L&D's
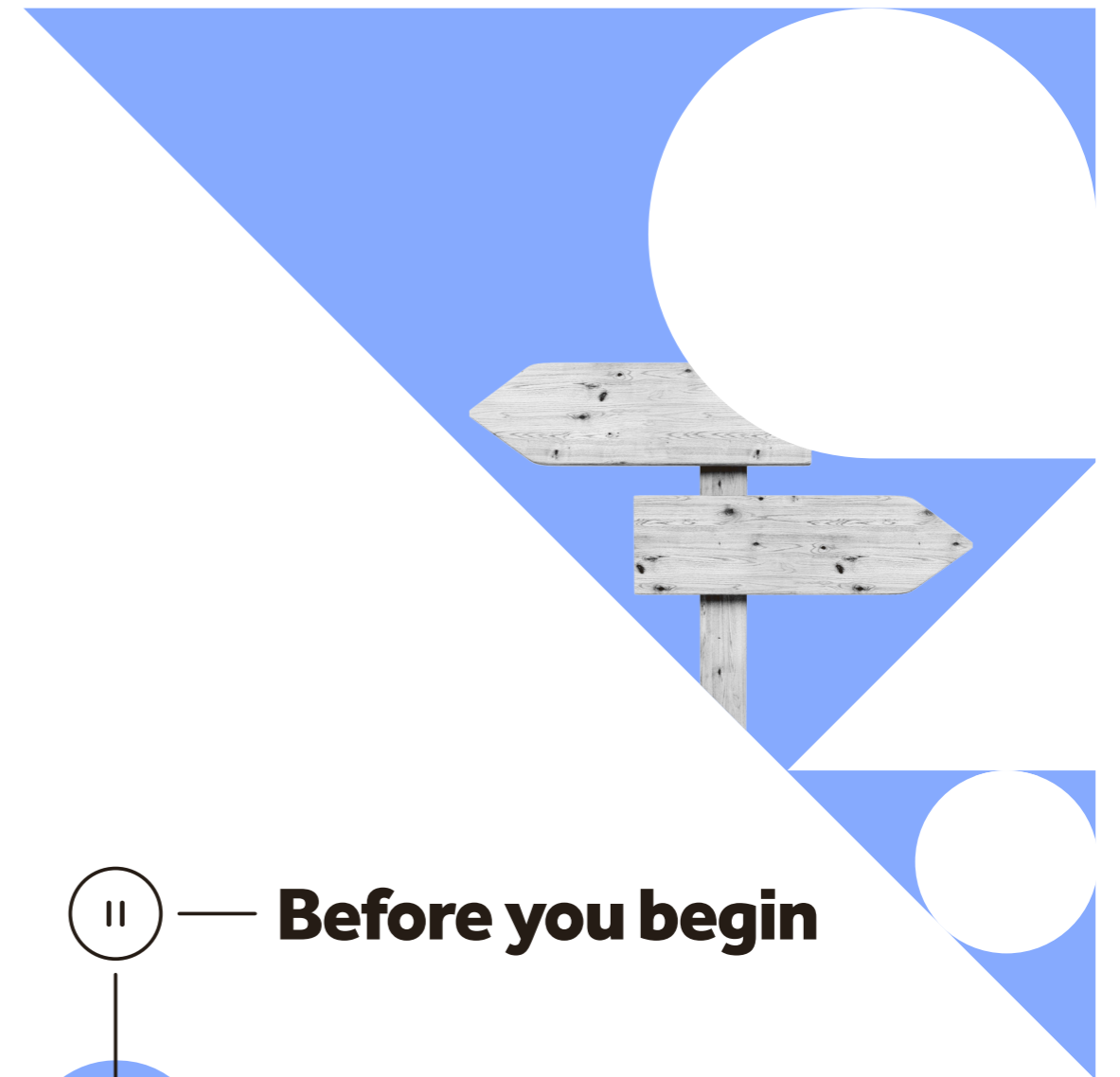# marketing communications playbook

Driving awareness of learning opportunities
through simple marketing tactics
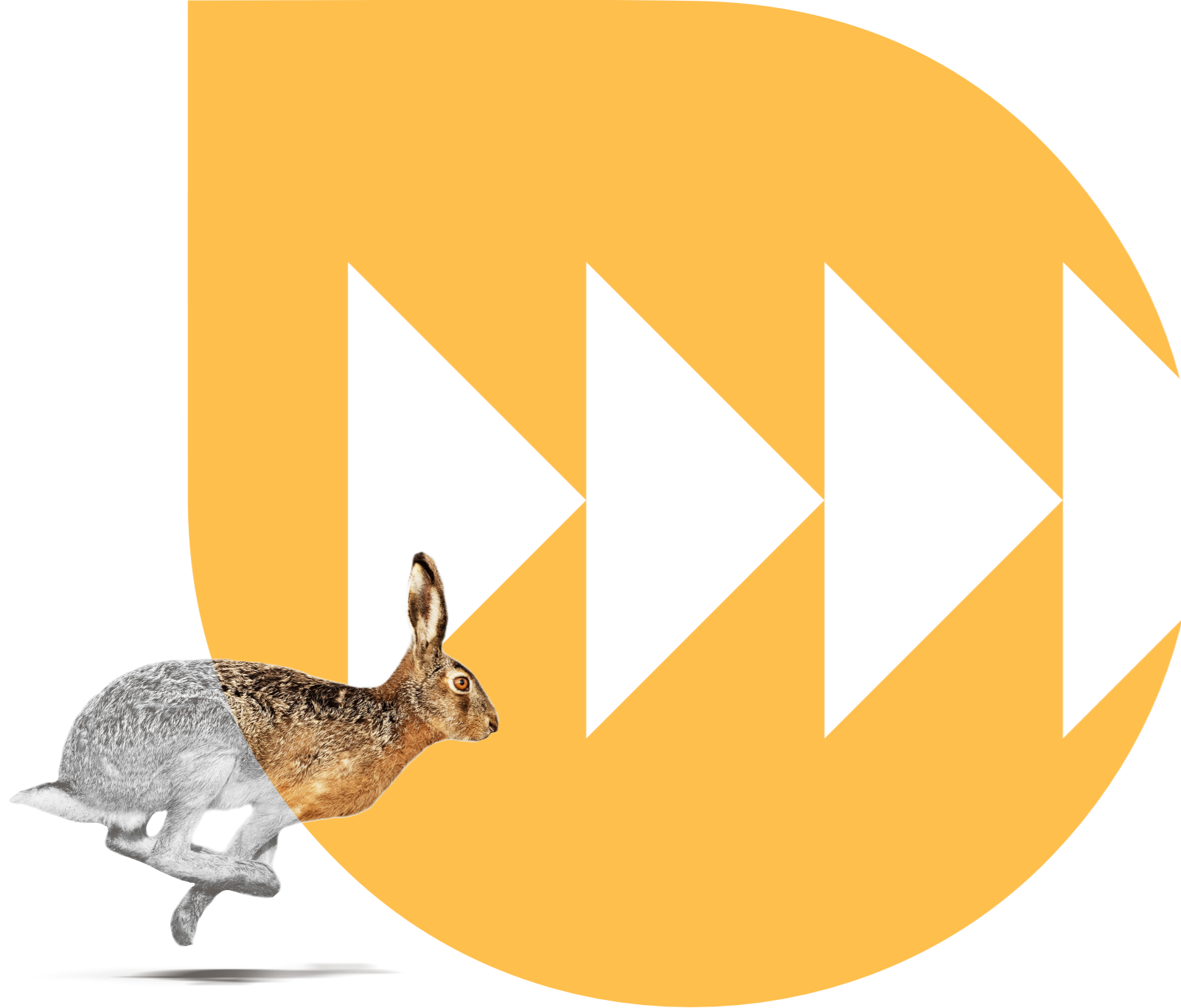
thinqi

Contents

Before you begin

If you're confident in marcomms then use **section 1**.

If you're new to marcomms in L&D, skip to **section 2**.

1

SECTION 1

Quick start guide

1 Create persona templates

You can't communicate effectively with your audience until you fully understand who they are and what they want.

Create a set of personas for different departments to find out people's pain points, motivations and goals. These will inform how you (and your marketing team) will communicate learning as a solution. **Here's a template for you to use.**
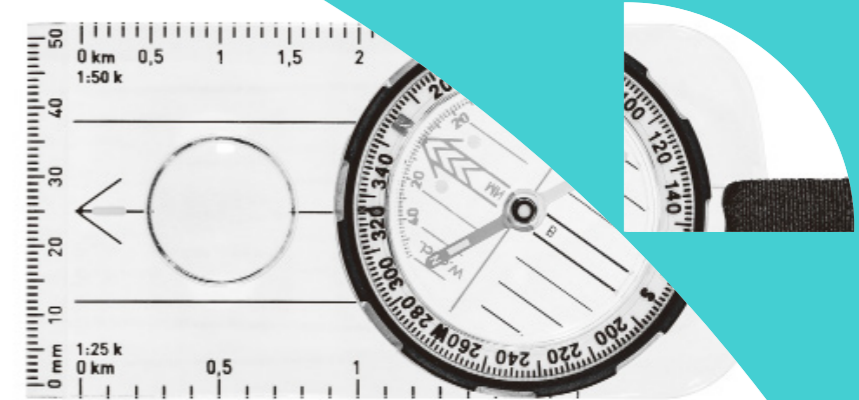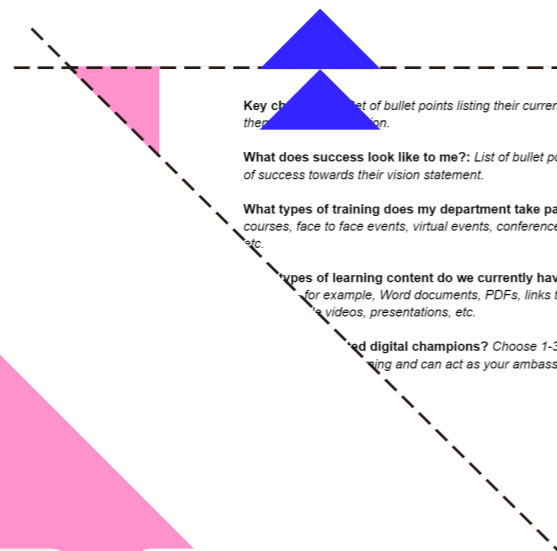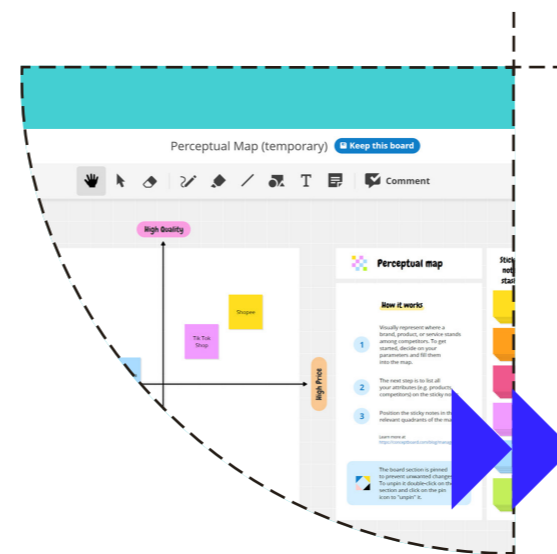

2 Define your learning brand and complete the perceptual map

What's your brand? This isn't about swanky logos and straplines. The L&D department is a brand in itself – how does the wider business perceive this? Can you create a positive brand experience?

If you could summarise how you want your L&D department to be perceived in one statement, what would it be? A brand perceptual map using two key parameters can help you determine how you are currently perceived and where you need to be to fulfil your positioning statement – then shape the messaging to help you achieve this perception in the eyes of your target audience (i.e. your staff).

Here's a **free online template** that makes it easy. You might want to think about how other departments are perceived in comparison.

4 Collect responses from your digital champions using the interview questions

Now that you have an overarching brand for L&D, think about your brand advocates (or digital champions) for each of your sub-brands.

Find members of staff who have successfully completed the training and get them to advocate the benefits of a past learning programme, providing a strong testimonial to include in your communications. You can do this by collecting quotes as powerful testimonials to include in your communications – **here's a template of interview questions** you can use.

1. What learning programme
2. What did you want to be able t
3. What were your markers of succ
4. How are you currently applying the
5. What is your biggest achievement as
6. Would you recommend this learning

3 Draw up accountability agreements for the campaign with marketing

Your friends in marketing have all the tools at their disposal to communicate with people in the right way and measure engagement.
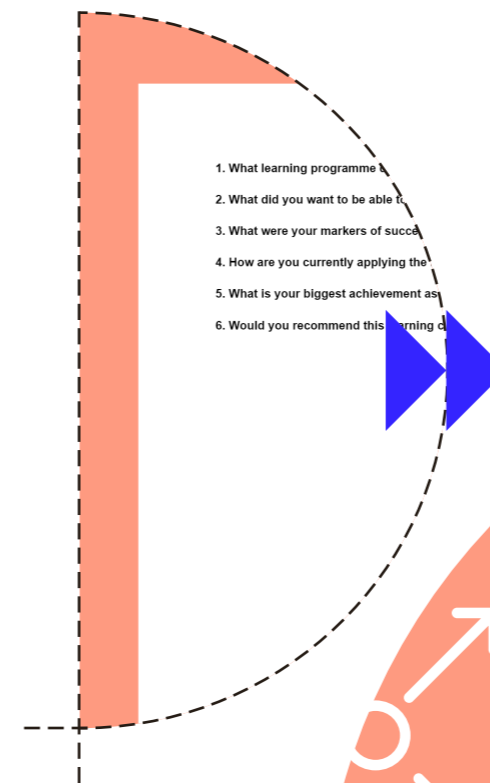
You need to create an operational level agreement between your L&D department and the marketing team. While marketing should be accountable for raising awareness of your learning programmes, you should be accountable for continuing to engage people once they've signed up.

5

Create a brief communications plan using the AIDA framework

According to eLearning Industry, lack of awareness is a major problem for L&D, with a staggering **65% of L&D professionals saying their learners are not aware of the learning opportunities available at their organisation.**

To drive awareness and inspire action, consider the simple AIDA framework used by marketers for communications:

65%

lack of awareness

- AWARENESS
- INTEREST
- DESIRE
- ACTION
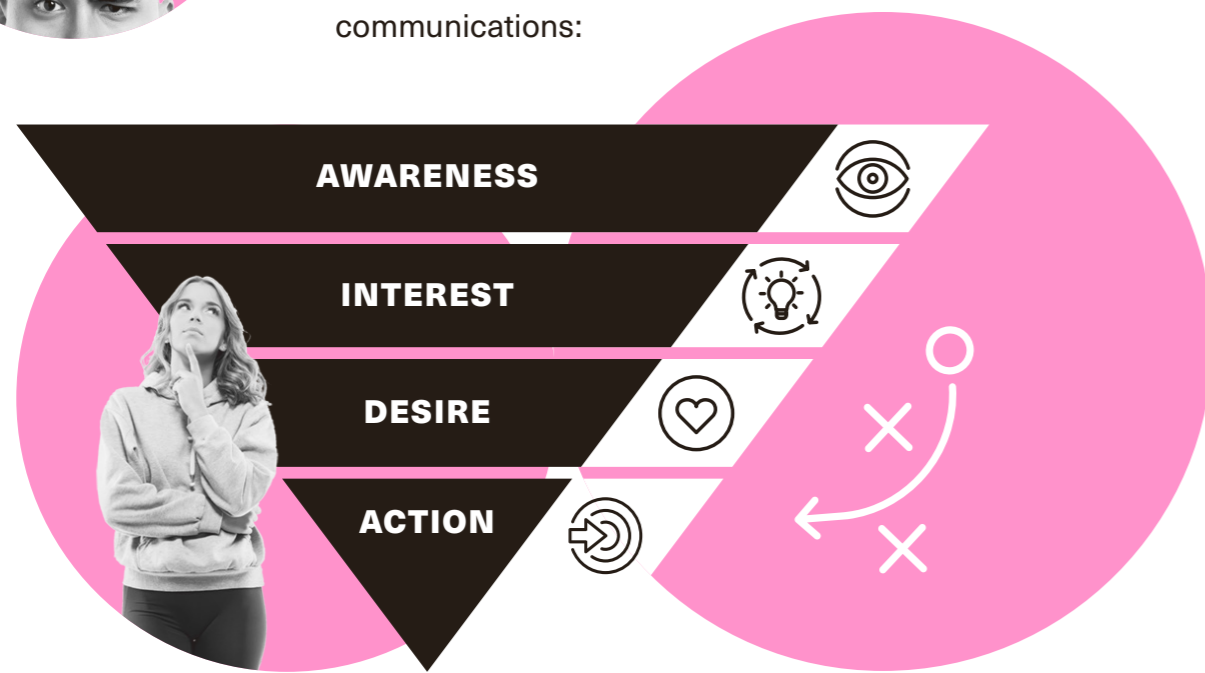
Get familiar with the AIDA model and start planning out how you will communicate your learning programme using each of the four steps. Just some brief notes or bullet points will give you a general sense of direction.

6

Plan your email campaigns

Regular email communications with recaps and reminders will keep learning at the forefront of learners' minds and remind them of the learning opportunities available, along with the tangible benefits.

Plan a series of emails to go out before, during and after a training course. Start with a list of benefits for the target audience if they sign up, send regular reminders of what's been covered, and next steps for what they need to do after the course has finished.

Here's an **example** of an email marketing plan you can use.

7

Make a list of what you'll be measuring to track engagement

Measurement and evaluation is a critical component of any marketing campaign, despite its difficulties in L&D. Testing what works and what doesn't is absolutely key to making sure your message is on point and reaching people in the right way.

Draw up a list of what metrics you will need to collect to determine engagement.

doesn't work

works

End of section

2

L&D
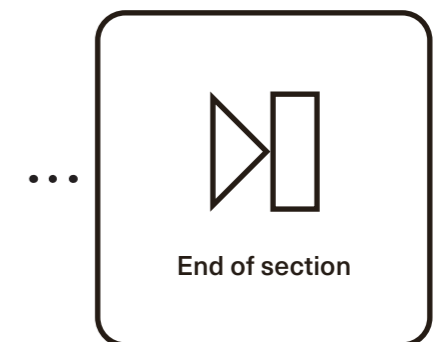
SECTION 2

Marketing and communications in L&D
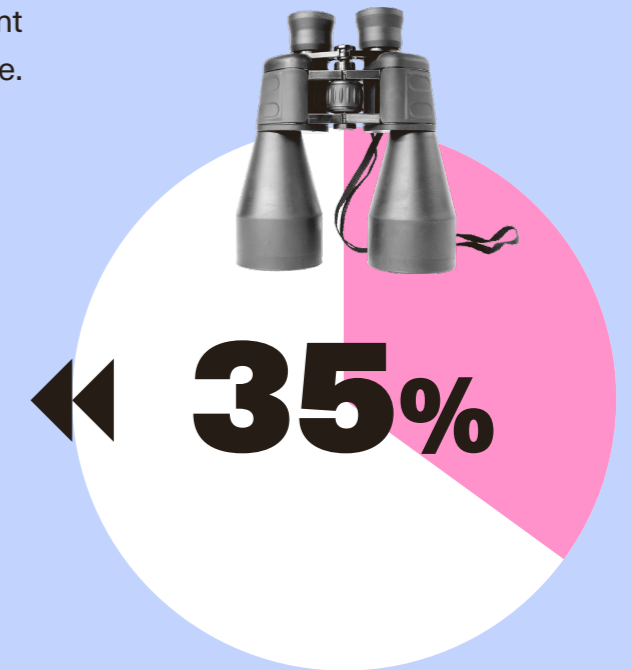
Why marketing?

Are you struggling to engage people with learning opportunities in your organisation?

Do your employees see learning as a disruption to their daily work rather than an opportunity to open doors in their professional lives?

Building and maintaining engagement with corporate learning is a challenge. In 2021, LinkedIn's survey of over 6,000 respondents revealed that

35% of L&D professionals are looking for new ways to boost learner engagement.
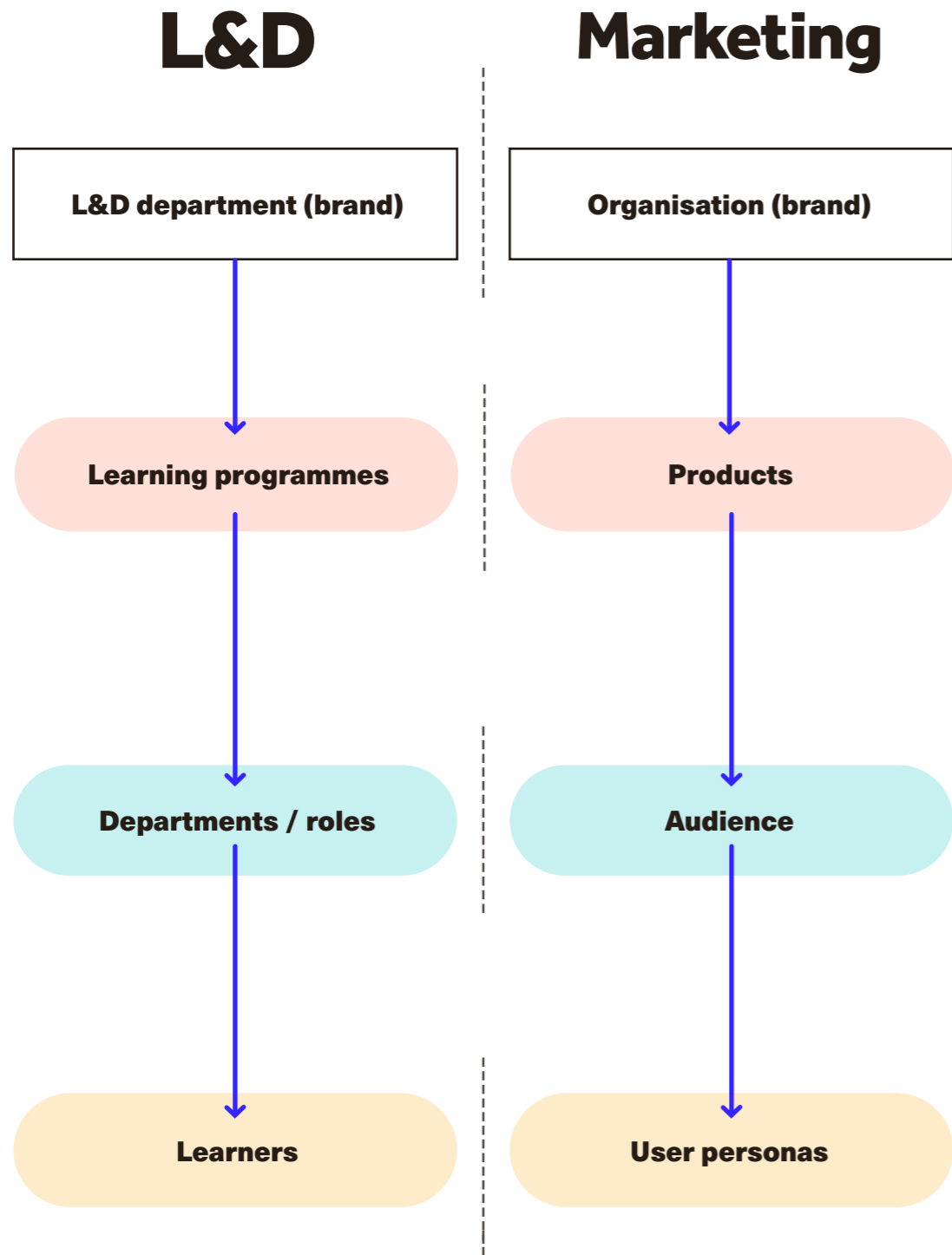
35%

Yet according to the 2022 LPI L&D Dashboard, **'marketing and communications'** was listed as one of the five weakest skills for L&D professionals today.

Ultimately, you want people to 'buy' into L&D – and if there's one department that knows how to reach, engage and influence people to 'buy' something, it's marketing. Let's explore the similarities between marketing and L&D and what you can learn from marketing...

In the marketing context, your L&D programmes are your products, your departments are your audience and the people within those departments are your user personas.

L&D

L&D department (brand)

↓

Learning programmes

↓

Departments / roles

↓

Learners

Marketing

Organisation (brand)

↓

Products

↓

Audience

↓

User personas

L&D

Connecting with a target audience **(departments)** and personas **(employees)**

Communicating benefits of a **learning programme**

Providing a 'hook' to hold their interest **(desire to learn)**

Targeted at **internal audiences**

Building **learning 'brand' awareness**

Demonstrating **ROI** to the business

Tapping into **learner needs** to deliver a suitable solution

Influencing a behaviour **(enrolling on a course)**

Marketing

Connecting with a target audience **(buyers)** and personas **(buyer types)**

Communicating benefits of a **service/product**

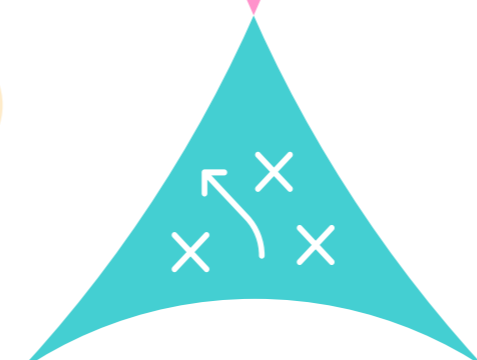Providing a 'hook' to hold their interest **(desire to buy)**

Often targeted at **external audiences (though can also be internal)**

Building **brand awareness**

Demonstrating **ROI** to the business

Tapping into **customer needs** to deliver a suitable solution

Influencing behaviour **(buying a product or service)**

So, given the similarities between L&D and marketing, what practices can you adopt?

Here are **seven top marketing tips** you can leverage today to drive awareness of corporate training and learning, allowing you to build and maintain engagement over time. Remember to tick off the actions as you work through them using the checklist at the end of this guide.

1.

Research your audience

You can't communicate effectively with your audience until you fully understand who they are and what they want. Today, people want and expect communications that are timely, personalised and relevant (e.g. you wouldn't push communications about a new sales course to your team of software testers).

In marketing, you would carry out your research by conducting surveys and questionnaires, interviewing individuals, facilitating focus groups, and examining secondary data such as official figures, market share and competitor performance.

The beauty of marketing L&D is that your audience is internal, meaning you can really get to know your learners through the simplest of methods.

Action point

Create a set of personas for different departments to find out people's pain points, motivations and goals. These will inform how you (and your marketing team) will communicate learning as a solution. **Here's a template for you to use.**

2 Create your 'learning brand'

What's your brand? This isn't about swanky logos and straplines. The L&D department is a brand in itself – how does the wider business perceive this? Can you create a positive brand experience?

> **Brand experience** = "All the feelings consumers have before, during and after interacting with your brand."
>
> HUBSPOT

To create a positive brand identity, you need to establish a strong connection between your learning programmes, staff development and how learning helps to positively contribute to broader business goals.

Ask yourself:

How does the wider business perceive the L&D function?

Do people associate it with positive or negative feelings?

Is the L&D 'brand' experience consistent with the rest of the organisation?

If you could summarise how you want your L&D department to be perceived in one statement, what would it be?

A brand perceptual map using two key parameters can help you determine how you are currently perceived and where you need to be to fulfil your positioning statement – then shape the messaging to help you achieve this perception in the eyes of your target audience (i.e. your staff).
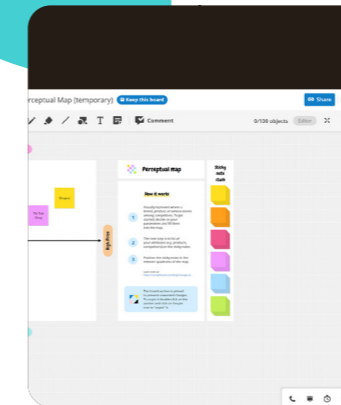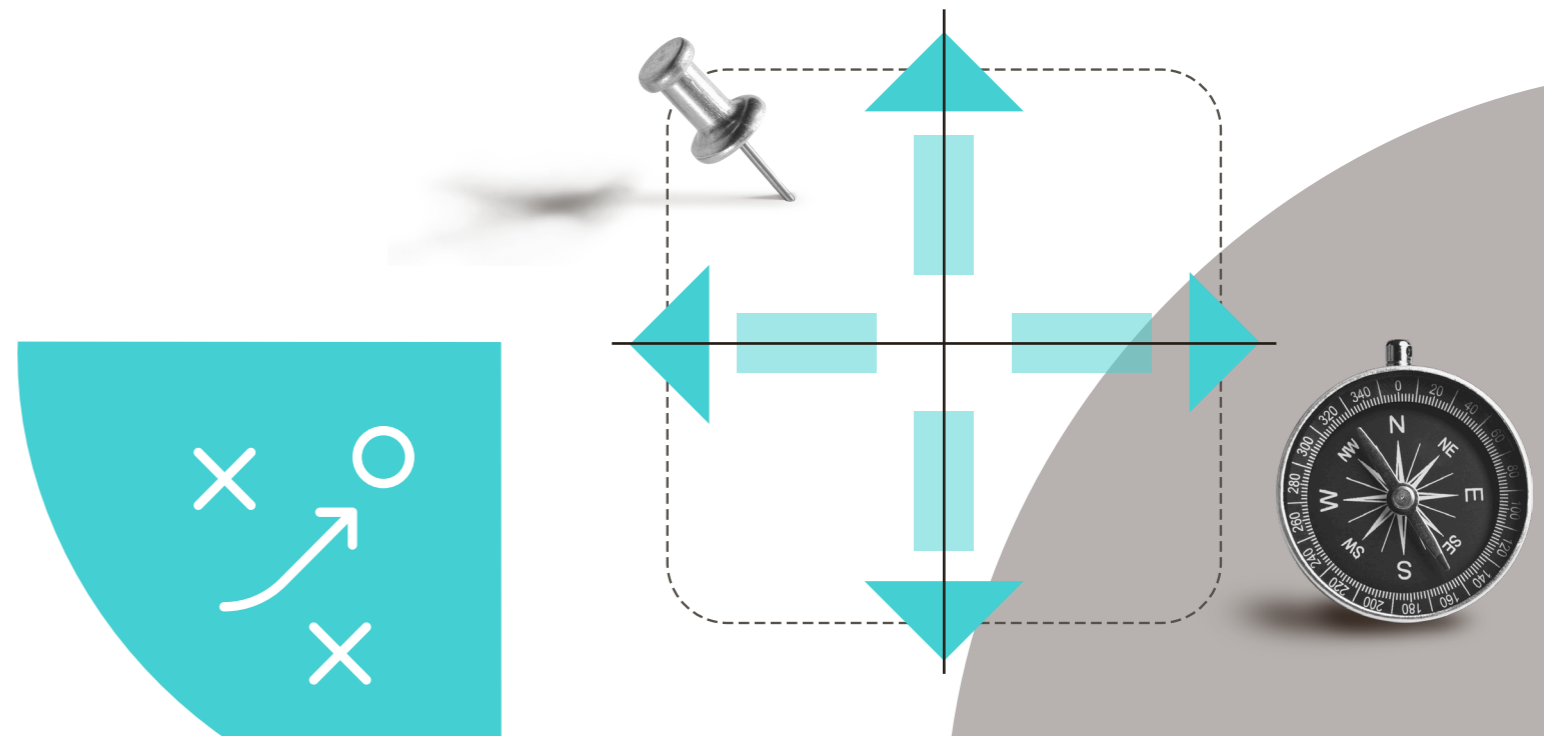
Action point ●●◉▸

Here's a **free online template** that makes it easy. You might want to think about how other departments are perceived in comparison.

In large organisations, there may be sub-brands that stem from the main brand. For example, holiday companies may have sub-brands for family holidays, another for solo travellers and another for luxury holidays. Although their messages and target audiences may differ, their brand is still recognisable and consistent – along with the feelings associated with it.

You may have 'sub-brands' for different departments. For example, the sales department is likey to have different aims and values than your HR team, meaning their learning experience will be different too.

What does success look like for your sales team versus your HR team? How do the experiences differ, and where should they be consistent? How do you appeal to each of these different audiences – what are their unique values?

People need to recognise a new learning programme and know that association with the brand will mean a positive, high-quality experience – no matter what department they're in.

Your Thinqi learning system plays a big part in this. If learners have the flexibility to manage their own learning, see personalised and relevant content, and know exactly what to do to achieve their goals then this will ultimately create a positive brand experience.

Good brands are distinctive, articulate their values well and are consistent in what they say, how they say it and how they present themselves. These form a brand personality and brand identity. As a result, they attract loyal followers and advocates.
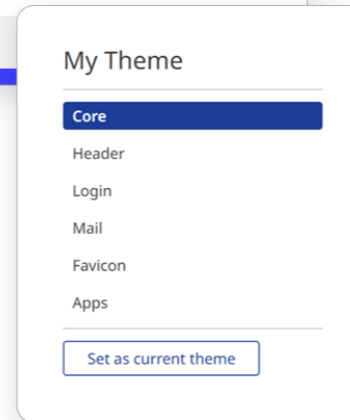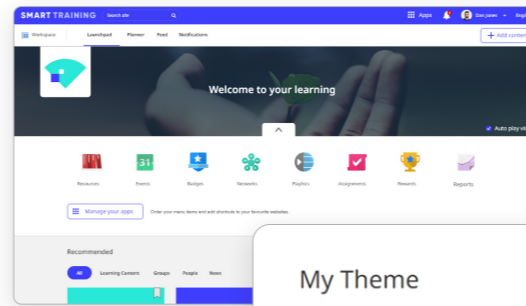
You need to change the narrative from "what we do" to "what we offer".

With branding options available in Thinqi, you can ensure a consistent experience in your organisation, your communications and throughout the learning system. Your brand should be recognisable and evoke positive feelings around learning for maximum engagement.

Example ▶◗

A great example of this was demonstrated by the landmark financial company Citi, which encouraged employees to use internal social channels in order to share examples of how they were taking part in their #BeMore learning campaign. This award-winning strategy was designed to encourage everyday learning and to get others to shout about their wins. This allowed them to foster a successful culture of continuous learning known at Citi as the **"3 E's: Experience, Exposure, Education"**.

#BeMore

3 Talk to your marketing team

Your friends in marketing have all the tools at their disposal to communicate with people in the right way and measure engagement.

Summarise your target audience, objectives and timeline for promoting your learning programmes, then share it with your marketing team. Just a one-page summary will help them get a clear idea of how they can best work with you to raise awareness so you can then work to maximise engagement.
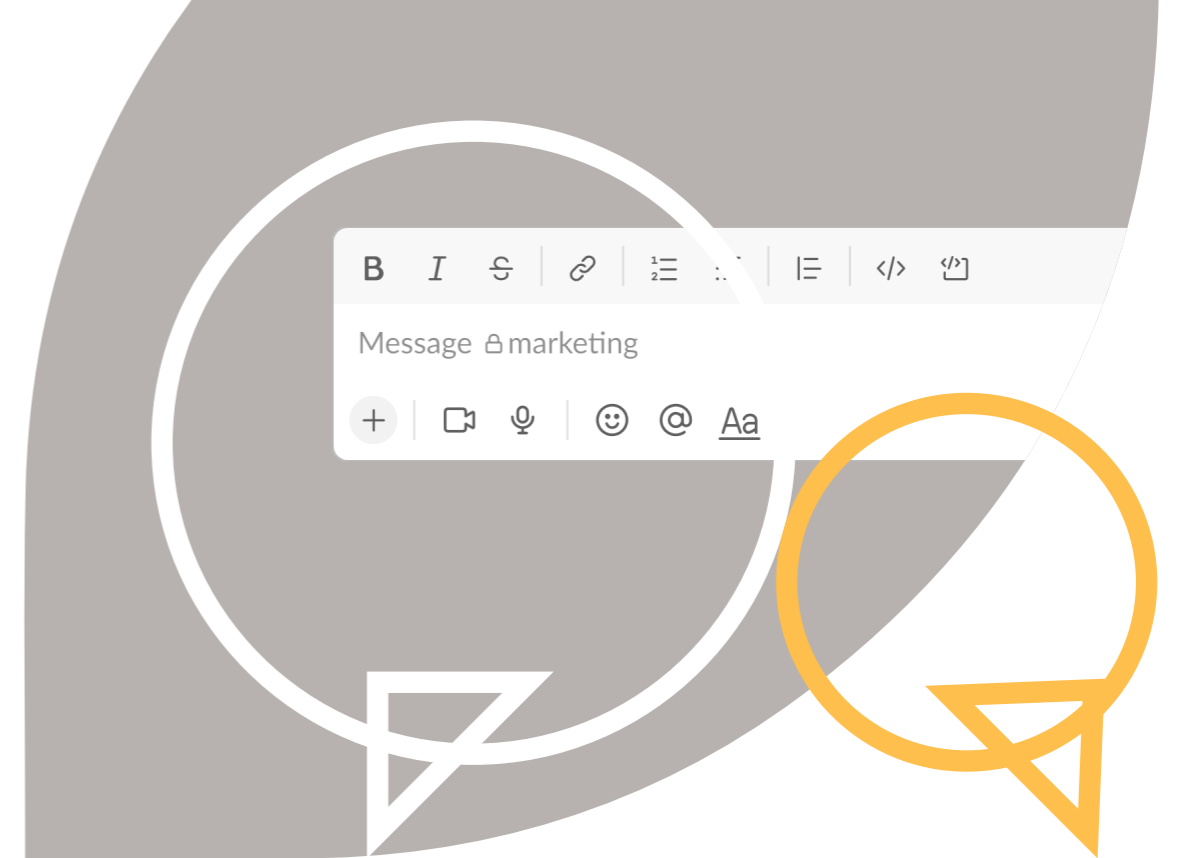
You'll also want to think about what channels to use to reach your learners – again, your marketing team will be able to help gather insights on what internal marketing channels are best. You can always test different methods to find the most effective communications mix.

Action point ●●○ ▶

You need to create an operational level agreement between your L&D department and the marketing team. While marketing should be accountable for raising awareness of your learning programmes, you should be accountable for continuing to engage people once they've signed up.

4 Identify your digital champions

Now that you have an overarching brand for L&D, think about your brand advocates (or digital champions) for each of your sub-brands. Those in more senior roles are particularly powerful ambassadors for learning as their stories will prompt your staff to start joining the dots between a good learning programme and career success. As the people your staff know and trust, leaders can act as social influencers to drive positive behaviour change.

There's a powerful social influence that can be harnessed here – people will naturally look up to successful people in the organisation and imitate their behaviour.

"The bottom line is that Humans are easily nudged by other Humans. Why? One reason is that we like to conform."

THALER AND SUNSTEIN
(authors of 'Nudge')

Marketing successfully leverages the power of influencers to sell products and services. Think about your own 'influencers' for learning.

1. What learning programme did you complete?
2. What did you want to be able to achieve as a result of the learning programme?
3. What were your markers of success?
4. How are you currently applying the learning to your job?
5. What is your biggest achievement as a result of the learning?
6. Would you recommend this learning course to others and why?

Action point

Find members of staff who have successfully completed the training and get them to advocate the benefits of a past learning programme. Collect their thoughts using these interview questions and turn them into powerful testimonials to include in your communications.

5. Use a simple communications framework

According to eLearning Industry, lack of awareness is a major problem for L&D, with a staggering

65% of L&D professionals saying their learners are not aware of the learning opportunities available at their organisation.

65% lack of awareness

AWARENESS

INTEREST

DESIRE
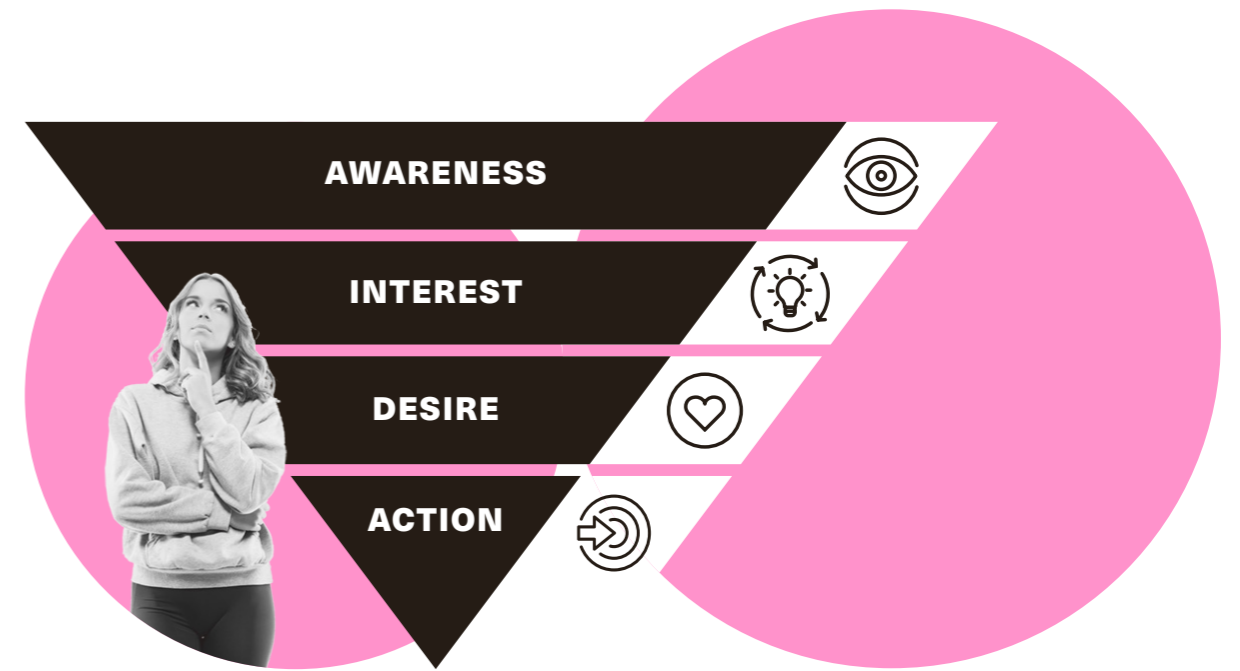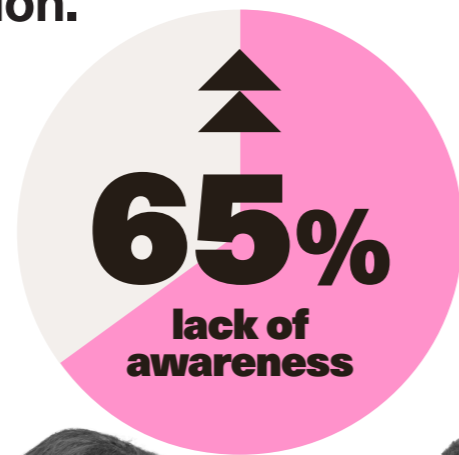
ACTION

To drive awareness and inspire action, consider the simple **AIDA** framework used by marketers for communications:

Awareness

What actions are you taking to raise awareness of your learning programmes (e.g. emails, adverts, recommendations)? Are you using your L&D brand voice?

Interest

Once you have people's attention, you need to maintain their interest. Is your learning content relevant to your audience? Do titles and summaries pique their curiosity? Can you craft a compelling message to promote it?

Action

Now it's time to drive people to take action. Create a sense of urgency with a clear call-to-action; for example: **'Last few places remaining – sign up today!'** or use a social nudge such as **'Sign up today and join 1,000 learners taking their sales career to the next level'.** Include a link so they are able to take appropriate action in the moment.

Desire

Remember those surveys and interviews you collected earlier? Think about what your learners' priorities are and remember to communicate value – how will signing up for the learning programme help them? Can you help them visualise success?
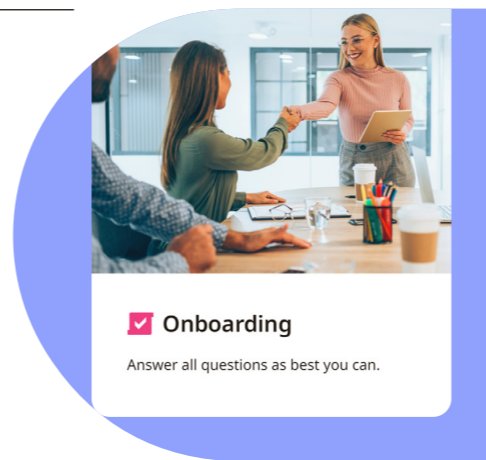
6 Employ drip marketing engagement tactics

'Drip' marketing has nothing to do with chocolate ganache, but it does involve 'drip feeding' nuggets of valuable information and timely nudges to learners at key moments – say a once-a-week summary of what has been learned and a reminder of the next steps. This helps to 'nurture' learners and maintain engagement once they're aware of learning opportunities.
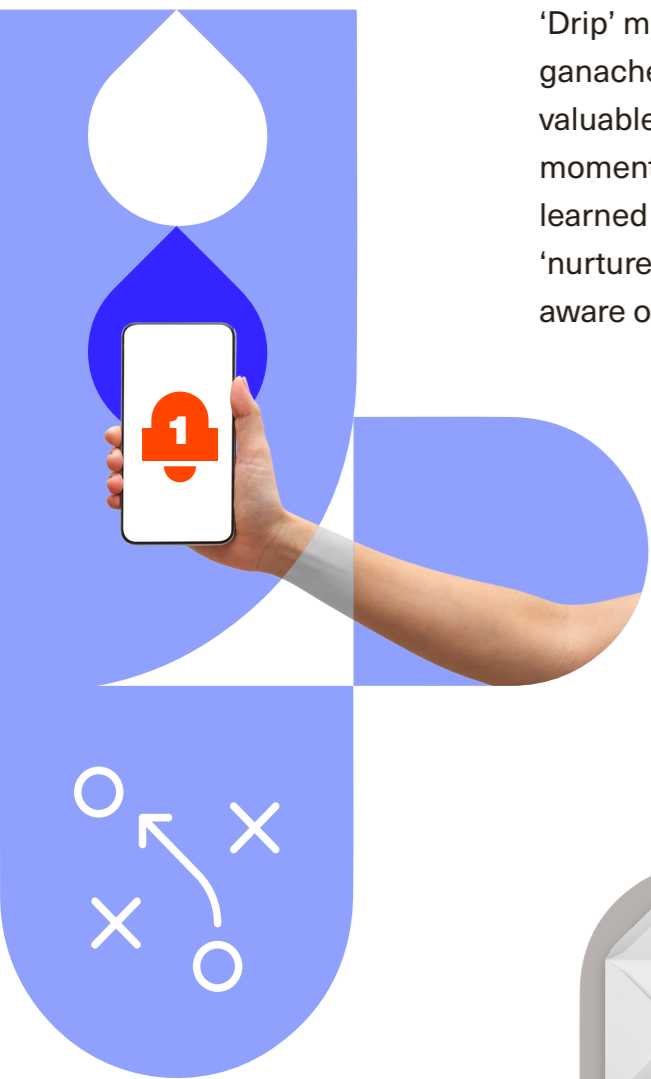
☑ **Onboarding**
Answer all questions as best you can.

Personalised emails with recommendations for learning content relevant to a particular cohort, such as new hires in the customer service team, can also be promoted.

RECAPS

REMINDERS

Regular email communications with recaps and reminders will keep learning at the forefront of people's minds and remind them of the opportunities available, along with the tangible benefits.

Action point ●●⏩

Plan a series of emails to go out before, during and after a training course. Start with a list of benefits for the target audience if they sign up, send regular reminders of what's been covered, and next steps for what they need to do after the course has finished.

Remember your brand and your audience – is the messaging consistent? Are you promoting the right learning programmes to the right audience at the right time?

Track your open and click-through rates to see who's engaging with different emails to identify what content is working, what's not, then investigate why.

Here's an **example** of an email marketing plan you can use, allowing you to plan five promotional emails per campaign. You can always add more rows to the template if you want to promote them over a longer period of time.
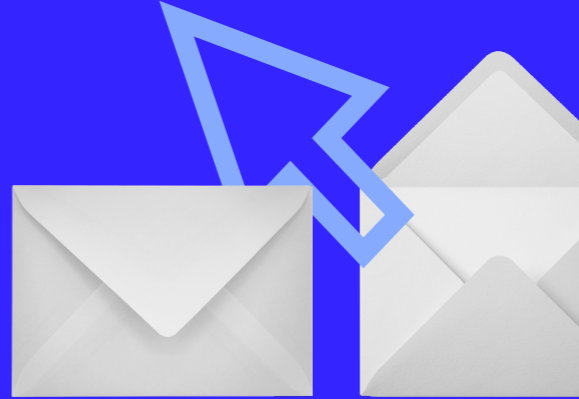
7 Measure, evaluate and improve

Measurement and evaluation is a critical component of any marketing campaign. Testing what works and what doesn't is absolutely key to making sure your message is on point and reaching people in the right way.

You need to be actively tracking and measuring various metrics that indicate the effectiveness of your efforts across all marketing channels. Remember how earlier you agreed to be accountable to marketing and vice versa? This is where the marketing team can provide you with the insights you need to determine what's working and what's not.
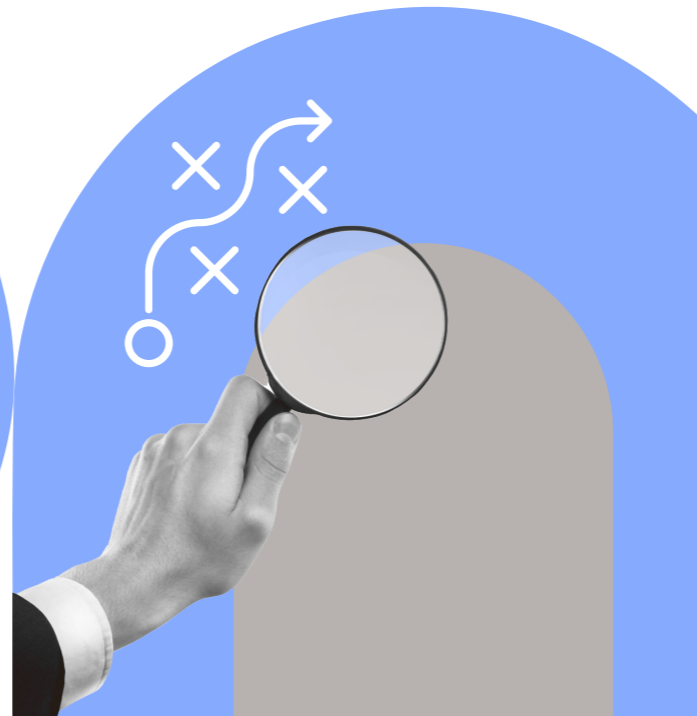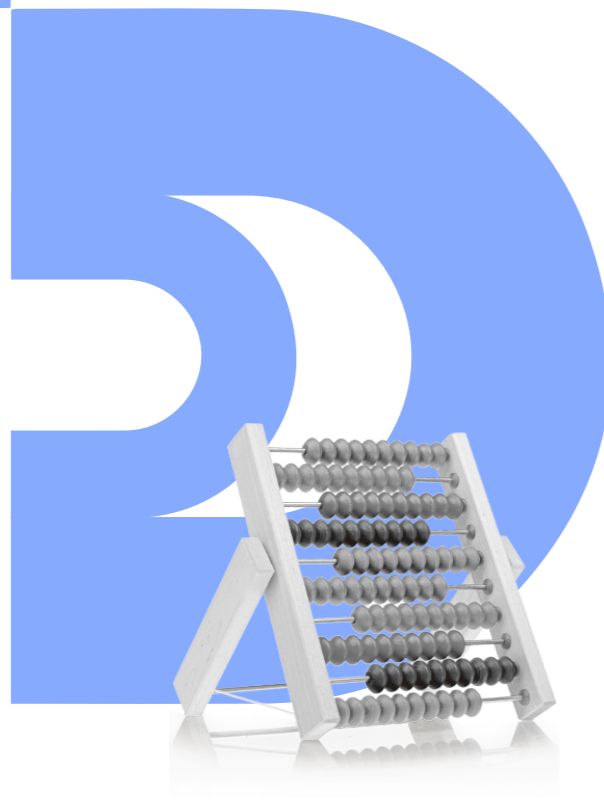
You might want to start by asking them:

"Are people opening my emails? Are they clicking the links?"

"What time of day are people engaging with the emails the most?"

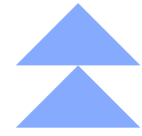"Where are people signing up to the courses? What's my highest-converting channel - email, social media or push notifications?"
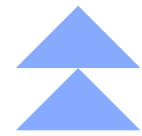

"Do we need to create a new area of the intranet and measure how often people are accessing it?"
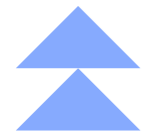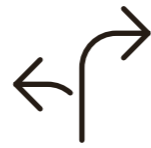
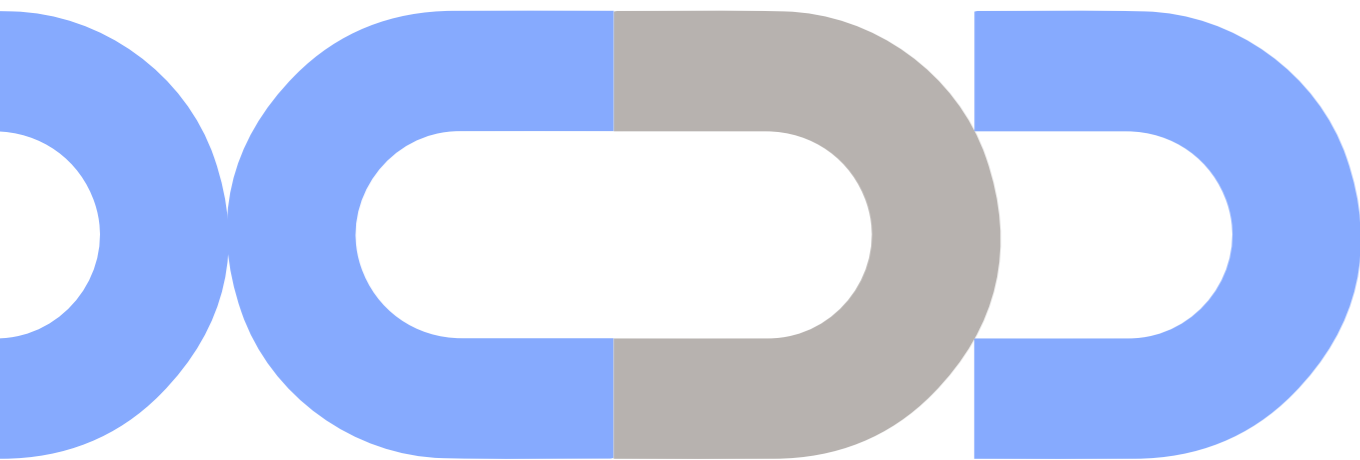**The three main advantages of evaluation are:**

It allows you to see whether a campaign has hit its overall objectives.

It gives you a clear insight into which marketing channels and types of messages are most effective.

It helps you to make informed decisions for planning future campaigns.

Action point

Marketing can provide you with reports on email open and click-through rates, along with conversion rates for sign-ups. Once marketing has raised awareness, L&D now needs to drive engagement. This is where Thinqi can help.

Draw up a list of what metrics you will need to collect to determine engagement. Some examples could include:

**How many of the people who signed up via email completed a course?**

How many have earned a badge by completing a full set of learning activities?

How many are actually logging in to learn and how often?

When are users most active in the learning system?

Your marketing team can include UTM* codes within links to ensure attribution can be tracked across multiple channels. This will help to identify the most successful ways to communicate.

✱ *UTM code is a simple snippet of code that you can add to the end of a URL to track the performance of campaigns and content.*

...

End of section
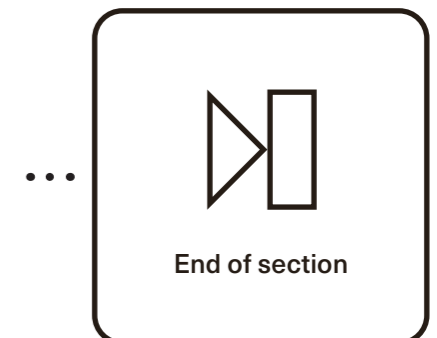
Your marketing L&D checklist ☑

- **Create your persona templates** ☐

- **Define your learning brand and complete the perceptual map** ☐

- **Draw up agreements with marketing on accountability for the campaign** ☐

- **Collect responses from your digital champions using the interview questions** ☐

- **Plan your email campaigns** ☐

- **Create a brief communications plan using the AIDA framework** ☐

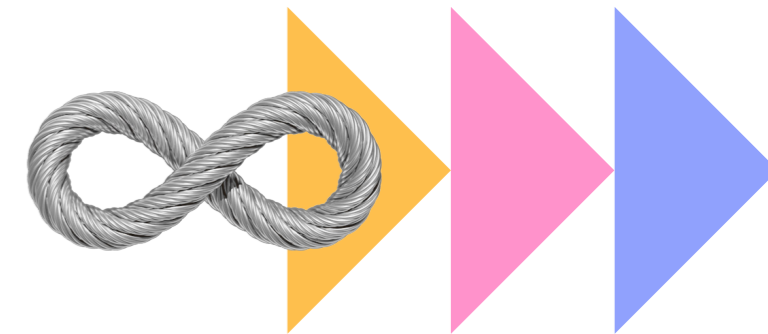- **Make a list of what you'll be measuring to track engagement** ☐

thinqi

Remember, your learners are your key. You need to reach out to them and really get to the heart of what they want from the learning – and make sure that the relevance of it is clearly demonstrated through personalised communications. By showing that you are actively listening, your learners are going to be much more open and responsive to the learning you are trying to market.

Finally, when learning is a success, shout about it! Get your learning champions to help you raise the volume and add authenticity to the success of your learning programmes. Lead by example, show the positive impact of learning, and your sign-up forms will soon fill up with names of eager and engaged learners. And isn't that the point of marketing learning?

By demonstrating the importance of continuous learning in all we say and do, we can foster the sort of culture that **Never Stops Learning**.

thinqi.com

thinqi