Let's say you are using the psychographic data you've collected to create your persona. You believe one of the main drivers for your persona is the fact that they are impatient, so you want to test this out.
- You create two emails, each with the same internal contents but a different subject line:
    - Focus on urgency = Subject line 1:
    - Get the new skills you need NOW Peter!
    - Focus on taking your time = Subject line 2:
    - Give yourself the time you need to succeed Peter!
- You monitor the open rate of each of the two emails
- The outcome of the test will help you understand your persona better.

Now, this is a simple test and you shouldn't say to yourself "OK, subject line one got a way higher open rate. That means my persona is absolutely impatient." Instead seek to gather a body of information and draw conclusions from that; one email, one data point, does not signify much. So get as much data as you can in your testing and then move on to step 5.

5. ITERATE AND EVOLVE

Once you have some data on how your persona is performing, you can then adjust and evolve it over time. Use information from your learning and communication efforts to help you realign your persona and include new attributes as they become relevant. Remember: a persona is a living, breathing thing that you should tend to regularly. It's not a 'one and done' situation. Keep it thriving and alive by feeding it new information that you have gathered based on your audiences behaviour. And never, ever stop.

The beauty of creating a robust persona is that it can be used in a variety of applications in L&D. After all, it's ultimately helping you understand your audiences better, so whilst we are suggesting using it to help you improve your marketing efforts, why not use it to help inform your learning programmes and the learning experiences you are developing too? One persona. Dozens of applications. Sounds like a task worth completing, doesn't it?

WANNA SEE PERSONA DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION?

Well you're in luck. I recorded a vlog the last time I created personas! Taking you through every single step of the process – the research, ideation, creation, the lot! Happy watching:

STEP FOUR: DEFINING YOUR PRODUCT & PURPOSE

So now you know who your audience is, it's time to redirect your focus to your product (yep, you do have one!)

When talking to learning leaders for the first time, I often find myself having conversations about particular learning interventions, platforms or solutions. And truthfully, that stuff is too granular to be the starting point for your marketing for learning initiatives. Instead, we need to zoom out and take a holistic snapshot of your function. What is your function's purpose? And what are you offering to your audience?

Although you might think those questions are straightforward – to provide learning and development to the company and learning, duh! – it's way deeper than that, but have no fear, we have a few models and templates to help you out.

So let's get stuck in with defining your product:

WHAT IS AN L&D PRODUCT?

If you have a learning offering, you have an L&D product. Fact.

Your L&D product might be face-to-face training, a blended intervention, a learning library – or all of the above and much more. Simply put: your product is everything you offer to your audience.

So that's it?
We've defined what an L&D product is.
Job done. *Dusts off hands*

Of course not – defining your L&D product is much more than that. And it's actually the cornerstone of effective marketing, for five key reasons.

Product definition allows us to:

1. Articulate benefits clearly. If you don't know what problem or challenge your product solves, how on earth can you communicate the benefits with your audience?
2. Answer the WIIFM. The 'WIIFM' (What's in it for me?) is something we talk about a lot at MAAS. In fact, we've mentioned it a lot in this ebook so far. But ultimately you have to determine what your audience will get out of getting involved with your learning offering.
3. Bat away competition. You might think you don't have competition as an internal L&D department, but you do (e.g. Netflix, their Phones, their children...) By defining your L&D product, you can bat away competition much easier! (Although we would not recommend literally batting away children... obvs.)
4. Manage resources more effectively. It's not all about marketing around here. Knowing your L&D product – and perhaps even your product road map – will help you manage resources & capacity much more efficiently.
5. Boost engagement – and isn't that what we all want?

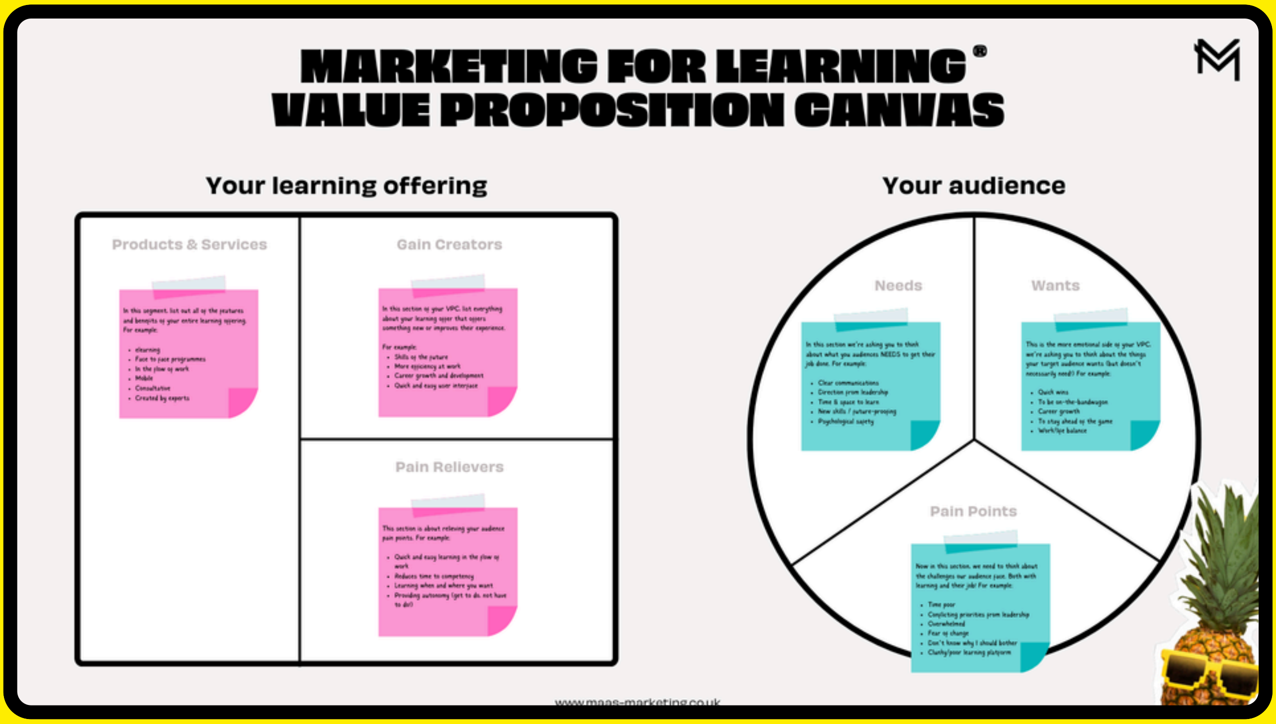
Truthfully, product definition should steer every element of your marketing for learning strategy. And without a clearly defined product, you'll struggle to get your people to consume your learning time and time again.

WHAT IS AN L&D PRODUCT?

Defining your positioning is about marrying up your offering to your target audience's wants and needs – and highlighting how it'll help them alleviate some of their fears and pain points. And the value proposition canvas (VPC) helps us do this.

A completed VPC enables you to craft more impactful marketing messages that relate to both the benefits of your product AND your audiences desires. Hey, it might even help you refine your product or realise a gap in your offering.

AND IT LOOKS A LIL' LIKE THIS:



YOUR LEARNING OFFERING

The product side of your VPC is made up of 3 sections:

PRODUCT & SERVICES
Although you should never market your L&D product based on its features, you must understand them. Because our product features help us to determine the benefits of getting involved. But when you're filling out your 'Products & Services' box, make sure you're considering your entire learning offering. It's really easy to just think of your LMS or LXP here. But what about your face-to-face programmes? Training days? PDFs? Learning in the flow of work? Make sure you include features of your entire offering!

GAIN CREATORS
What is it about your product that is going to positively impact somebody? How is it going to help them achieve their goals? Is it going to make them more productive? Is it going to help them climb the career ladder? Does it save them time? Does it equip them to prioritise themselves? Gain creators add the human element to your offering, and highlight what it is about your offering that offers your audience something new, or improves their existing process.

Looking at an example away from the world of learning, a feature of Apple devices is that they sync up with one another (i.e. your MacBook links with your iPhone and iPad). That's a feature. The 'gain' of this is that you have seamless access to your photos, your contacts, your notes, and anything else that's on your iCloud account, no matter which device you have with you. #Simples

PAIN RELIEVERS
This box flips your 'gain creators' on their head, and instead of targeting the benefits of your product, we think about the ways it can alleviate your audience's pain points. For example, is your learning offer inclusive, meaning everybody can get involved? Is it the best quality curated content meaning your audience doesn't have to search for themselves? Is it bite-sized so people don't have to leave their day job for a full day? Ultimately here, we're looking at ways that we can bat away any naysayers when it comes to our learning offering.

Oftentimes the experience you anticipate your audience will have, and the reality of the experience, are vastly different. So we'd recommend talking to people about their lived experiences to help you fill out this box.

YOUR AUDIENCE

The audience side of your VPC should be created in tandem with your personas. But it's important to spend the time collating the wants, needs and pain points of your target audience here. These three areas are some of the biggest behavioural drivers, and will paint a clear picture of why your audience are acting in a certain way; and what will help them change!

WANTS
What does your audience want to make their life easier? What is it that will make them happy? Is it a pay rise? Is it to help others grow? To provide a better service for their clients? Ultimately... What is it that gets them out of bed in the morning?

It's really tempting here to list out learning wants: e.g. they want bite sized content, they want certifications etc. etc. But doing so is falling into the trap of only thinking about your audiences as 'learners'. Your audience's wants are much bigger than learning – and often rather than a want in itself, learning is the vehicle to help them get what they actually want.

NEEDS

Unlike wants, needs are non-negotiable. Career growth is often a need related to L&D audiences – and it's clear to see how learning is the answer to that. Relevant learning opportunities also come up time and time again. But how about psychological safety? Empathy? Time? Permission? There's a lot that your audience might need before they can interact with your offering – and you must do the work to understand these!

PAIN POINTS

Now this section often makes L&Ders uncomfortable. Because pain points are a bit awkward to address aren't they? We don't want to acknowledge that our audience might be worried about something. Or that something is causing them pain. But it's really important that we do.

This box unlocks a whole world of marketing tactics and approaches for you. And although we don't want to evoke behaviour or action from a place of terrified panic (i.e. we'd never say 'do this or you'll lose your job!') Feelings associated with fear promote action, for example: the growing skills gap. That is a fear-based message, but it doesn't mean that you're trying to terrify everybody with your comms.

Completing a VPC will help you gain a holistic understanding of your product and audience – and how the two match (or not!) And somewhere between the two of these is where we cook up our marketing magic and create an L&D product that our people actually want to engage with.

CRAFTING A BRAND NARRATIVE

So now we've got our completed VPC, we need to create something a lil' more tangible, right? That's where our brand promise & positioning statement step in, to encapsulate your purpose.

Your brand promise is a pledge you are making to your target audience about what you will deliver to them. What kind of experience can they expect when interacting with you? What standard are you going to hold yourself to? Now is the time to stop thinking of yourself as "the L&D team". Instead, consider yourself a collective that is on a mission to fulfil your brand promise.

Brand promises aren't necessarily something that you'll ever see in external marketing., because they're super personal and often internal. But I've done some digging and found a brand promise example for you:

> "To inspire and nurture the human spirit. One person, one cup, one neighbourhood at a time."
>
> – Starbucks, About Us, 2023.

But wait... they didn't mention coffee at all?!

Yep. That's right – you don't need to overtly mention your product in your brand promise. Your brand promise is your "why". Why are you doing what you're doing? What keeps you going? What gets you out of bed every morning?

Despite not mentioning coffee, Starbucks' brand promise isn't a surprise is it? It exudes in all they do. In their adverts, their staff, their stores. Even the way they write names on their cups. It's very personal, and you can see how they're trying to nurture the human spirit. And how they constantly deliver on their brand promise time and time again.

So why is a brand promise important for L&D? Well sticking to your brand promise builds trust with your audience – and if your audience doesn't trust you, they're not going to get involved with your learning offering, are they? But it also unites your L&D function. It gives everybody one purpose to work towards; with no confusing grey areas!

CREATE A BRAND PROMISE IN 3 STEPS:

1. Analyse your value proposition canvas.
Use your VPC to identify what your audience wants from you, and what they'll get from getting involved with your learning offering. Answer the all important "what's in it for me?" question.

2. Carefully consider your offering.
You probably have an LMS, LXP, or something similar. What's the experience of that like? If you are promising your people that they are going to get the best learning experience of their life, but your LMS is absolutely pants… There's gonna be a bit of an imbalance, right?! So look at your offering – and be real with yourself about how great it really is.

3. Keep it simple and make it catchy!
Make sure your brand promise is something your entire team can remember. It should be catchy, keeps your team on path and working towards those set values that you have as a learning team.

The truth is, brand promises are a really simple part of a really big process (defining your product). And after creating your brand promise, you aren't finished. You need to think about your product positioning if you want to make a real impact…

WHAT IS A POSITIONING STATEMENT?

So, what is a positioning statement? Well, HubSpot can answer that better than I can, so...

"A positioning statement is a brief description of a product or service and an explanation of how it fulfils a particular need of the target market. The goal of a positioning statement is to align marketing efforts with a company's brand and value proposition." – HubSpot, 2023.

So simply put: a positioning statement combines your brand promise and your VPC – and identifies how your product meets your audience's needs, AND how it aligns with your business goals. Let's look at an example of a positioning statement:

> "For athletes in need of high-quality, fashionable athletic wear, Nike offers customers top-performing sports apparel and shoes made of the highest quality materials. Its products are the most advanced in the athletic apparel industry because of Nike's commitment to innovation and investment in the latest technologies."
>
> – Hubspot, 2023.

Nike's positioning statement is clear, impactful and to the point. It considers the how, what and why of their offering. And it's for this reason that positioning statements are so important in L&D. So let's look at creating one together, shall we?

ooo I love a bit of team work

CREATING YOUR L&D POSITIONING STATEMENT

HubSpot have created a template for creating positioning statements – giving us a great place to start:

> For [your target audience] who [target market need], [your brand/product name] provides [main benefit that differentiates your offering] because [reason why target audience should believe in your differentiation statement].

So we have 4 key questions to answer:

Who is our target audience?
What are their needs?
What is the main benefit of our learning offering?
Why should our audience believe us?

The first three questions are answered in your VPC, so we actually only need to create one piece of our positioning statement, and then piece it all together. #Winning

But it's that final part that most L&Ders struggle with. For decades L&D have lived in a bubble where we believe people should believe us and use our content – because we said so. But our audiences have wised up to this. And they won't take "because we said so" any more.

It's time to really think about why your audience should believe you and get involved with our learning offering. We can't tell you the answer to that right now (not without doing some deep discovery work with your team), so for now, this is a point of self-reflection... but reviewing your VPC will help!

But to help you on your way, let's dissect a few positioning statements to see how they work:

First, let's put HubSpot's template to work and break down Nike's positioning statement:

Target audience	Athletes
Audience's needs	Need of high-quality, fashionable athletic wear
Main benefit:	Top-performing sports apparel and shoes made of the highest quality materials
Why should they believe you?	Nike's commitment to innovation and investment in the latest technologies.

We can see how that works. But in L&D we often haven't got a lot of time and money to invest in the latest tech or innovation, do we? So that doesn't help us with the 'why?' Let's look at another example...

"For organisations who need visual collaboration at scale, Mural helps you bring imagination to work from anywhere with agile and design thinking methodologies, sales and consulting, and research and design, all in one platform. Join a growing network of global enterprises, consultancies, schools, and nonprofits using Mural to innovate."

– Hubspot, 2023.

And let's break this down into Hubspot's template again...

Target audience	Organisations
Audience's needs	Who need visual collaboration at scale
Main benefit:	Imagination to work from anywhere with agile and design thinking methodologies, sales and consulting, and research and design, all in one platform.
Why should they believe you?	Growing network of global enterprises, consultancies, schools, and nonprofits using Mural to innovate.

Okay, that's social proof and a firm reason why their audience should believe. But not all L&D teams have a growing network of learners, so let's look at a hypothetical example for L&D...

A MADE UP L&D TEAM'S POSITIONING STATEMENT

We don't have an L&D team here at MAAS. But if we did, a first draft of our L&D positioning statement might look a lil' like this:

For employees of MAAS Marketing who need to develop the skills to future-proof their careers and our organisation, we provide flexible, collaborative, on demand learning tailored to their unique needs because we know there is no right way to learn and we want them to take charge of their career possibilities.

Let's distill this down into our grid, to check we're hitting all the right marks!

Target audience	Employees of MAAS Marketing
Audience's needs	Who need to develop the skills to future-proof their careers and our organisation
Main benefit:	We provide flexible, collaborative, on demand learning tailored to their unique needs
Why should they believe you?	Because we know there is no right way to learn and we want them to take charge of their career possibilities

Woohoo, that works! But it's a bit of a mouthful isn't it? So let's put our marketing hats on and make it sound a bit better...

"MAAS Marketing gives our people the opportunity to learn, network and connect with their colleagues across the globe, helping us strive towards a future of collaboration, forward-thinking and growth. We know there is no 'right' way to learn. So our people are in charge, choosing their own learning journeys, format and timeline to make sure they are prepared for growth."

Much better! The same message is portrayed, but it's less clunky and keeps attention. Exactly what we want!

Creating a positioning statement does take some time, but it unifies your team, your product and your audience. And ultimately – it makes sure you have a product or service ready to be marketed!

DELIVERING ON YOUR POSITIONING STATEMENT

But the truth is, all of this will be a waste of time and effort if you don't put the work in to make it a reality. You need to have the team structure, collaborative culture and support network to really bring it to life. So now is the time to think about your team a little bit. Notably:

YOUR CAPACITY & STRUCTURE
Your team's structure, and its ability to support strategic goals. For example, do you have the capacity in your team to deliver on your brand promise, alongside your other priorities?

BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS
Do you have relationships with other functions to truly understand their wants, needs and fears — to ensure that your product meets their requirements?

SUPPORT NETWORK
Have you established a support network across the organisation that will amplify your brand, and your brand promise? We all need advocates to succeed!

COR, THIS IS A LOT. IS IT WORTH THE EFFORT?

Yes.

End of section.

Joking… but we get it, defining your product might seem a little bit far-fetched for many L&Ders. Especially as we've spent years with the assumptions that our product = our learning, and our audience should want to take it. No questions asked.

But in today's day and age, that's not the case. Our people have millions of pieces of data — and learning experiences — at their fingertips, thanks to Google, YouTube, TikTok, etc. And to compete with that kind of competition (AKA some of the most engaging platforms in the entire world), you really have to know what your product is, and why your audience should care.

So yep, it might feel cumbersome right now. But trust us, spending the time defining your product, thinking about how it impacts your audience, and why they'd want to get involved will help your marketing efforts tenfold.

Hey… it's why we start every single project here at MAAS with a discovery process and creation of a VPC. We practise what we preach guys! 💁🏻‍♀️

STEP FIVE: DECISION MAKING JOURNEYS

So now you've got your personas and your product definition, you're ready to start marketing! But that doesn't mean returning to your old ways of blanket emails and boring social posts. No, now we need to put our personas and product understanding to work. And we do that with decision making journeys.

Decision making journeys are the secret sauce to truly engaging with your people. We use them to work out where our audience is hanging out. What they're doing. And what they're thinking and feeling at each stage of the process.. starting from when they're unaware, all the way through to when they're loyal advocates of learning and development.

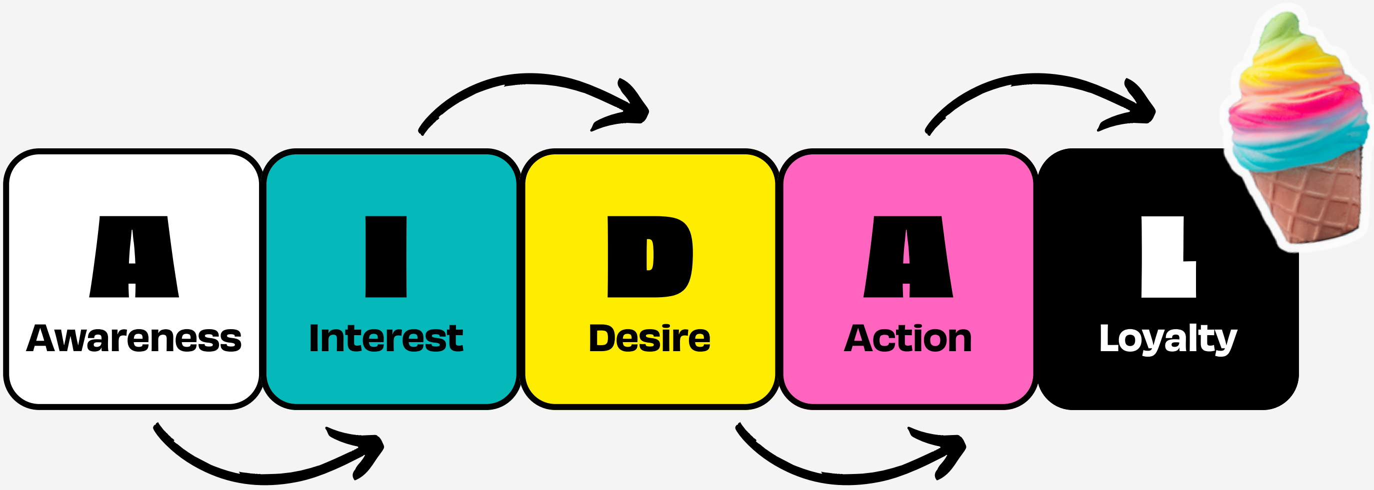
WHAT IS A DECISION MAKING JOURNEY?

In marketing we have a concept called the "customer decision making process". And it is an activity to work out the steps an organisation's target audience takes before, during and after purchase. Marketers will map out where their people are, what they're thinking about and how they're feeling at every single point of this journey. And it's only after having that in-depth understanding of their target audience, does a marketer start thinking about marketing tactics.

So it'll come as no surprise that your decision making journey is the same – but in a learning context. Obvs. So instead of thinking about a purchase — we're thinking about what our audience are doing, thinking and feeling, before, during and after your learning intervention.

But to do this, we need to establish what the stages of the journey are. And we've come up with a five step process that works for every L&D team we've ever encountered: the AIDAL model. (Ok, ok. We stole this one from marketing too - but we tweaked it a lil bit 😉)

WHAT IS THE AIDAL MODEL?



AIDAL stands for Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action and Loyalty. And they are all the motions your audience will go through whilst dealing with you and your learning offering. It's best to think of AIDAL as a funnel. In L&D, most, if not all, of your target audience will have some level of awareness of your offering – but that's not good enough, is it? We want them learning! So our objective is to nudge them down the AIDAL funnel, in order to get them to get involved with your learning offering (action), and tell their friends, colleagues & peers about their experience (loyalty).

USING THE AIDAL MODEL

So now we know that the AIDAL model is a representation of our audience's journey with learning, let's look into each stage in a bit more detail...

STEP ONE: AWARENESS

The first step of the AIDAL model is awareness – and if you have a large cohort of employees who are unengaged with learning in your organisation, this is where they'll be sitting. Simply put: they know your learning offering exists – but they're not doing anything with it. They're not engaging with it. They're not talking about it. They're not even thinking about it.

REMEMBER:
An individual's stage in the journey has no correlation with their tenure at your organisation. Somebody could have worked for your company for decades, and still be in the 'awareness' stage of the journey.

STEP TWO: INTEREST

The next stage of the decision making journey is interest. This is when your audience starts thinking about your learning offering, and how it might benefit them. They still haven't decided if they want to get involved, if the offering is right for them, or if they deem the learning necessary at all. But they're interested in it...

The best way to understand the interest stage is by thinking about the last new gadget you purchased. For me, it was my dishwasher. I spent a long while in the interest stage.. I knew the benefits of having one, I knew how it would impact my life, I was interested in having one. But I spent time weighing up whether it was right for me, whether it was worth the cost, and (probably most importantly!) if it would fit in my kitchen.

So in the interest stage your audience has realised they have a challenge, but they're trying to work out if learning is the solution.

STEP THREE: DESIRE

The middle stage of the AIDAL model is where your audience ups the ante. They now want to take part in your learning offering. They've identified their problem, and they know they need to learn a new skill or way of working to fix it.

But this doesn't mean they're ready to go full steam ahead just yet. In fact, this is the stage in which your audience is most likely to be comparing you to another option. Is there another way they can acquire this skill or gain more knowledge on a particular topic? Maybe there's an off the shelf course that would be easier for them to acquire and complete. Or maybe there's some YouTube videos on the topic. Going back to my dishwasher example – I was in the desire stage (knowing I really wanted a dishwasher) but then I started comparing different makes of dishwashers, before I made a purchase.

STEP FOUR: ACTION

This stage is pretty self explanatory, right? It's the moment your audience takes action. They dive in and complete your learning intervention. Whether that's completing an elearning course, enrolling on a face-to-face programme, or signing up to your mentoring scheme. Whatever 'it' is, they're doing it. Depending on your organisation, your L&D function and your marketing strategy, your action stage may be a small action, i.e. signing up for a learning intervention. Or it may be a long, complex action, for example completing a blended learning programme. I cannot tell you what your action should be, but make sure it's defined up front – before you move on to considering what your audience are doing at this stage.

STEP FIVE: LOYALTY

The final stage in the AIDAL funnel is loyalty – and this is the most impactful for L&D. And the one that most of us dream of – having loyal learners to advocate for our offering. At this stage your audience is raving about your offering. They're telling their friends, colleagues and peers about the experience they had, and the impact it had on them. Oh, and they're coming back to you for all their future learning experiences, of course!

But nudging people into the loyalty stage isn't always easy. In fact, people often share their negative experiences more freely than they share their positive experiences. So to get people to advocate for your L&D offering, you really need to knock their socks off.

THE DECISION MAKING FRAMEWORK

But before we dive straight in, it's important to remember that the decision making framework is a task of empathy. Now is the time to put yourself in your persona's shoes. And thinking about their activities, goals, thoughts and emotions at each stage. In its final form, the decision making framework is a matrix that gives us a holistic view of our audience's experience with learning.

AND IT LOOKS A LIL' LIKE THIS:

		AWARENESS	INTEREST	DESIRE	ACTION	LOYALTY
ACTIVITIES	What are your audience doing at this stage?					
GOALS	What are their objectives at this stage?					
THOUGHTS	What are they thinking at this stage?					
EMOTIONS	How are they feeling at this stage?					

🛑 STOP 🛑

MUST READ BEFORE YOU CONTINUE!

Don't bother trying to complete a decision making framework if you haven't created your personas. Persona development is a critical first step.

It's especially important to take your learning hat off for this task. The chances are your audience isn't thinking about learning as much as you are... so keep that in mind while filling out your framework. Now let's dig into each step a little more, shall we?

ACTIVITIES

What are your audience doing at each stage of the funnel? What tasks are they completing? How are they spending their time? Remember to think outside of the box here. Remember! Not all of the activities will be learning related, your audience will likely be occupied with their day job, family life and social activities too! (And they'll probably prioritise these over learning too!)

GOALS

As an L&Der, it's easy to assume our audience's goals will be learning related. Maybe you assume your people have a goal of learning a particular skill or acquiring a piece of knowledge. And that might be true for some. But a large portion of your audience will have very different goals. For example, they might have the goal of getting a pay rise or promotion. Or maybe they're striving towards the goal of the perfect work/life balance. For many – their goals will not be learning related, but we know the solution will be!

THOUGHTS & FEELINGS

We know that the decision making framework is a task of empathy, but when filling out the thoughts & feelings sections of your framework, you need to take this up a notch. You need to put yourself in the shoes of your audience and really think about how they might feel at that moment in time. Don't rush past this part, spend time thinking about how to articulate their thoughts and feelings. And utilise the full wheel of emotions! Don't settle for 'happy' – maybe your audience is optimistic and inspired. Instead of being scared, maybe they're feeling overwhelmed and inadequate. Dig deep and articulate their emotions!

A WORD OF WARNING ABOUT POSITIVE INTENT

When completing your decision making framework, you must be realistic. Oftentimes we assume positive intent towards learning – but that isn't a realistic depiction of your audience's journey. Particularly in the desire, action and loyalty stages, make sure you're being realistic about how your audience might feel. For example... What happens if someone has a bad experience with your learning offering? How might they feel? How might that impact them moving – or not moving – on to the 'loyalty' stage of the funnel? Be realistic, it'll help you when it comes to marketing your offering.

FAQ: HOW MANY DECISION MAKING FRAMEWORKS SHOULD I CREATE?

We often get asked how many frameworks someone should complete, so if you're wondering: you should complete a learner decision making journey for each of your personas. Your personas are unique characters – so their journey (and thoughts and feelings they have throughout it) will also be unique.

USING YOUR DECISION MAKING JOURNEY

So now what? You've completed your framework and have a holistic view of your audience's journey with your L&D offering. Now we have to do something with it, right?

Your completed decision making framework is a tool to help you choose the marketing tactics that will be best suited to nudge your audience down the AIDAL funnel. It will enable you to choose the right marketing tactics, tools and channels to engage with them. For example, if your persona is incredibly time poor and feeling frustrated in the 'awareness' stage, then it's probably not a good idea to send them an email that'll take them 10 minutes to read. Instead, you should use short, snappy bursts of information – that keeps your offering and brand front of mind, and spark intrigue with your audience

.

When creating your marketing for learning strategy (see step six), create a decision making journey and use it to inform all of your marketing tactics throughout. This is the only way to truly personalise your marketing efforts – and we all know that personalised marketing gets butts a'movin, right?

"OK, BUT WHAT TACTICS SHOULD I USE?"

This is a question we hear a LOT at MAAS. And it's often rooted in a belief that L&D teams can only use email to communicate with their audience. But this niffy table is here to tell you that belief is wrong...

A Awareness	Blogs or articles. Videos. Infographics or posters. Managers. Leaders. Learning Business Partners. Newsletters. Events.
I Interest	Emails. Drip campaigns. Educational blogs. PDFs. Webinars. Podcasts. Managers. Leaders. Learning Business Partners.
D Desire	User generated content. Testimonials. Sneak peeks. Exclusive offers. Emails. Drip Campaigns. Influential people.
A Action	Reminder emails. Exclusive events. Compelling copy. User generated content. Certificates. Great customer service.
L Loyalty	Community groups. Alumi-only events. Email. Refresher training. Templates. Tools. Podcast. User generated content.

You've probably noticed that the tactics at each stage are not exclusive. That means that yes, you can use email throughout. It means you can use events as both an awareness and a loyalty tactic. But how you use these tactics should change depending on the stage your audience is in their journey. For example...

- An email in the awareness stage should be short, snappy and grab attention. Whereas an email in the loyalty stage might be longer, and be jam-packed full of information.
- User Generated Content (UGC) may be used as a tactic in the loyalty stage by having selfie style videos of alumni talking about how great the programme is. Whereas you might use UGC to engage someone in the loyalty stage by asking them to film a video for you to share.
- A podcast might be used as interest stage tactic by giving your audience a taster – making them realise what they don't know! Whereas a podcast might be used as a loyalty tactic to keep your audience engaged in a subject matter, and refresh their knowledge and understanding after they've engaged with your learning.

So there you have it, a clear framework to use to understand your audience's decision making journey – and some top tips on what tactics to use to nudge them down each stage! By applying this in your L&D function, you'll be able to cater to your audience's wants and needs, put them front and centre and create a learning experience that your people actually want to engage with.

STEP SIX: CREATING MARKETING CAMPAIGNS FOR L&D

So now we know who we're targeting, what we're targeting them with, their journey and the tactics we can use to get their attention.. we need to bring it all together. Enter: marketing campaigns.

The truth is, the world is noisy. Your people are inundated with a cacophony of comms both in and out of the organisation. Getting attention (and keeping it) has never been more difficult - nor has it ever been more pertinent in L&D.

The fact you've made it this far through this juicy ebook, tells me that you know marketing has a critical role to play in modern L&D teams. In fact, you may have even tried to do some marketing for learning before now. But if we're realistic, that was probably just a smattering of boring, corporate emails here, or a cobbled together promotional picture there. These kinds of marketing efforts almost always lack any strategic backbone, are usually done last minute and rarely span more than a couple of weeks.

The result is marketing efforts that don't make an impact and just get ignored. It's a true exercise in futility and adds even more noise to our audience's plates. So, what's the fix? Campaigns, of course!

WHAT IS A MARKETING CAMPAIGN?

According to Hubspot:

> "Marketing campaigns are organised, strategic efforts to promote a specific company goal. That can include raising awareness of a new product or capturing customer feedback. They typically involve a combination of media, including email, print advertising, television or radio advertising, pay-per-click, and social media."

So simply put, it's a focus period of marketing activity to instigate action. And that's what we want our people to do, isn't it? Take action. Whether that's becoming more aware of our offering, partaking in a learning intervention or advocating for us... we want them to take action. Which is why marketing campaigns work so well for L&D. So let's look at what it involves...

BUILDING A LEARNING CAMPAIGN

We've broken down the campaign planning into six core steps:

1. DEFINE YOUR GOALS

Whilst this step is one of the most critical for building out your campaigns, it's often an area I see as vastly overlooked by L&D overall. I don't know whether that's because we're scared of collecting data, or just don't really believe that goal setting is important when it comes to campaigns, but either way, it's not widely practised as far as I can see.

So, when planning your learning campaigns, always start with this step first. Ask yourself: "What am I trying to achieve with this learning campaign?" Make sure you're specific too. Saying something like "get more people learning" is quite intangible and will be quite difficult to measure against.

We also recommend that our customers measure success in two different ways, marketing effort success and then learning success. And that's because whilst learning and marketing are inextricably linked in this context, marketing cannot impact the quality of the learning product itself.

Here's a couple of areas you could consider monitoring:

MARKETING MEASUREMENTS	LEARNING MEASUREMENTS
Engagements with emails	Repeat visits to learning experiences
Increase visits and repeat visits to learning experiences	Improvements in performance
Increase registrations to learning content	Changes in behaviour

Whatever your goal, make sure you establish them from the outset, and don't forget to benchmark before you start your campaign. After all, you can't see where you've gone if you don't know where you came from.

DON'T FORGET TO MAKE YOUR GOALS SMART.

Hopefully, most of you are familiar with the concept of SMART goals, but just in case you're not, here are the parameters you must adhere to in order to develop SMART goals. We strongly recommend your goals utilise this format as they're easier to measure and monitor.

- They must be SPECIFIC, detailed and meaningful. Use action words where possible.
- They must be MEASURABLE. How will you evaluate success? Use tangible data and metrics as much as you can.
- They must be ATTAINABLE, realistic and within your scope; no one wants a goal that's unachievable.
- They must be RELEVANT and align with company goals and vision. Ideally, it improves some aspects of the business too.
- They must be TIME-BASED and have a clear deadline.

2. IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Although you've created personas already (you have, haven't you? 👀) you still have a little bit of work to do when it comes to identifying your target audience. That's because when it comes to campaigns: you do not need to target every persona, every time. Some campaigns will be better suited to one or two personas, than it will to all of them. And that is absolutely fine! In fact, I encourage it...

All too often I meet learning professionals who are reticent to limit a campaign to specific personas. They assume that by only targeting part of your audience, you are excluding others. That it's unfair. That it's favouritism. And that's not the case at all. In fact, developing campaigns that are targeted to specific persona/s is a sure-fire way to create more meaningful, impactful discourse with your audience.

So for each campaign you create, think about your goals and objectives, and then think "which persona(s) should I target for this campaign?" If there is only one persona that will help you reach your objective: then create a campaign tailored for them. It'll get you further, more quickly!

3. ORGANISE YOUR CHANNELS

Every time I sit down with a client to discuss how they reach out to their audiences, the response is basically always the same. Most conventional L&D departments aren't exactly drowning in communication channels to reach learners. Pair that challenge with internal comms often holding the reins on a lot of the global comms and suddenly just getting a message out to someone appears to be quite challenging.

However, don't be despondent. You actually have so many more channels than you think you do, especially if you explore utilising people in your business as the conduit for your message. Here's some of the most common channels we've leveraged in learning campaigns that we've developed for clients:

- Emails, both en-mass and segmented wherever possible
- Social channels such as Teams or Yammer
- Communities
- Intranet, such as articles or hosting PDFs
- Screens in communal areas
- Posters in communal areas
- All-hands calls
- Business Partners
- And many, many more

Once you have defined your goals and know who you're targeting with your campaign, you should be in a great position to identify which channels are going to be the most effective at carrying your message.

TOP TIP: Don't use TOO many channels, as this can sometimes spread you very thin. We recommend focusing on 2-4 key channels and putting all your energy into these. Your marketing efforts are more concentrated and aligned as a result.

4. UNDERSTAND AVAILABLE RESOURCE

This step is another hugely overlooked aspect of strategy and planning. Whenever we start working with a client we always make sure to ask them a really important question:

"How much time and energy does your team have available to commit to marketing?"

There's very little point in developing a multi-channel strategy that is complete with loads of cool promo videos and social posts and weekly emails if your team only has 2 hours a week to create stuff.

The point of this step is to be really real with yourself about what's possible and attainable within your current capacity. Better to develop something that's within your grasp rather than create a strat that's setting you up for failure from the outset.

5. STRATEGIZE AND PLAN

Here's the really meaty bit of your learning campaign - this is where you're going to define:

what you're going to do,
how you're going to do it,
who you're going to do it to,
when you're going to do it and
where you're going to do it.

Your strategy should define the how, what and who of your campaign, whilst the plan is a really detailed document (usually a spreadsheet) that determines the release schedule and cadence of your comms across a defined time period. If you want a template for a marketing campaign plan, email me at hello@maas-marketing.co.uk and I may well share one with you.

These strategic documents are usually quite hefty when we do them (I'm talking 5k+ words) because there's a lot of detail about the campaign positioning and the psychology of how we're going to connect with audiences using our hook.

DEVELOPING YOUR HOOK.

Most great marketing campaigns have a hook of some kind. If you're not sure what I mean, just think about brands such as Nike or McDonald's. Chances are their marketing hooks come to mind straight away: Just do it and I'm lovin' it. I reckon you're probably also visualising their logos by now too, and feeling some emotions about the brands as well. That's some bloody good marketing. Anyway, I digress.

These hooks are designed to grab your attention and well, bed into your mind like a fish hook might. Think of it as your lure to entice your learners to your learning offerings.

When done well, they're incredibly effective, so do explore how you can create a clever hook. Consider the following:

- Hooks should be short, no more than 5-7 words tops
- As simple as possible, whilst also being clever
- There shouldn't be any cognitive energy required to understand the hook. If it does, you need to revisit bullet 2
- Leverage word play, puns or lean into brand where possible

Get creative and see what you can come up with — because if your hook falls short, you'll struggle to get much impact with your overall campaign.

DEFINING YOUR CREATIVE IDEA

The campaigns that will stand out and capture the attention of your audience are the ones that break the status quo. This could be through clever copy, or design. But it could also be with coming up with a compelling way to get them involved. Think about quizzes, surveys, user generated content and much more. In my experience, the campaigns that get audiences doing something at the early stages of the funnel are the ones that get the most impact!

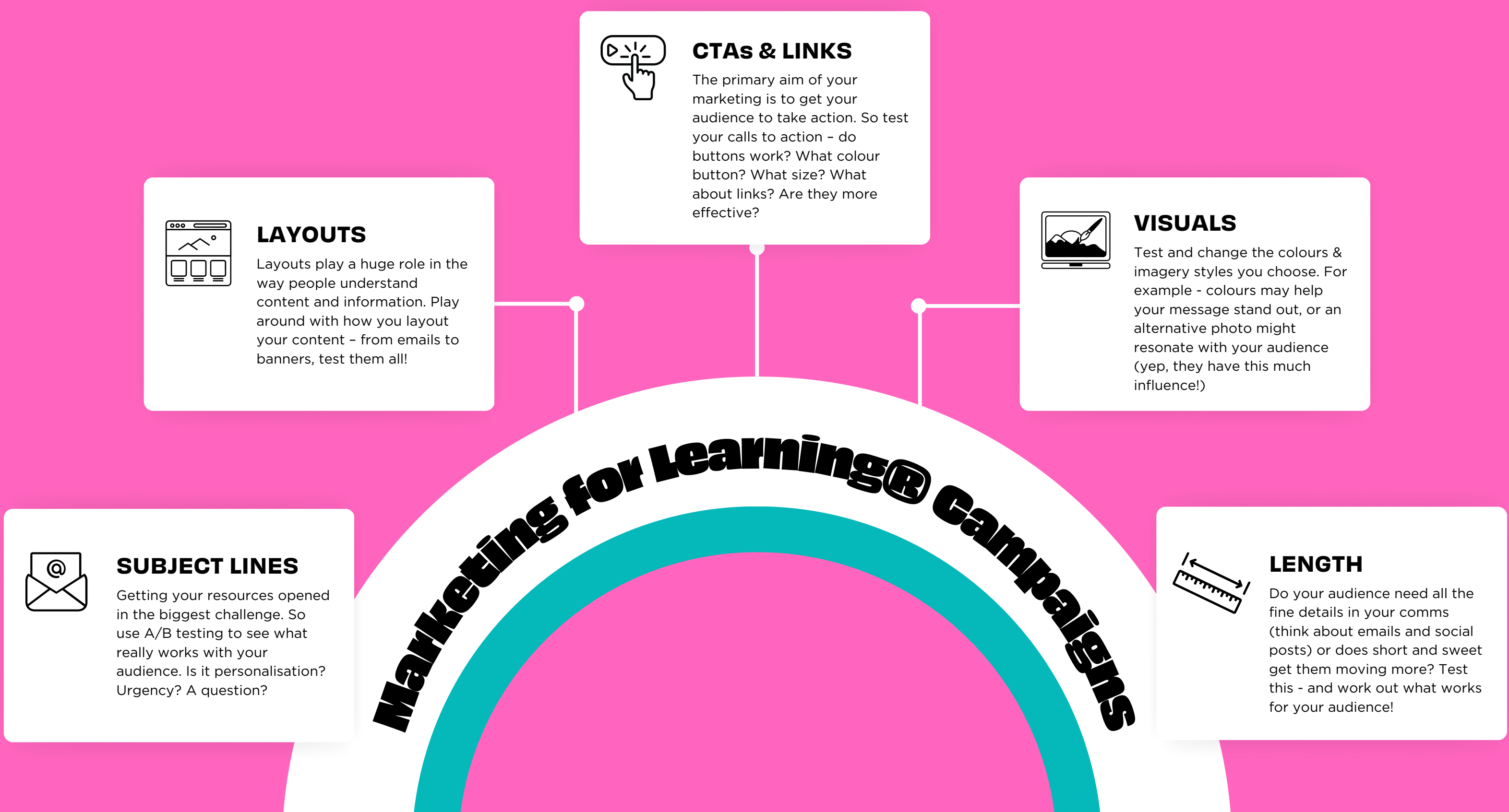
6. TEST AND ITERATE

Testing, learning and iterating is a vital aspect of marketing. Most digital marketers are a little bit fanatical about quality behavioural data from their audiences because it allows them to adjust their approaches and hopefully, improve their effectiveness over time.

There are loads of ways you can test your marketing efforts: Altering the contents of an email such as copy, subject line or imagery. Make sure to A/B test here, i.e. only change ONE component at a time. Split your list into two groups and send a version to each group. Add link tracking in emails to see which gets the most engagement or traction.

- Mixing up email length, try short emails and longer ones (just never make them longer than 250 characters (i.e., one side of A4). I'm serious, don't do it.
- Experimenting with colour psychology and the colours of your buttons or banners.
- Playing with tone of voice; does a casual or a conversational tone tend to resonate better with audiences? Who knows unless you experiment!

The key here is to always be playing with your marketing and thinking about how you can use the marketing efforts you are already undertaking to get an even deeper understanding of your audience.



STEP SEVEN: YOUR MARKETING FOR LEARNING STRATEGY

Every step we've covered in this ebook so far will play a critical role in your overall marketing for learning strategy. But the truth is you will likely have tens of learning initiatives that you need to promote within a year. And you will not be able to run full-blown marketing campaigns for all of those initiatives. So now we need to prioritise our initiatives and campaigns to ensure we are always staying front of mind. And we do this by thinking about three words: Hum, Sing and Shout.

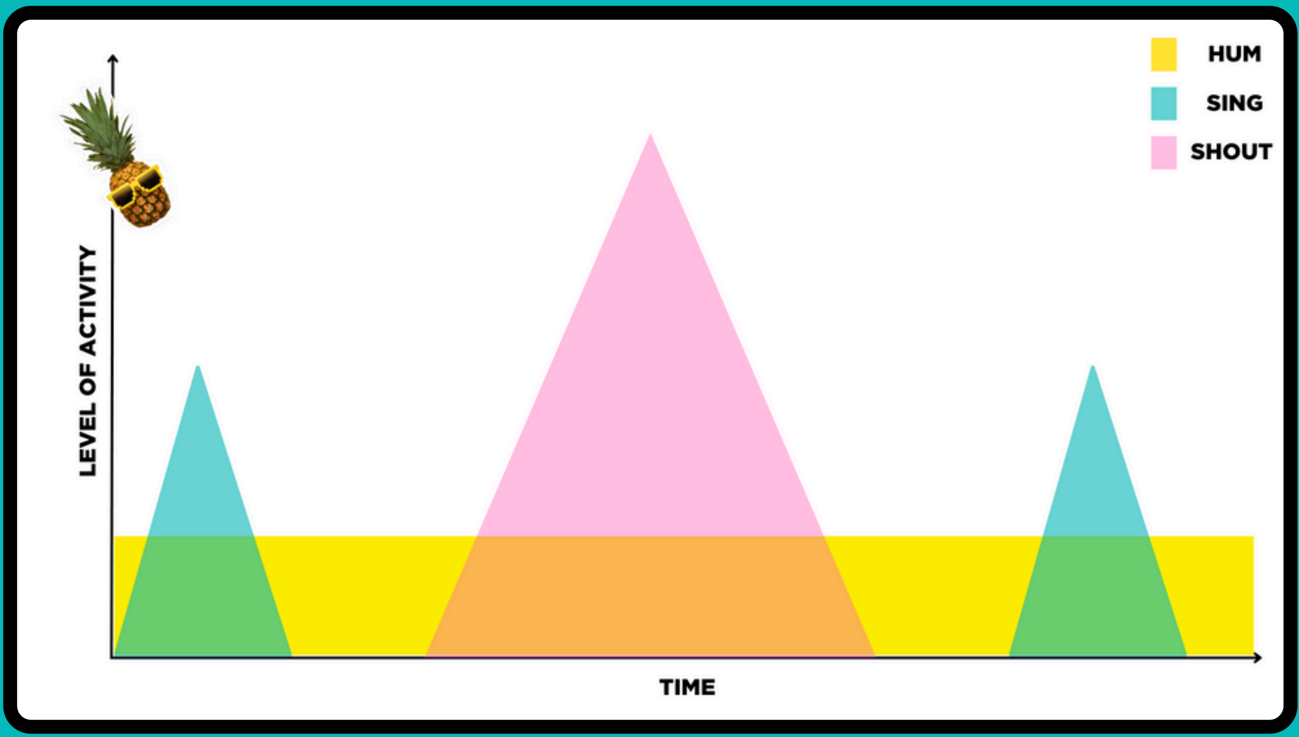
To create an effective marketing for learning strategy, you need to organise all of your activities into one of these three buckets.

HUM:
The always-on marketing. Your BAU, standard communications. Do you have a monthly learning newsletter? That's a hum tactic. A quarterly update meeting? That's hum too. It's the consistent communications about learning that is happening regardless of any specific focus on marketing.

SING:
This is when we are paying a little more attention to marketing, maybe it's a product launch or update. Or maybe it's a learning event you have going on. It's typically attention-grabbing, but for a shorter span of time. Sing activities usually focus on a launch, or a priority activity for your function.

SHOUT:
Now this is when we want all eyes on your L&D function. You want everybody talking about learning, and how they want to get involved. This is when you run large scale, multi-channel marketing campaigns.

Integrating these three buckets into your marketing for learning® strategy ensures that you have consistent communications at all times, instead of starting from ground zero each time. Meaning your communications will look a lil' like this:



And there's one last thing to keep in mind...

THE RULE OF 7:

The Rule of 7 states that a prospect needs to "hear" the advertiser's message at least 7 times before they'll take action to buy that product or service. The long-established Rule of 7 tells marketers how they might maintain contact and visibility with clients to earn their trust and business. And we can (and should!) apply this to our marketing in L&D too. So integrate multiple channels into your marketing strategy.

BUILDING YOUR STRATEGY

OK, confession time. Everything we've included so far in this ebook is basically your marketing for learning® strategy. So bring it all together, and you have a year (or longer) strategy ready and raring to go.

But if you want help formulating your strategy, I'd recommend including the following sections:

- **Where you are now**
  - Utilise your market research phase to benchmark where you are right now. Look at things like your active user rates, engagement data and performance metrics.
  - Your value proposition canvas should be included here to inform the rest of your strategy.
  - Include your personas in this section – after all, they stay the same no matter how successful your marketing is!
  - And lastly, include your decision making journeys here too.

- **Where you want to be**
  - Write goals for the duration of your marketing strategy (remember to make them SMART!)

- **How you're going to get there**
  - This is when you integrate your campaigns into your strategy, to nudge you towards achieving your goals:
  - Hum marketing: always on, consistent communications.
  - Sing marketing: Any key launches that warrant a low-key campaign.
  - Shout marketing: Key campaigns, once or twice a year.

- **Marketing plan!**
  - A strategy without a plan will not get you anywhere. So break your plan down into a week-by-week calendar, for your entire team to use!

And there you have it, a marketing for learning® strategy that will help you boost engagement levels once and for all!

CONCLUSION

So if you've made it this far, well done! This is a beast of an ebook, but I hope you agree, it's an absolute goldmine of information, resources and advice about implementing marketing into your learning function. So what's the TL;DR for you to take to your team?

- Adopt a marketing mindset! Be curious, challenging (in the right way) and collaborative.

- Align your function with the Business Goals: Just as marketing strategies are crafted to support broader business objectives, L&D strategies must be aligned with the company's strategic goals. This alignment ensures that learning initiatives are not just educational but also impactful, driving your business forward.

- Understanding the Audience: Like marketers who study their customers, L&D professionals must deeply understand their audience. This involves creating personas, mapping the learner journey, and designing experiences that are relevant, engaging, and tailored to individual needs (en MAASe 😉)

- Be flexible. Learn from failures. Try, try and try again. Whatever cliche you want me to use... apply it here. Being adaptable to our ever evolving business environments is the only way forward.

Even with the best crystal balls in the world, it's almost impossible to predict the future of L&D. But here at MAAS, we truly believe one thing will always remain the same: our need to engage our audiences with the phenomenal learning content we create. And the only way to truly engage audiences is with marketing.

So what are you waiting for? Hop to it, and you know where we are if you need help!

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(YEP, EVERYTHINGGGG!)