The MOOC Handbook

Practical insights and integrated

strategies for online course creators

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Haaga-Helia

Introduction

Welcome to the MOOC Handbook, a strategic compendium specifically dedicated to educators and companies interested in building and launching successful Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). This handbook provides educators, entrepreneurs, and institutions with practical insights and integrated strategies for ensuring robust user engagement from inception to the execution of MOOCs. Compiled by a team of experts with firsthand experience in the field, this book offers a step-by-step guide covering pedagogical approaches, technical considerations, marketing strategies, quality assurance, and much more.

The MOOC Handbook is structured to offer you insights from seasoned professionals, helping educators and content creators dive in to the world of digital education. It starts with the fundamental aspects of planning and needs assessment, underlining the significance of understanding your target audience intimately. It then guides you through the intricacies of producing compelling course content, highlighting the influential role of video in digital learning. The handbook rounds off with a comprehensive checklist that summarily presents the core aspects of MOOC development, offering a practical quick-reference for practitioners.

Tailored for both new entrants to the MOOC landscape and those seeking to refine their current offerings, this handbook serves as an essential tool. It reflects a dedicated commitment to fostering the progression of global education through digital platforms, catering to the innovative needs of both companies and teachers in the field.

This handbook utilizes collected good practices and experiences from the project "Resilience, Green Transition And Digitalization of SMEs." This unique project combines the best expertise of Finnish universities of applied sciences (9 universities of applied sciences in the Southern region of Finland and 21 UAS's on national level involved) with companies and entrepreneurs in Finland in order to support their way with change towards carbon-neutrality, resilience and digitality by generating knowhow with changemaking new technologies and new ways of working together. Altogether there were about 150 MOOCs created from which Haaga-Helia did four. All the MOOCs are available at: https://www.yritystenmuutoskumppanina.fi/

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Strategies for Ensuring User Engagement in MOOCs: An Integrated Approach with Practical Insights

Introduction, Methodologies, and Initial Targeting

Ensuring robust user engagement in a MOOC is a complex task that begins well before the course's official launch. A pivotal strategy is conducting a comprehensive needs assessment before planning the actual course. Various methodologies can be employed for this, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The data accrued should be meticulously analyzed to customize the course content to meet the specific requirements of the target demographic. In our case, our primary target audience was micro-companies and SMEs. We initiated the project with a needs assessment focusing on themes like "Green Transition in Businesses, Change Agility, and Digitalization." Through this, we found that themes related to the circular economy and resilience in change were of particular interest, guiding the development of our initial courses.

Marketing Strategies, Execution, and Corporate Engagement

Once the courses were developed, our team deliberated on the marketing strategies for the two courses we had created at that point. We set an initial target of enrolling 250 companies and surpassed this goal, registering 354 participants as of the time of this writing. Roles were clearly defined for all marketing-related activities, and a cinematic trailer along with a dedicated landing page were developed as integral components of the marketing strategy. Progress was monitored through systematic data analysis conducted via Microsoft Excel, where metrics such as participant numbers and marketing channels were scrutinized. One of the main reasons many companies fail to capitalize on MOOCs is a lack of awareness.

According to Harvard Business Review (Kramer, 2018)[1] employees are often independently enrolling in MOOCs for self-directed career development without their employers' knowledge, representing a missed opportunity for companies to align employee development with organizational goals. This is why we also made sure that engagement would happen when the participant joins the MOOC course and starts doing its exercises. Each exercise in our courses consists of the question "How would the learnings of this module work at our company?". We also made sure that some of the exercises were public so that the participants could see what other participants had written in their exercises. With examples like these we made the participant more engaged in finishing the course and implementing its learnings as quickly as possible.

Budget Allocation, Additional Strategies, and Interdepartmental Collaboration

Upon realizing that a portion of the marketing budget remained unutilized, we decided to invest in Google Search Engine Optimization and influencer marketing. The efficacy of these additional strategies will be subject to evaluation in the first half of 2024. It is imperative to engage various organizational departments in the planning phase to glean valuable insights into the most effective channels for MOOC promotion.

Quality assurance and pedagogical framework

As we navigate through the nuances of course creation, the adherence to pedagogical quality stands paramount, a directive we've modeled after Haaga-Helia's Digital Pedagogical Quality Manual[2]. This comprehensive guide is instrumental in our process, beginning with the allocation of resources and the appointment of faculty responsible for MOOC course development. The collaborative journey progresses with a teaching team and digital pedagogy mentors developing and refining a detailed plan for course advancement. Together, they undertake the crafting of pedagogical scripts, the meticulous refinement of content, and the strategic construction of the course modules. Integral to this journey is a series of evaluative steps, wherein the teaching staff conducts thorough quality assessments informed by the Manual's detailed criteria. Mentors further contribute with analytical reports, offering insights that sharpen the course's educational efficacy. A summit meeting of quality review convenes mentors, instructors, and administrative leaders, providing a

multidimensional lens through which the course is fine-tuned. Subsequent adjustments are made with precision before the course's launch, followed by a feedback loop that critically informs future iterations. Periodic assessments continue post-launch, ensuring the course's alignment with the evolving educational landscape, as dictated by the principles set forth in Haaga-Helia's esteemed manual.

This systematic approach to quality, delineated in Haaga-Helia's framework, empowers educators to sculpt platform-provided structures, such as those on Moodle, into pedagogically robust courses. Our methodology embraces the Manual's eight thematic categories, each dissected into granular quality criteria, bolstered by accessible examples and guidelines that serve as beacons for instructional excellence.

Transparency, Success Metrics, and Conclusion

Transparency in communicating that the MOOC has been meticulously designed based on the findings of the needs assessment is crucial. Success metrics should encompass both educational indicators such as completion rates, student engagement, and learning outcomes, as well as business-oriented metrics like enrollment figures, generated revenue, and customer satisfaction surveys. By adhering to these strategies, educational institutions can not only increase the likelihood of their MOOCs achieving success but also ensure that they deliver tangible value to the end-users.

Finally, marketing plays a pivotal role in connecting MOOCs with businesses that can truly benefit from them. Effective targeting and outreach are essential for this initial engagement. However, once businesses become service users, the focus shifts to the quality of the course, where pedagogical methods take center stage. Employing sound educational strategies is increasingly important for ensuring not just enrollment, but also meaningful engagement and successful course completion.

How to guarantee learning?

1. Clear Learning Objectives:

Before creating a MOOC, it's essential to define clear learning objectives that guide the course's content and assessments. These objectives should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound). They serve as a roadmap for what you want your students to achieve by the end of the course. Align these objectives with the overall goals of the course and consider breaking them down into smaller, module-level objectives for a more granular focus.

2. Target Audience Analysis:

Understanding your target audience is a critical step in MOOC production. Conduct a thorough analysis of your audience, including their demographics, prior knowledge, motivations, and learning preferences. Use surveys, interviews, or data analytics to gather information and create learner personas. These personas will guide your content and interaction design, helping you tailor the course to the specific needs of your learners.

3. Content Design:

A well-structured curriculum is the backbone of a successful MOOC. Create a course outline with clear, well-defined modules or units. Ensure a logical sequence and, if necessary, establish prerequisites for progressive learning. Consider using an instructional design model such as ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) to guide the course creation process. This model helps ensure that your course design is systematic and effective.

4. Active Learning Strategies:

Engaging students actively is key to effective learning. Incorporate various activities, such as discussions, problem-solving, and case studies, into your course. These activities promote critical thinking and peer interaction. Provide clear instructions and rubrics for these activities to guide learners and ensure a consistent and effective learning experience.

5. Multimodal Content:

To cater to different learning styles and preferences, create a variety of content types within your MOOC. This can include video lectures, written materials, quizzes, and interactive elements. Ensure that your videos are engaging, well-produced, and accompanied by clear narration. Additionally, make sure the text is well-structured, readable, and supported by downloadable resources. Consistency in the course's look and feel contributes to a cohesive learning experience.

6. Quality Assurance:

Developing a quality assurance (QA) process is essential to ensure your MOOC meets high standards. This process includes content review, usability testing, and piloting. A review team should assess the accuracy and relevance of course materials. Usability testing helps identify and rectify any technical or user experience issues. Piloting involves offering the course to a small group of learners to collect feedback and identify potential improvements. Regularly update the course based on feedback and stay current with developments in the field of study.

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Video for your class

Basics, do's and dont's

We're currently in a time where platforms like YouTube and TikTok have become not just the usual channels for news and info but also the go-to for entertainment. Even streaming services, once thought to be at their peak, are now slowing down in terms of subscribers, and in some cases, shrinking. Some attribute this to high subscription costs and the overwhelming number of services available. It's turned into a bit of a mess, with each service holding onto its own stuff, making it feel impossible to pay for all of them. Some people are deciding it's better to stick with free options.

In the midst of all this, Sony Pictures is doing things differently. Instead of creating its own streaming service (which they easily could, given their vast collection of films and series), they're selling their content to the highest bidder. This approach makes them the most profitable studio in terms of sales, and you can find Sony's stuff on platforms like Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu.

Why does this matter? Because the audience for our classes is the same group mentioned earlier, and this audience is always changing. Educators stick with the same class, but their students, or audience, keeps evolving. Your current class, made up of people born between 1999 and 2005, will soon be replaced by those born between 2004 and 2009, and so on. These new folks will bring in new ways of consuming information and new ideas of what's "cool" and what's not.

Now, when it comes to classes, lectures, and other forms of education, they're in a paradoxical way consumed in a similar way to films or novels. You dedicate a chunk of your attention to get some kind of information that'll benefit you, whether it's knowledge, education, debate, awareness, or just entertainment. So, the best ways to complement your classes or Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) content are through audio and video.

Quality is key

Focusing on video, quality is crucial. Even though there's a lot of buzz about TikTok and engaging videos, it doesn't mean everything you do has to be super dynamic with all the colors and effects. What's more important is putting effort into good audio and video quality. I get it if you're thinking, "But I've never worked with video!" Nowadays, almost all of us have a decent camera in our pockets, and with the help of A.I., we can use tools that were unthinkable just five years ago.

Before diving into the video-making process, one key thing to note is the importance of audio. No matter what, make sure your voice is captured well. Test it out yourself: a slightly lower quality video with good audio is more engaging than a crystal clear video with terrible audio that sounds like it was recorded in a bathroom. Find a quiet spot, keep the microphone close, and if possible, use a proper microphone.

Resilience, Green Transition And Digitalization of SMEs

The primary objective of the project "Resilience, Green Transition And Digitalization of SMEs" involves developing new Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in conjunction with events tailored for emerging entrepreneurs in Finland, with a specific focus on the core elements outlined in the project's name.

In working on this project, the focus was on making quality videos that bring a bit of freshness compared to typical MOOCs. While we're not breaking new ground on a big scale, it's a new thing for the Haaga-Helia community. We aimed to keep it simple and important, focusing on what makes videos both good and interesting for viewers.

Completing the first two courses is a big step, and we've got two more in the works. Along the way, we've learned some useful stuff about making videos on a tight budget at a finnish University of Applied Sciences (UAS). Plus, we've figured out how to coordinate better within the team and sync up with content contributors, making the whole video-making process more efficient.

So, let's make a new video!

For the purpose of this handbook, let's break down the making of a video in two different tiers: firstly doing it by yourself, secondly how to make a video when you have a decent-sized budget for your project and will probably hire extra people to do so. If you are reading this having this scenario, feel free to jump to this particular part.

Before anything, please note that these are tips on how to achieve a better quality on your video classes for better engagement. There might be times when you don't have certain tools available or none at all; but knowing what to look for is essential for a possible next project.

Doing it yourself

Embracing change is often associated with dynamism. Continuous display of a presentation or a fixed talking head, regardless of the subject's inherent interest, can result in a monotonous video presentation. This holds true for simultaneous display of both elements on screen, such as a presentation accompanied by a talking head in a corner.

Opting to alternate between these elements can be a strategic decision, effectively "refreshing" the viewer's attention periodically. It is important not to feel compelled to utilize tools that place your face and presentation simultaneously on the screen, especially if it necessitates reliance on the potentially subpar webcam of your computer.

Camera and visuals

If you possess a video-capable camera and are proficient in its operation, it may be preferable to use it. Alternatively, most individuals have access to a high-quality camera in the form of their smartphone. Investing in a modest table tripod for your phone, typically priced under 15 euros, can ensure proper framing during recording.

When using the front camera for a more visible self-framing, be mindful that it generally offers lower quality than the rear-facing camera. If opting for the back camera for superior quality, seek assistance in setting up the position or place a reference object beforehand to gauge the composition.

Ensure a visually appealing background and be cautious of brightness levels. Testing different setups will help identify the most suitable arrangement. Consider incorporating elements like a small plant or an aesthetically pleasing item on a corner table.

If capturing audio separately, as recommended, remember to clap before each take. The significance of this will be explained shortly.

Audio

Research indicates that viewers respond more positively to videos with high-quality audio, even if the visual content is not exceptionally compelling. Regardless of video sharpness, poor audio quality—characterized by an echo or reverberation—can detract from the overall viewing experience.

Ideally, capture audio using a second device, such as a dedicated microphone or a lavalier mic. These microphones can connect to a sound recorder or your phone. Consider researching available options.

An alternative approach involves placing a second phone nearby and using its sound recorder app. The clapping action becomes valuable during video editing, serving as a synchronization point for aligning video and audio seamlessly.

Editing

Various software options exist, both computer-based and online. Adobe Premiere, often available on school computers, and Davinci, a free software, are recommended options for computer-based editing.

Online alternatives such as Canva, Clipchamp, Clideo, and Veed offer intuitive tools for editing. Explore these options to determine which aligns with your preferences.

Encourage creativity by incorporating titles and subtle background music. During the editing process, review the video as

a viewer would, ensuring that it aligns with your preferences and meets the standards of content you would personally enjoy watching. Strive to create content that resonates with your own viewing preferences.

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My project has a budget

Maybe you have the budget for video and content but no expertise inside your team to make it happen. These few points might help you through the process in a way that either you can lead the process, or at least know what to expect from someone that will do it for you.

Benchmark it

Commence your video production journey by establishing a benchmark. A reference serves as a valuable visual guide and, if needed, a point of reference for what elements to avoid. While it's crucial not to be daunted by the benchmark's quality, recognize that you can likely match or closely approximate it through various means. Maintain a sense of reasonableness and realism throughout this process. Sharing the benchmark with prospective collaborators is vital, and it is anticipated that showcasing this will be one of the initial requests from any new team member.

What does your school have to offer?

Explore the resources available within your educational institution. It might be surprising to discover the extent of your school's offerings. In some cases, different departments may not effectively communicate or share resources, necessitating preliminary research. Questions such as "Does the school have a dedicated video department?" or "Do we have access to a TV/Video studio?" can guide your investigation. Each university or university of applied sciences (UAS) is unique, and there's a likelihood of finding equipment under a specific department. For instance, at Haaga-Helia, the communications/marketing department provides access to a video professional with cameras and editing software. While scheduling availability may be a consideration, tapping into these resources can lead to potential cost savings.

Assessing available resources will illuminate what you possess and, conversely, what you lack. Understanding these limitations is crucial in discerning where your costs will be directed. By leveraging existing resources, you can better comprehend the scope of your project.

The right people

To elevate the quality of your video production and maximize your budget, enlist the expertise of the right professionals. Consider securing a producer or director to guide you through the process or engage a small production company that offers a comprehensive service package covering the entire production cycle. It's imperative to build a team that includes partners and participants providing content for your video. Clarity in roles and mutual trust among team members is essential, differentiating constructive suggestions from micromanagement.

Budget allocation

Define what tasks you can handle independently or with school resources and identify areas that would benefit most from third-party services. Depending on your budget, exploring a small company offering end-to-end services, from production to post-production, can be a viable option. Breaking down the steps involved in delivering a high-quality video will further clarify how to allocate your resources effectively.

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THE CREW

Director

Will be the creative brain of the video. The one who knows what the final product should look like and the one who will go after benchmarking your next video. This person will also be directing the filming and will be the person who will be following the editing and post-production (treatment of color, animations etc.) up close. Depending on the budget, this person might also act as a producer.

Producer

Is basically the person who keeps the puzzle together. It is the one contacting all the parts, professionals, thinking and keeping track of everything needed from equipment to food, from contacting all the professionals to making sure that everything is on time. As mentioned, this might also be executed by the director or project manager, depending on their previous experience and expertise.

Executive producer, or in this case, project manager

Is the person who will deal with the bureaucracy and numbers. Who will keep the director and producer on budget and also who will be the one trying to get more funding, changing funding allocation, communicating with funders and dealing with contracts between third-party workers and the UAS.

Filming crew

For this one, it is better to hire someone who will bring a team with him/her. This way, you make your life way easier and this person will probably act as a producer within the team for you. On the other hand, if you know what to do, or have contacts within this area/market, then yes, hire people you trust.

Post-production

This regards everything that happens after the shooting of your video is done; that means editing of the video, leveling colors, placing text and animations and so on. Some editors do everything themselves, some leave the animations etc. to somebody else. It will be up to you to check this with whoever will edit it for you.

Summary

By integrating these points, you'll have a comprehensive guide that covers all the bases for creating a successful MOOC.

Initial Planning and Needs Assessment

Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment using methodologies like surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Analyze the data to tailor the course content to your target audience. Themes like "Green Transition in Businesses" and "Change Agility" could be particularly relevant.

Audience Understanding and Adaptability

Recognize that your audience is part of the digital generation. Adapt your teaching methods to suit their consumption habits.

Be aware that your audience will evolve over time, bringing new perspectives and expectations.

Marketing and Engagement

Clearly define roles for all marketing activities and set measurable targets.

Develop key marketing materials like a cinematic trailer and a landing page.

Use data analytics tools to monitor progress in real-time.

Engage participants with exercises that prompt them to apply learnings to their own companies.

Leveraging Multimedia Content

Use audio and video to complement your course material. Quality is key; invest in good audio and video equipment

Consider the aesthetics of your video, including background and lighting.

Quality Over Flashiness

Prioritize delivering quality content over flashy visuals.

Prioritize audio quality; a good audio experience can make up for less-than-perfect video quality.

DIY Video Production

Utilize available camera technology, even if it's just your smartphone.

For better audio, consider using an external microphone or a second device to capture sound.

Budget and Additional Strategies

Allocate budget for various marketing channels and be prepared to pivot.

Involve multiple departments in the planning phase for a well-rounded strategy.

Transparency and Metrics

Be transparent about how the course was designed based on needs assessment.

Use both educational and business metrics for evaluation, such as completion rates and customer satisfaction surveys.

Pedagogical Considerations

Once businesses are engaged, focus on pedagogical methods to ensure meaningful engagement and successful course completion.

Guaranteeing Learning

Define clear, SMART learning objectives.

Design your content carefully, considering a structured curriculum and possibly using models like ADDIE.

Employ active learning strategies and multimodal content to cater to various learning styles.

Quality Assurance

Implement a quality assurance process that includes content review, usability testing, and piloting.

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