

MillerCoors's Multifaceted Marketing Approach to Learning

How do you change the learning culture of a company that is deeply rooted in a traditional learning paradigm? MillerCoors, the result of a merger between two long-established American breweries, has a multigenerational workforce that is spread across the United States. More than half of its employees are brewery workers. MillerCoors wanted to convince them of the value of flexible, self-directed learning.



MillerCoors – a Young Organization

MillerCoors is the result of a merger between two veteran brewing companies dating from the 1800s: Miller Brewing Company and Coors Brewing Company. The company has 9,000 employees in eight large and five smaller breweries across the US.

A company with more than 200 years of combined history, MillerCoors was deeply rooted in traditional learning concepts: It had a strong affinity for classroom-based learning. More than 70% of all the learning solutions the organization used to offer were face-to-face workshops or instructor-led classes.

MillerCoors's learning team has been gradually shifting the organization's learning paradigm from traditional classroom-based learning toward self-directed learning, introducing the benefits of social learning, online learning, classic and web-based mentoring programs, action learning projects, business simulation learning experiences, and so on. Each of these activities is aligned to support their three main capability-building areas: "leadership development," "commercial functions (sales and marketing)" and "operation or supply chain organization."

MillerCoors wants to change the "hard and set paradigms people have about learning." Rather than saying, "I'm working on this

particular skill. What classes can I go to?" they want their employees to think about effective development strategies, whether or not formal classroom education is part of that.

When MillerCoors University was founded, the concept of a corporate university was foreign to most employees. The learning team created a road show presentation to explain the idea behind it, going "from function to function, from team to team, from colleague to colleague" to introduce the solutions and resources the corporate university contains.

Oftentimes, the learning team would research in advance whether a department

Achieved Results

- Employees benefited from nontraditional learning solutions.
- Helped the company shift its learning paradigm toward flexible learning.
- Ability to reach the hourly workers who make up more than half of all employees and work in 13 different breweries.
- A brewery employee in Georgia is one of MillerCoors's top 5 users.

CASE STUDY: MillerCoors™

head favored a particular book. If so, the team would jokingly offer to sell copies of the summary to the employees to save them time, thereby educating people on the value of getAbstract while bringing some humor into the presentation. Promoting getAbstract, MillerCoors opted against a “push strategy.” The learning team wanted their employees to use the service on demand, because they found it useful. To market getAbstract in the company, they used a multifaceted approach based on a mix of media:

1. Strengthening the Online Presence

MillerCoors University’s online presence is a crucial part of marketing getAbstract. The corporate university’s website gets 1,000 hits per month and is among the most visited sites within the organization. At first, the getAbstract link was buried on the internal website. The learning team moved it to the front page. Clicking the link will take you to a page with information about getAbstract’s service. Visitors to the site can then go to the getAbstract site, where they can browse and download summaries.

2. Educating HR Managers and Learning Colleagues

The learning team realized that educating the company’s HR managers about getAbstract was crucial to reach the end users, the actual learners. They distributed hard copy and e-format versions of a product sheet explaining the solution, its benefits and its target audience. The sheet describes how people can access getAbstract’s summary library and how employees can use the content to seize development opportunities. The sheet helps educate HR managers allowing them to talk to their client groups in an informed manner. HR managers can also distribute the sheets directly to their client groups.

3. Launching a Web/Print Campaign

MillerCoors put up posters advertising getAbstract across the company. In addition, MillerCoors displayed digital versions of the print poster in a loop on LCD screens. They placed a banner ad on the front page of the company intranet, which displays news stories and valuable links for employees. This getAbstract promotion caught people’s attention. When they clicked on the ad, a page opened where they could learn more about the service or access the summary library directly. The exposure from these campaigns proved to be “remarkably effective” in helping people see value in nontraditional learning solutions.

4. Creating a getAbstract Video

MillerCoors produced a one-minute introduction video that describes what the getAbstract service offers and how it can become an element of an effective professional development plan. The firm hosted the video in its Learning Management System as a featured one-minute course. MillerCoors also houses the video

on its internal getAbstract page, where it has become a frequently watched video.

5. Using getAbstract as Pre- and Postclass Material

MillerCoors uses getAbstract summaries to reinforce classroom learning by sending related summaries to course attendants in advance as a preparation tool. After the course, summaries form an important part of the postclass communication, helping people continue to apply what they have learned and giving them additional mental stimulus from different leading authors on the subject.

“getAbstract has reinforced our belief that development happens everywhere, not just in the classroom.”

Jay Anders, Director of Leadership Development for MillerCoors

6. Developing a University Handbook

A university handbook reinforces the company’s core values and leadership requirements and promotes resources people can use to build their capabilities further. The handbook advertises classroom learning and online courses, and it recommends relevant summaries that align with those critical success factors and leadership requirements.

Despite tough economic times, the company has invested millions in a “physical representation of MillerCoors University.” MillerCoors executives have helped foster a learning culture in the organization. To introduce a topic in team meetings, they send out book summaries in advance, so they can have an informed discussion about how that topic affects the team or the company as a whole. MillerCoors has not monetarily incentivized using getAbstract or pushed summaries to its employees through the weekly summary service. People who are taking advantage of the service do so because they see the value of it. Curiosity and desire to learn are bringing them in. They use it because they tried it and liked it.

Although about 5,000 of MillerCoors’s 9,000 employees are hourly brewery workers who don’t work at computers all the time, they can access computers in break and team rooms. They all have email and they’re all able to log in to getAbstract’s website. The product sheets and posters in MillerCoors’s team rooms remind these workers that the resource is available to them. A brewery employee in Georgia is one of MillerCoors’s top 5 users.