



Do's & Don'ts for MOOCs & SPOCs

Best practices for developing Massive Open Online Courses and Small Private Online Courses.
EDITED BY LORRI FREIFELD

In theory, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) would appear to be a training slam dunk, allowing thousands of participants to learn and collaborate anywhere, any time at a reduced cost. But countless organizations have missed the mark with MOOCs in the last few years, never fully realizing the potential of this technology.

“MOOCs have been heralded as a panacea for limitless self-development where anyone can learn virtually anything, at any time,” says Mark Onisk, general manager and vice president, at Skillsoft. “Conversely, the model has been derided as a red herring, with critics citing underwhelming participation, abysmal completion rates, and uneven content relevance as obstacles to mass adoption. In response, SPOCs (Small Private Online Courses) have emerged as a more targeted cousin to the MOOC that address these shortcomings through smaller cohorts structured around highly relevant learning paths.”

Despite some hiccups, MOOCs and SPOCs continue to lure learners and intrigue organizations looking to increase employee engagement in e-learning. According to Class Central, student enrollments in MOOCs doubled to 35 million in 2015, attracting roughly 17 million new learners last year (<https://www.class-central.com/report/moocs-2015-stats/>).

“Improvements in the technology have fed the corresponding growth in learning delivery,” Onisk says. “Today, the creation and delivery of streaming video and other rich media is ubiquitous, as are the tools to support it. Collaborative technologies have matured from one-dimensional chat-boards to multi-modal experiences that provide the richness of in-person interaction, at scale.”

Despite these improvements, MOOCs often fall prey to the pitfalls of many traditional learning programs. We tapped a variety of experts to share their do's and don'ts for implementing a MOOC or SPOC initiative.