Training to the Web training with the Web

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Abstract

"SQcuola di Blog" is a new teaching model which aims to build bridges between a new breed of professionals emerging on the Web (but often far from the training and business opportunities) and the Business World.

Web and Social Media are changing the communication paradigm which is clearly affecting Corporations at all levels: dialogues replacing monologues, storytelling and narrative approach replacing traditional marketing techniques, new opportunities as much as critical variables emerge which need to be dealt with swiftly and promptly according to new engagement rules. The economic downturn is also pushing Corporation to experiment new communication models capable to optimize results at a lower cost. Web and Social Media therefore are emerging as viable answers in such sense, however often companies do not have internal personnel fully skilled and educated to these new tools and rules.

The economic downturn is raising unemployment and changing the scope of recruitment on many levels (e.g. LinkedIn). Furthermore it is reducing opportunities for traditional job class such as marketing, G&A, HR mounting the urge for many of these professionals to revamp their skills towards more appealing competences: Social Media tops the list.

A year or two ago the 'Social Media Manager' didn't exist. The whole category of Social Media jobs is still so new that is very difficult (and expensive!) study or learn how to do it anywhere.

There are thousands of people who are looking for professional training, certificates, projects and challenges available as much as one can deny that there are thousands of businesses around the world looking to hire people to work on Social Media tasks.

*"SQcuola di Blog" is a recognizable and visible hub creating and fuelling a participative and loyal community through education and value. We select "classroom" of passionate, skilled and competent individuals, we work with them for months cultivating and enhancing their talent using the **Techniques** of the Web 2.0 (LMS and webinars) and the **Methodologies** of the Learning 2.0: **Mentoring** the first.*

Whether it is true that most of these jobs don't require any prior experience and the only skills you need are a good knowledge of how to use Facebook, we all know that real companies are looking for skilled new professionals capable of doing much more than that.

*That is why at "SQcuola di Blog" the 500 hours of training are through an **e-learning platform**, with more 24 two-hours live webinars, **wiki** collaboration portals and class interaction through Social Networks, with the flanking of Senior Experts as Mentors.*

*The end game is to provide our Blogger with all the key competences required by corporation, both from a technical and a creative point of view. Each Blogger might have a specific field, however being part of a networked community of professionals studying and working in **crowdsourcing**, using social approach, teaching each other's through sharing, collaborating and keeping up with a fast evolving world (wiki-style).*

1. Introduction

In recent years Social Media experienced a growth both in the accounts and in the new kind of network, with ideas and interactions more or less innovative [1].

Many reasons helped this growth: we pointed out the following.

The improvement of the technologies, an easier broadband access, more powerful PCs, wired and wireless connections, a wider ASP market with very different offers, the lowering of connection fees, enabled a larger number of people and companies to connect to the Web.

The "glocalization" forced the companies to deal with new *modus operandi* to face the new market requirements, otherwise they disappeared from the market.

Less noticeable than the previous, but very important, is the mass of people using social networks: for the Company Marketing this means a huge pool of potential customers, for the job market this means new opportunities to create new jobs [2].

2. Our framework

The ICT workforce in Europe in 2011 amounted to 6.7 million, which is 3.1% of the overall workforce. From 2000 to 2010 the ICT workforce grew at an average yearly rate of 4.3%. According to brand news, as yet unpublished figures [3], the number of digital jobs that will be created in Europe by 2015 could be as high as 864,000.

However, a drop in the number of ICT graduates leaving universities, and the retirement of ICT workers over the coming years, threat ICT job growth potential. Education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics needs to be strengthened and the career image of these fields improved, in particular for women.

The Commission has sought pledges in the following key areas [4]:

- **Training and matching for digital jobs** – to ensure the skills people are getting are the skills business needs;
- **Mobility** – helping those with skills get to the place where they're needed, to avoid shortages and surpluses in different towns and cities;
- **Certification** – making it easier to prove to an employer what skills one has, regardless of the country;
- **Awareness raising** – so that people know the digital sector offers rewarding and enjoyable careers to both women and men;
- **Innovative learning and teaching** – so our education and training systems expand and improve to give more people the skills for success.

In Italy, when someone want to follow a highly specialized and abreast with the times training, the main problem is the difficulty to find qualified and up to date offers. The public education system does not offer the quick adaptation required by the high-speed changes in the technologies and markets. So it's compulsory to look at the private sector: a solution that shows obstacles concerning logistics (available only in great cities) and money (very high costs to access); one more difficulty is to evaluate the quality of the contents: often the "criteria" are the corporate brand and the word of mouth.

Our humanistic culture affects this type of training: still very theoretical.

On the company side there is the difficulty to perceive training as an investment rather than a "cost". That's due to two historical factors: the very small size of the typical Italian enterprise and the undercapitalization.

Summarizing, we face a specialized training accessible mainly to people with disposable income, rather than for individual capabilities. The funds available to support this type of training are too small and there are too few scholarships, mostly offered by large companies.

3. 5W+H

The "viral" propagation of Social Media is transforming very deeply the behaviours related to services and information retrieval, the purchase and sale of the products, as well as the ways of promoting and advertising.

People use these tools to share opinions and experiences creating mechanisms for the selection, recommendation and trust that companies can no longer remain strangers. For many companies, however, this trend appears to be traumatic because internal resources are not able to adapt themselves to these new dynamics. On the other hand, hundreds of new professionals are seeking to reintegrate into the labour market or adapt their skills to these new dynamics but not finding adequate training offer.

In this scenario fits "SQcuola of Blog". Born in 2010 (maybe the first Master on this subject), now is starting the fifth edition.

Here some data from the previous editions:
- more than 1200 candidates
- more than 100 bloggers
- average age 33 years old
- 70% women
- 77% with University degree

3.1 What "SQcuola di Blog" does

"SQcuola di Blog" is an online Master in Social Media Management, whose goal is to help individuals and organizations to be prepared to the challenges such as employability, social inclusion, active citizenship, Long Life Learning, with answers based on personalized and collaborative learning, learning by doing and nurturing creativity.

For a right planning, setup and management of a Company Digital Strategy, "SQcuola of Blog" provides expertise at various levels and in several sectors:

- **Technical features:** use of tools, visibility and indexing on search engines.
- **Relational approach:** content communication in the emotional, experiential and leisure framework.
- **Presentation:** look and feel and usability.
- **Disclosure:** social tools and viral spread of the contents.
- **Discipline:** continuous interaction.
- **Public Relations:** Reputation Management.
- **Blogging:** publishing content and opinions is the starting point for any strategy of Social Media Marketing, after the setup of a full Digital Strategy.

3.2 Where "SQcuola di Blog" perform its activities

The training activities are performed following the metaphor of a true High School, so we have:

- **The Classroom:** the website "TrainingWeb" [5], is the (asynchronous) training platform where the students find the training units and the related final tests;
- **The Corridor:** is the Facebook Group "SQcuola di Blog – Classe"; it's a secret group, only for the students and the Alumni, where the Alumni (together with the Teachers and the Tutors) help the younger colleagues to solve problems related to the training units, explain better what means some terms, and so on: here we are testing the Mentoring, at this early stage this activity is not yet so formal and declared, but we planned to improve and to apply in the future editions;
- **The School Board:** is the dedicated website [6], where there are public areas (e.g. only via this website is possible to submit the application to the Master) and areas reserved for students;
- **The Library:** one more Facebook Group (named "SQcuola di Blog – Academy" [7]), where all the members can post Q&A and experiences (the exteriors of the Master must apply for admission and be accepted only if it is clear their interest in the world of Social Media). Here is the opportunity for students to share ideas with experts and professionals and to get a better idea (for the "newbies") of what means to be a *Social Media Manager*, a *Community Manager* or a *Digital Strategist*, deciding in what area to specialize.
- **The School Journal:** where students practice their blogging skills and share their projects, receiving public feedback from the teachers and professionals [8]
- **The Lab:** on SlideShare [9], it allows to keep in touch with industry professionals, with students and Alumni and backup the materials presented during the Monday webinars.

Other useful links for developing contacts and to practice are the LinkedIn profile [10] and the official Pinterest page [11] of the Master. An example of how this interaction is working is the creation of a "SQcuola di Blog" dedicated Pinterest board by a student [12].

The training activities involve Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and FourSquare too.

3.3 Who is the Teacher of "SQcuola di Blog"

The typical teacher of the Master is an expert who comes from the world of enterprise consulting and has extensive experience both in the use of the most popular Social Media and in the business activities. Many teachers have already worked as a consultant or Project Manager in the development and implementation of the Digital Strategy in the companies, often also carrying out training activities for the personnel involved.

"SQcuola di Blog" is an Open (successful and work-in-progress) Laboratory, so we welcome other organisations and individuals, sharing our fundamental principles, who wish to teach about their own competencies and experiences.

3.4 When "SQcuola di Blog" issues the Master

The Master has two edition per year: the winter edition (starting on February) and the summer edition (starting on July).

Due to the length of the activities, especially those relating to the Company Project Works, the end of an edition overlaps the beginning of the next, so there is a great exchange of experiences between students of the two editions.

3.5 Why "SQcuola di Blog" does this

We need to help people develop the skills that will be crucial in the 21st century economy: knowledge-based economies need people who are able to think critically, take initiatives, be entrepreneurial and creative, and who are at ease in a world that is being constantly modified by forces such as ageing, sustainability challenges, globalisation and, not least, technological progress. Furthermore, we need to get people together, teach them how to better work remotely, how to become networked professionals.

The idea is based on the values of sharing, participation, collaboration, combined with the desire to give real and effective value for those who want to grow. It is an Open Source project, open to external suggestions and contributions, just because it comes from the real needs, the queries of the students, the professionals and the companies, daily facing each other in our classrooms.

The creators of "SQcuola of Blog" offer this free course (putting their faces, their resources and their time) to the students and the workers representing a mirror of the society and the current market.

3.6 How "SQcuola di Blog" works

The aim since the beginning was to exploit how new attractive learning techniques can help to re-attract, to re-engage and to motivate students who might be at risk of being left out, (adults, women with children, special needs).

The full Master is 500 hours long, with a two days event IRL and the others activities only on the Web. The Program is:
- 200 hours for the long distance asynchronous training, in more details:
- 80 hours for exercises and self training;
- 100 hours of multimedia training;
- 20 hours for the assessment and evaluation tests.
- 24 hours for two hours webinars;
- 56 hours of supervised study, using a special area of the "TrainingWeb" platform;
- 20 hours of actual seminars, debates and exercises, with networking activity;
- 200 hours of Project Work (the PW is performed on the basis of a brief submitted by an actual enterprise interested in developing and/or improving a Digital Strategy).

The access to the Master, which is strictly meritocratic, is subject to the submission of a CV with activities that are likely to benefit from the use of Social Media, joined with a letter of motivation. The selection process begins with two admission tests, carried out automatically on the Web, then there is the CV and motivational letter evaluation by a HR and SM expert panel. At the end is a ranked list: the first thirty have access to the Master.

4. Looking at the Future

"SQcuola di Blog" aims to continue offering, expanding and improving education and training systems, to give more people the skills for success.

What we are planning for the Future?
- A short Master in presence, so that even the mid-sized companies (or groups of SMEs) can bring inside easily the know how and skills necessary to take advantage from the Social Media.
-.A higher level online Master in which a high awareness of the possibilities offered to the company by Social Media (required as input level), will be improved by more accurate techniques and methodologies of business analysis, to enable the students to plan a more accurate and efficient Digital Strategy for the Company.
- A more flexible on-line Master, with which match the special requirements coming from special groups: handicapped, over 50, women who want to re-enter the world of work, SMEs.
- A lot of partnerships and agreements, both permanent (through trade agreements) and temporary, devoted to participate in large area projects (funded by the EC or by private initiative) focused on the e-learning, on the continuous education of the adults, on the sharing of best practices (evaluating how and if the "SQcuola di Blog" model can work in other Countries) and on the growth of more qualified professionals to support european enterprises to exploit the strengths of the Social Media.

L.E.N., through "SQcuola of Blog", has already held preliminary meetings with other Organisations, both at national and european level, in the context of the higher education about Social Media and Enterprise (trans-European project "Digital Sunrise Europe" [13]) and of the methodologies to improve learning and corporate integration (Italian School Mentoring [14]).

This Third International Conference on the Future of Education is a great opportunity to exchange and to spread the experiences and the best practices in the European Union, getting in touch with organizations similar to our in other Countries.

References

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