

GOOD PRACTICE BRIEF

MARCH 2021

LEARNER-FOCUSED KNOWLEDGE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT & DISSEMINATION

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Awareness of and engagement with knowledge products is increased when:

- The targeted learner and purpose of each knowledge product is defined early in the development process;
- Shorter, bite-sized complementary products such as videos, blogs, or flowcharts are created to draw learners into the knowledge products and provide them with varied format options through which to access the learning; and
- Dissemination plans are used to share the learning opportunities with the targeted learners.

BACKGROUND

The Center for Education (DDI/EDU) technical experts work tirelessly to further education sector knowledge related to their areas of expertise. The abundant creation of knowledge products, however well-intentioned, has the potential to overwhelm the practitioners they are trying to support (not to mention the USAID technical experts who develop the products). In DDI/EDU's case, this happens on two levels:

Quantity of Products: There are so many new knowledge products that learners cannot discern what to prioritize.

Format and Length of Products: Despite [wide criticism in recent years](#), the dominant digital format for knowledge products continues to be report-style PDFs. This format inhibits learning in several ways. They:

- are not as user-friendly as HTML (native web) content, particularly on smartphones.
- must be downloaded to be used, which creates a barrier to entry for busy learners.
- are long, which requires learners to expend energy just to determine whether the document might include any information relevant to their context.
- are challenging to update over time as knowledge increases or changes.

GOOD PRACTICE

The EPIC Communications and Knowledge Management (CKM) team worked with the USAID to respond to these challenges by creating and using a more learner-focused approach to developing and disseminating knowledge product packages.

DEFINING LEARNER AND PURPOSE EARLY IN THE PROCESS

EPIC created and piloted a knowledge product development process to help DDI/EDU prioritize its knowledge product creation and focus it around learner needs. This process required that when technical experts proposed any new knowledge product, they must specify for whom they were creating that product (M&E Specialists, Education Officers, donor partners, etc) and what specific questions or challenges the product would respond to.

This initial step helps ensure that only knowledge products that respond to real learner needs are created, providing the opportunity to potentially decrease the number of knowledge products created. It also creates a system through which DDI/EDU is able to track the full range of knowledge products they are developing so they can ensure collaboration and decrease duplication.

DEVELOPING COMPLEMENTARY PRODUCTS

To address the challenge of the format and length of the products, the EPIC team worked closely with the technical experts to “right size” content and understand the intended audience and purpose in order to propose other complementary products. These products, including blogs, timelines, briefs, flowcharts, infographics, and videos, sought to highlight key portions of the information and/or make key portions more engaging. The purpose was to draw people into the product to “learn more.”

These products not only enticed learners to explore the core product itself, they also offered learners the option to more specifically select what topics were most relevant to them through cross-linking related information, and to explore key concepts in the knowledge product in other formats. This created a self-directed learning approach that aligns with how adults prefer to learn.

DEVELOPING TARGETED DISSEMINATION PLANS

By defining the specific learner and purpose of each knowledge product early in the process, DDI/EDU set itself and the EPIC communications team up for success. First, this clarity from the start helped the technical experts focus the substance of their knowledge product. Second, it enabled the development of more targeted dissemination plans, including messages specific to each defined learner (drafted around the previously defined learner questions and challenges) delivered through the networks and channels where those learners are most active. All of this helps get the attention of targeted learners and cut through the deluge of information that education practitioners receive every day.

OUTCOMES

INCREASED AWARENESS OF LEARNER-FOCUSED KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

In 2019, [resources](#) that were part of learner-focused knowledge product packages received more than ten times as many page views as other resources.

Of FY2019 and FY2020's ten most-visited resource or blog pages, seven were part of learner-focused knowledge product packages, which were supported by EPIC, Global Reading Network (GRN), and Data and Evidence for Education Programs (DEEP).

The targeted dissemination of the learner-focused content was effective in generating more web traffic to the respective pages. In 2020, direct website traffic to EducationLinks for learner-focused knowledge product pages averaged 42 percent compared to only 30 percent across all website content.

INCREASED ENGAGEMENT WITH LEARNER-FOCUSED KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

In 2020, EducationLinks visitors spent 5:29 minutes on pages included in learner-focused knowledge product packages, compared to only 2:48 minutes on other pages.

BEHAVIOR CHANGE IN THE CENTER

Over the life of the project, EPIC saw DDI/EDU go from seeing report-style knowledge products as their default option to considering other formats—most commonly more bite-sized blogs, but also videos and briefs, depending on what was best suited for their particular learning goal.

EPIC also saw subject matter experts' understanding of the importance of dissemination planning grow over the life of the project. At the start of the project, experts were often unfamiliar with the idea of planning to whom and how a product would be disseminated. By the end of the project, this was an understood part of the development process, with some experts even developing dissemination plans on their own.

LESSONS LEARNED

RECOGNIZE REALITIES

What is described above is the ideal state of how knowledge product development, dissemination, and engagement would take place. In reality, the existing structures and processes of DDI/EDU made it difficult to implement the process broadly, resulting in the infrequent definition of a product's purpose and target audience during the early stages of product development. This continues to be an area of opportunity for DDI/EDU.

STREAMLINE THE CLEARANCE PROCESSES

EPIC's approach to developing complementary products from approved knowledge products allowed DDI/EDU to streamline its content development process. Instead of leadership being required to approve whole packages of products, they needed only to approve the core knowledge product upon which the complementary products were built. For example, when EPIC worked with DDI/EDU to create the [Disability How-To Note](#) package of products, it worked with the relevant subject matter experts and leadership to develop, refine, and approve the How-to Note itself. While that process was underway, it also worked with its KM Activity Manager and one or two DDI/EDU experts to select and develop key portions of the How-to Note to highlight in products that complemented the Note. It is highly recommended that this approach continue in the future.

This brief was created by Education Performance Improvement, Communications, and Knowledge (EPIC), a five-year activity (2015-2021) of support services to the Center of Education (DDI/EDU). EPIC consisted of activities in four key areas that were implemented simultaneously: performance improvement through organizational effectiveness; professional development, training, and learning for all staff; knowledge management, generation, brokering, uptake, and use; and internal and external communications, engagement, and partnerships.