

Postprint on the Informatization Construction and Online-Offline Integration Practice of Xinhua News Agency' s Education and Training Platform

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Abstract

With the advancement of informatization and networking technologies, information-based methods are increasingly being applied to all aspects of education and training. Based on the current status and practical experience of Xinhua News Agency' s education and training informatization construction, this paper analyzes and provides an outlook on the integrated development of online and offline education and training.

Full Text

The Practice of Informatization Construction and Online-Offline Integration of Xinhua News Agency' s Education and Training Platform

Abstract: With advances in information and network technologies, more information-based methods are being applied to all aspects of education and training. Based on the current status and practice of Xinhua News Agency' s education and training informatization, this paper analyzes and prospects the online-offline integrated development of education and training.

Keywords: education and training; informatization; platform construction; training platform

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The emergence and application of IT technologies such as big data, cloud computing, and the Internet of Things have heralded the transformation of the Internet era. The progress of the Internet and informatization has driven technological evolution, causing tremendous changes in people's lifestyles and announcing the arrival of the omnimedia era. In this omnimedia era, how to utilize new technologies and new media to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of Xinhua News Agency's education and training has become a new topic for consideration by builders of education and training network platforms.

1. Distinguishing “+ Internet” from “Internet +” and Accurately Understanding Online-Offline Integration in Education and Training

Current online-offline integration has been widely applied in media, retail, advertising, and many other industries. Further promoting online-offline integration in education and training has become a major issue facing current education and training work. To do this work well, we must first accurately understand the concept of online-offline integration.

1.1 Distinguishing “+ Internet” from “Internet +” in Online-Offline Integration

Online-offline integration, as the term suggests, refers to a model that comprehensively utilizes online methods combined with traditional offline approaches. But is this “online + offline” model a case of “+ Internet” or “Internet +” ?

The academic community has not established precise definitions to distinguish these two concepts. Generally speaking, “+ Internet” refers to not changing the original business model but relying on the Internet to expand platforms and channels, with the Internet mainly serving as a tool in the development model. “Internet +,” however, more often uses Internet thinking to deconstruct business models, typically building upon existing business foundations while fully utilizing Internet technology and concepts for innovative applications to improve service efficiency and quality. The former is integration dominated by traditional concepts, while the latter is integration dominated by Internet concepts. With continuous technological development, intelligent exploration has blossomed everywhere, and further enhancing Internet thinking to promote online-offline integration with informatization concepts will inevitably become a future trend. From the perspective of our agency's education and training actual situation, the current online-offline integration still leans more toward “+ Internet.” In the future, through further concept enhancement, strengthened innovation levels, and increased policy and financial support, online-offline integration will gradually transform toward “Internet +.”

1.2 Understanding Two Levels of Online-Offline Integration in Education and Training

The first level is integration at the teaching level, commonly known in the industry as blended training, which is the organic combination of online course learning and offline classroom teaching. Some courses suitable for remote teaching and multi-terminal applications are placed online, while courses requiring discussion and exchange are organized as face-to-face instruction. Through information-based methods, online and offline teaching models are combined to form complementary approaches.

The second level is integration at the business process level, that is, the organic combination of face-to-face training with online management and online-assisted teaching. Expressed in professional terms, this level of integration is called business process informatization. This process originated in the mid-1990s when the development of information technology promoted computer participation in business work. Some large enterprises and government agencies began introducing computers and networks into their work, mainly manifested in the emergence of various business information systems such as OA, ERP, CRM, etc. This system construction process continued until around 2010. Since then, informatization work has basically been based on certain systems and platforms, gradually evolving into the current online-offline integration model.

1.3 Fully Leveraging the Role of Network Platforms in Online-Offline Integration of Education and Training

Currently, Xinhua News Agency's education and training network platform mainly consists of one website and one client: the Xinhua News Agency Education and Training Network and the Xinhua School Client. The platform produces a large number of training topics annually, uploading various online courses on political theory, current affairs hotspots, editing and reporting, business operations, management, foreign languages, etc., becoming the main channel for all agency employees to access online training. In light of the actual situation of online-offline integration in education and training, the network platform mainly serves as a carrier in the teaching-level integration process, playing more of a service and support role. However, in the business process-level integration process, it can play a greater role. During the construction of the Education and Training Network and Xinhua School Client, we fully considered the online management and auxiliary functions required in the online-offline integration process of training, developing and reserving corresponding functions. Fully utilizing these platform functions will further promote online-offline integration in education and training and effectively enhance the relevance and effectiveness of training.

2. Actively Exploring Platform Construction: Improving Architecture, Enriching Content, and Expanding Integration

In recent years, the Xinhua News Agency Party Group and agency leaders have attached great importance to education and training work, putting forward multiple requirements for training. To enhance the scientific and standardized level of education and training and strengthen its forward-looking nature, relevance, and practicality, the education and training network platform has also made considerable efforts and attempts in its construction.

2.1 Developing Reserved Functions and Improving Platform Architecture

During the initial construction of the network platform, we fully considered the changing trends of technological and industry development. The platform should not be positioned merely as an online learning platform but as a comprehensive business platform integrating learning, training, and management. The platform integrates five subsystems: training comprehensive management subsystem, survey questionnaire management subsystem, mobile terminal management subsystem, online learning subsystem, and online examination comprehensive management subsystem, as well as four resource databases: student database, teacher database, audio-video courseware database, and training materials database. Different subsystems and resource databases can be combined to meet the needs of online, offline, and blended training, reserving corresponding functions for promoting online-offline integration in training and providing a relatively solid technical foundation.

Simultaneously, in accordance with the scientific and standardized requirements of education and training work, we gradually sorted out relevant workflows to further improve the entire chain of network management processes. During the platform construction process, considering future development needs, the training comprehensive management subsystem covers the entire training process. Vertically, the platform's training management covers needs investigation and formulation of training plans, planning and organization of training classes, and statistical analysis and feedback of training results. Horizontally, the platform incorporates all relevant personnel from various units involved in training work, covering various roles including the Education and Training Department of the Personnel Bureau, various training departments of the Education and Training Center, training work responsible persons within the agency, instructors, and trainees.

Currently, the training management functions of the Education and Training Network and Xinhua School Client have covered all main links of online and offline training management and possess the capability for immediate iterative updates.

2.2 Strengthening Thematic Planning and Enriching Course Content and Formats

To enhance the relevance and practicality of training, according to the Party Central Committee's requirements on cadre education and training and in line with the spirit of relevant work deployments by the agency Party Group and leaders, and combined with Xinhua News Agency's education and training needs, we have further strengthened thematic planning efforts. In 2018, we successively launched major political theory learning topics such as "Thoroughly Studying and Implementing the Spirit of the 19th CPC National Congress," "Thoroughly Studying and Implementing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," "Marxist View of Journalism," and "40th Anniversary of Reform and Opening Up." We also regularly distribute course demand questionnaires to determine course topics based on survey results to better meet the content needs of all agency trainees.

To facilitate the increasing number of mobile terminal users, in addition to traditional video courses, we have also added a large number of micro-courses and audio course content to adapt to employees' fragmented learning needs.

2.3 Exploring Applications and Expanding Online-Offline Integration

Since 2018, the Education and Training Network and Xinhua School Client have gradually introduced various management functions into offline training, applying the client in multiple training projects to provide trainees with class notifications, course schedules, learning material downloads, student interaction and exchange, and teaching evaluation services.

Through the "one website, one client" platform, we have also organized remote thematic training and examinations for Xinhua News Agency's overseas bureaus. Trainees study and take exams online, and grading teachers also grade papers online. This was the first time we conducted multi-point online training globally, achieving excellent results.

3. Key Insights from Platform Development

3.1 Adopting a Macro Perspective with Micro Implementation for Gradual Platform Improvement

Due to the rapid development of information technology, from a platform design perspective, it is essential to adopt a macro perspective with long-term planning and overall layout as the foundation and framework of platform construction, which must have forward-looking considerations.

To better achieve integrated online-offline development of education and training, strong driving force is required during implementation to ensure coverage of all links. High-level leadership attention, inter-departmental collaboration, and complete software and hardware support are all indispensable.

Meanwhile, given real-world constraints, platform construction should not blindly rush forward in pursuit of comprehensiveness. Instead, it should follow the principle of “laying one stone at a time,” completing mature components gradually and advancing step by step.

3.2 Starting from Demand, Co-designing, and Striving to Improve Management Efficiency

Careful analysis of past successful cases reveals that all smoothly implemented functions are those where users directly propose requirements and that can generate direct benefits for users. They either simplify work or make content more attractive. Functional points that can meet users’ direct needs locally and generate direct benefits are what people can use and are willing to use.

This also proves the “co-design principle” in technology development (where users, as end-users, participate in co-design to ensure they can express their real wishes and meet their real needs). Only by truly understanding employees’ education and training needs and conducting co-design and precise development based on these needs can we more effectively improve the efficiency of network platform management functions.

3.3 Starting from Content, Driven by Technology, and Actively Exploring Innovation

In today’s rapidly developing Internet technology era, 5G, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence have gradually penetrated all industries. The informatization construction of education and training and online-offline integration have also shown dynamic development trends.

First, enhancing user stickiness by starting from content production. “Content is king” is a hot term in the current media industry and represents the core competitiveness of media. For education and training, the importance of content is equally significant. The informatization of content production can be reflected in the informatization of training needs analysis and course development: achieving full-staff coverage of training needs investigation through online questionnaires and conducting statistical analysis of training needs using big data analysis. Training courses are then developed more targeted based on this foundation, fully reflecting trainees’ needs and wishes and receiving their welcome.

Second, reshaping training models driven by advanced technology. 5G and VR can transfer most practical training online, transforming one-way didactic learning into interactive learning. Cloud computing and big data can enable dynamic analysis of trainees’ learning and effectively carry out personalized training, realizing a trainee-centered training model. However, informatization is not simply about utilizing new technologies as the most superficial training tools but rather about integrating them with the training teaching process to promote model innovation, process reengineering, and methodological transformation [1].

Third, enhancing learning experience by prioritizing mobile terminals. Currently, mobile Internet has become the main channel for the public to obtain information, and the informatization carriers for education and training are also gradually shifting from PCs to mobile phones. From apps to WeChat official accounts to mini-programs, more terminal applications will emerge. On the one hand, mobile terminals enable trainees to independently arrange learning time and content according to their own situations, making full use of fragmented time and enhancing learning experience [2]. On the other hand, the rapid iteration capability of mobile terminals allows them to timely launch various training functions to meet trainees' actual needs.

Fourth, promoting deep integration through training concept innovation. Promoting online-offline integration cannot be limited to simple online-plus-offline approaches nor be satisfied with innovation in a single technology. Only by continuously advancing training concepts with the times, breaking free from the constraints of traditional training models, and enhancing Internet thinking can we form an integrated and deeply integrated education and training model that develops online and offline as one, moving from addition to integration and transforming from “+ Internet” to “Internet +.”

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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