

Implementing Nano-Learning in the Law Firm

Abstract: This article by Ann-Christin Karlén Gramming, Elisabeth Ejemyr and Elin Thunell is based on a presentation delivered at the BIALL Annual Conference in 2019. It focuses on promoting library services through an e-learning system called ‘Nano-learning’. It is an innovative way of promoting the library and its services in a new and engaging manner. It combats information overdose (usually followed by a rapid forgetting curve) by relying on spaced repetition. The system also comes with useful analytics and reporting tools, making it easy to measure and showcase ROI (return on investment) to partners.

Keywords: e-learning; Nano-learning; marketing; law firm libraries

INTRODUCTION

Vinge is one of the oldest and largest law firms in Sweden. It is a full-service firm, focusing on business law. Together we number 450 co-workers in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, Helsingborg and Brussels. Vinge is also the only Swedish firm that still employs professional librarians in all offices. Other firms have downsized their physical libraries, and some have even let their librarians go. Some firms make do with one librarian/information specialist that travels between the offices and others have replaced their librarian with law students.

As a result of these changes it is important to provide a high return on investment (ROI) to the company, for example by focusing on promoting our resources. In this article we will discuss how we implemented Nano-learning as a tool to promote library services.

KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING

Digitization, automatization and globalization are changing the world around us. A knowledge-intensive working life needs continuous professional development in the form of new knowledge, re-skilling etc. Our skills and knowledge have an expiration date and to cope with ever changing job descriptions and responsibilities we need to keep on learning all throughout our professional lives.

The problem is usually not lack of courses and training programs or even the cost, but rather the lack of time in our busy workdays. For an organization there are also the challenges of adapting training to large groups of people, and training people ranging from experienced old-timers to newly hired employees, not to mention keeping the content up to date.

LEARNING IN LAW FIRMS

What about learning in our environment – the (Swedish) law firm? According to section 36 of the charter of the Swedish Bar Association a member shall maintain and develop his or her professional qualifications. The association has issued specific guidelines for continuing professional training stating that in order to remain a member of the Swedish Bar Association a lawyer must complete at least 18 hours of structured professional education every year. Six of these hours may take the form of structured online learning. The training must be led by a teacher, have a course plan and be attended by a minimum of 5 participants. Each training must be at least one and a half hours (or one hour for online learning).¹ Add to this the demand for maximum billable hours – there is little time (and energy) left for informal learning.

FOCUS ON FOCUS

The Forgetting Curve, first identified by the German psychologist Dr. Ebbinghaus in 1885, is the theory that we forget 90% of anything new we learn within just one month. Within the first 24 hours we forget as much as 67–70%.²

A solution for this is something called spaced learning or spaced education. Spaced learning exercises the brain, by teaching and testing the same information more than once over an extended period of time. This is achieved by learning in small portions and by using activities like quizzes, application questions, and case studies. The more often the brain is exercised on a particular concept, the longer the information is retained.

The solution to keeping up to date with knowledge and learning in a time-efficient way, is something called

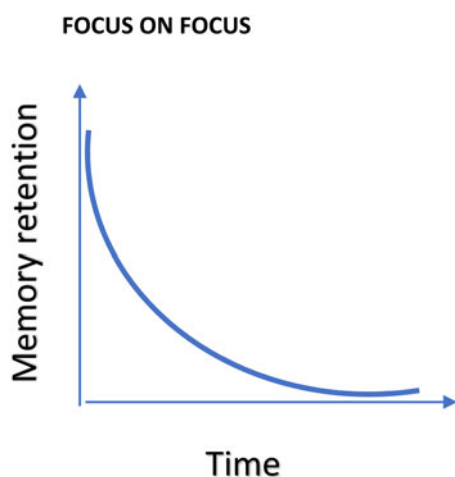


Figure 1: Memory retention and time.

Nano-learning or microlearning. It is a pedagogical model based upon how our brains retain information. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time!

Outside of our professional environment we have things like YouTube videos and other online tutorials on how to fix household appliances, make complicated braids or bake rainbow unicorn cupcakes. People are used to looking something up when they need it. They do not need to take a year long course to become experts at it; they just need to solve a problem at that particular moment.

WHAT IS NANO-LEARNING?

Nano-learning can be described as 'quick hits' of information. Nano-learning has been around for more than 15 years but it is becoming more popular in the last five years or so. One of the reasons that it has become such a hit in corporate settings is because it works well for companies that have offices in different physical locations.

...the traditional, annual e-learning course was a bit like serving all employees a kilogram of vitamins once a year to be done with it.³

Another reason why microlearning is more effective than traditional learning is because it mimics how people instinctively learns. By serving up small portions you remember better.

We refer to this technique as nano-learning but it can also be called NOOCS (Nano Open Online Courses), SPOOCS (Self-Paced Open Online Courses), Micro-learning and Bite-sized learning. And there are probably a couple more that we have not yet come across.⁴

A Nano course should take approximately five minutes to complete. It is usually highly targeted and covers a single objective. It can be described as self-contained or stand-alone, and it offers small nuggets of information. It is designed for viewing on a range of devices, including handhelds such as iPads and cell phones.

EXAMPLES OF CONTENT IN NANO-LEARNING

A Nano course can include text as well as video, sound, and images. Some learners may prefer to watch a video rather than follow on-screen illustrations or text while others retain knowledge best by listening to audio clips. Here are some examples of contents that works well with Nano-learning:

1. Quizzes and assessments: you can add short quizzes and assessments together with other content or just feature them on their own.
2. Videos: short videos are a good way to illustrate learning situations; for example, how to use a database.
3. Infographics are becoming more popular as a way to break down data in a visual way. A good use for infographics is when you are explaining a process. Infographics let you break down complex processes into their simpler components and represent these visually and sequentially for easy understanding.
4. Interactive Documents such as PDFs with links, etc. These are useful when your objective is to create awareness rather than for building skills and competency.
5. Surveys are often used as a simple method to solicit feedback about course effectiveness but can also be used before instruction to evaluate what kind of knowledge the learners already have.

EXAMPLES OF USES

Nano-learning works especially well for topics that require repetition. One example is learning languages. If you have come across the Duolingo app, it is a good example of this method.

Business processes and procedures is another area suitable for Nano-learning as it is very useful for reinforcing this kind of knowledge. It is often used for teaching employees about information security and anti-money laundering regulations.

Nano-learning is also useful for practicing micro skills that build into larger skills. The library can use different Nanos to introduce library resources with the objective of making the learners self-sufficient. The EURlex e-learning model is a good example where they use short videos to highlight different features like how to build CELEX numbers or how to use quick search.⁵

It can also be used as a marketing tool. Nano-learning is an excellent way to promote the library in itself and to familiarize the users with the library staff.

Nano-learning can be used as course augmentation, before or after classroom training or a longer online module. It works just as well for introducing a topic as it does for wrapping up a lesson by delivering take-aways.

The last example is to use the Nano technique for just in time learning. There might be occasions where you need to refresh a skill quickly for a specific event –

this is where Nano-learning comes in very handy. Sometimes you just need to quickly look up something to solve a problem. Another use is for example if a database has been revamped and you want to highlight some new features.

ADVANTAGES OF NANO-LEARNING

There are many advantages of Nano-learning, one major being that it reduces cognitive overload by keeping it short. Nano-learning makes it easier for you to handle a greater volume of learning content and get it out to learners fast. This way you can accelerate new-hire orientation for example. Some other advantages are that it is easily adaptable to different audiences as it supports both new and experienced users.

By leveraging the courses for multiple uses they can be part of a larger course but also accessible independently. This is a good way to reduce training costs. Another idea is to let the learner control the learning by making it available on the intranet in combination with sending it out. By supporting 'just in time learning' the learners get what they need, when they need it; for example en-route to a client. It enables a person to quickly close a small knowledge or skill gap.

Nano-learning offers flexibility by being re-usable. With templates you can make new courses quickly and easily which also makes it a cost-effective way of learning or marketing. And since Nano-learning is available on smartphones and other handheld devices, courses can be completed while on the move or while on hold.

CHALLENGES

What are the challenges involved with Nano-learning? For starters you can't replace a whole day of classroom training or a longer online course with Nano-learning, but you can use it as a way to break-up a one-hour video seminar in smaller pieces. It is a support tool that improves retention and comprehension when combined with other forms of training, but it will not replace it. Also making something short and simple isn't necessarily easy. You need to take lots of information and synthesize this information into a concise and readable form. And make sure the knowledge is not fragmented.

Nano-learning is probably not suitable for all subject matter. And since it relies heavily on context you need some sort of a build-up - you can't just send links without warning. It is important to contextualize the knowledge to the workplace. One size does not fit all. You need to adapt your Nano-learning to your specific target group or groups.

NANO-LEARNING AT VINGE

Nano-learning at Vinge was originally implemented by the IT department to raise awareness about information security and GDPR. One of the librarians was invited to

a training course about Nano-learning and it occurred to her that it would be a useful tool for promoting library services as well.

At Vinge the databases and services are presented online in a 'digital library'. A lot of time is spent on choosing and evaluating databases, all with the goal of giving the users access to the right information.

Many services are very expensive and when it is time to renew a contract the library looks carefully at the user statistics as well as contacting users directly to get an idea of how much the service is used. Unfortunately, we have been in a situation where we contact somebody that we believe uses a specific service a lot only to find out that they were not even aware that it existed.

We realized that we needed to step up our game when it came to marketing our services as well as training. We have already seen that a regular training session in the form of classroom training is not always the way to go. We wanted to offer some simple, but efficient, promotional activities.

For the last couple of years the library has been marketing its services through a recurring 'Library tip' on the intranet. The tips highlight new databases or for example if someone at Vinge has published an article in one of the journals we subscribe to. We also post the same kind of information on the inside of the doors leading into all lavatories, we call it 'the toilet paper'.

The library staff also attend weekly meetings with different practice groups to keep them informed of news and services in their specific area.

For training we annually invite some of the database providers to host training sessions or webinars.

The library has reached users with all of the above methods, but we also wanted to test Nano-learning. The short training sessions, sent out by email, could be completed in a few minutes. This way the library could offer up some good tips but also be a little more in-depth than what is possible on the back of a lavatory door.

EXAMPLES OF USAGE

We started by compiling a top-10-list of resources that we wanted to highlight through Nano-learning. We decided to name the series 'Bibblans bästa' - which translates into 'Best of the library'. The first Nano we sent out focused on legal alerts. We wanted to promote a couple of services that offer tailored alerts. We also wanted to tell our users about the advantages of using services with personal log ins. We have some databases where you can choose between ip-access and personal log in and by logging in as an individual you have access to alerts and other features.

Our first Nano was a success and shortly after we made another Nano to promote Dagens Industri, the Swedish equivalent to the Financial Times. We have a firm wide license and wanted to introduce features like their app, alerts and newsletters to the staff. That Nano was also well received and we felt that we had a good Nano flow and came up with some other services that

could be promoted through Nano-learning. One example is 'Getting the deal through' which is a useful database that we have had for some time but a service that often gets overlooked. Another example that we are working on is WordFinder, a subscription-based dictionary service. We have had WordFinder Pro, a desktop program for many years but we also have a license for WordFinder Unlimited, their cloud-based service which offers access to more specialized dictionaries. We want to promote the latter to the staff at Vinge since we believe that many are not aware of its existence.

THE IMPORTANCE OF METRICS

Metrics are important for evaluation purposes and our current Nano system offers different kind of data for which we can use to follow up on the Nano lessons.

We have been able to see some positive results from our Nanos. For one of the services we promoted through Nano-learning the usage increased by almost 100% in 2018 compared to the previous year. It remains to be seen whether this trend continues in the long run.

NANO OPTIONS AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SYSTEM

At Vinge we use a Norwegian company called Junglemap but there are of course several other alternatives available. Some companies offer various courses online, usually for promoting specific products or services. A lot of them are available online and you can enroll for free, so trying some out is a good way to get some inspiration if you want to explore ways of putting together courses. As always you need to find a vendor that fits your specific needs or that can tailor its services to your demands. It is important to prioritize wanted features.

Some companies offer different gamification strategies to provide interactivity. Other companies offer features like dynamic timelines where you can add a relevant time-span between the lessons (for example, 1 hour, 1 day or 2 weeks). In this case the programme can stay 'open' and participants can join at any time compared to specific timelines where you schedule the training chapters on specific dates. When a new lesson opens a push-message goes out to all participants at the same time.

There are many other things to consider if you decide to implement Nano-learning in your organization. It is useful to have a tool that lets you build once but that deploys to multiple devices. And it must look good in all browsers and operating systems.

If possible choose a cloud-based system so that more than one member of the team can work on it at the same time. It is worth noting that not all cloud-based systems are compatible with security and confidentiality demands so always be sure to check with the IT department.

The system should allow you to create a lesson from scratch or customize ready-made content.

Does the system offer the ability to build a 'theme' that you can personalize or brand with colours or logos? It is also good if it is possible to create templates since this will save time.

A system that offers access to a database of media files that are ready to use (images, graphics, and icons) will also save time. Otherwise you have to source your own illustrations that comply with copyright restrictions. For this purpose, the system should also let you upload your own images and keep them organized and accessible within the projects.

Integration is another thing to look into. Does the program or system sync with the organizations LMS (Learning Management Systems) or LRS (Learning Record Store)? Can the system be used by different departments in a law firm? Is it possible for IT, HR and Knowledge Management to share the cost?

And very importantly – analytics. You want a system that gives you insight on completion rates, quiz and poll results, individual learner profiles and more. You probably want to track your learners progress.

Do you want to promote any social interaction through sharing, commenting and liking on videos and images in the lessons? This is something that might appeal to law students.

Does the system come with incentives and rewards? Some systems have built in gamification features where learners earn points with quizzes and polls, or for reading and creating content. It might for example have dynamic leader boards that shows top performers, and certificates that reward achievements. Perfect for interns who are always competing!

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

What have we learned from our Nano adventures? For a start it is always good to try something new and we have learned a great deal from our Nano-learning. One important lesson is that training and promoting doesn't have to be complicated.

If you are using Nano-learning to promote a specific service, it is important to review usage before as well as after. It is also worth considering setting specific goals so that you have something to benchmark against.

Another lesson learnt is that there is always room for improvement. In the future we will strive to improve the designs of the lessons. So far, we have kept the design very basic and minimalistic. The content of our Nanos consists mostly of plain text and a few illustrations. Nano-learning lessons are often most effective when they provide links to additional, related training materials, such as other Nano-learning lessons, practice aids, performance support tools, more in-depth training modules, or other resources. Remember to involve your learning and development manager!

We can also improve interactivity to make it more interesting.

It would be beneficial to increase the frequency and send out lessons more regularly as it would help to maintain continuity.

FEEDBACK AND PLANNED FUTURE USES

The feedback we have received from users so far indicate that they like Nano because it is simple and easy. They can complete the training while commuting to work (if they use public transport) and they are always happy to learn about services that they weren't aware of.

Some future uses for Nano-learning that we have planned are highlighting new features in existing databases and introductory training for new employees to augment the current face-to-face training. We are in the process of phasing out a major business information database that we have had for some 20+ years and Nano will be a useful tool to manage this transition.

Two of our major legal databases (equivalent to Westlaw UK) are merging and this will bring about a lot of changes. We plan to create several Nanos to guide our users through this transition.

CONCLUSION

Here are ten take-aways, presented in an analogue Nano format.

1. Work a little extra on the subject headline and the introduction email. The text must be short yet interesting. One must get curious enough to start the lesson	2. Keep it simple. Marketing and training doesn't have to be difficult and time-consuming.
--	--

3. Break it down: make an effort to word things concisely. You don't need to fit everything in one Nano. It is better to break it up and make it into several short courses. Optimal lesson time is three to four minutes.	4. Make a plan: create a Nano-learning strategy, taking into consideration for example target groups and training goals.
5. Evaluate and adapt: did it work as well as you hoped for?	6. Combine: integrate Nano-learning with other forms of training
7. Trial and error. Try it out before you send it out. Pave the way for the Nano by giving your audience a heads up that a Nano course is being sent out shortly.	8. To achieve maximum learning efficiency, send out one lesson at a time and space out the lessons. The amount needed between the sendouts depends on the topic and target group.
9. If you include a quiz, take your time to formulate reliable possible answers. It should not be obvious which answer is correct.	10. If you would like to include a link, make this the last page. Otherwise you risk losing users who will never return to the lesson after clicking that link.

Footnotes

- ¹ Advokatsamfundet, the Swedish regime for continuing professional training of advocates. https://www.advokatsamfundet.se/globalassets/advokatsamfundet_eng/regime_for_professional_training.pdf accessed 20 September 2019
- ² Thalheimer, W. (2010, April). How Much Do People Forget? <https://www.worklearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/How-much-do-people-forget-v12-14-2010.pdf>, accessed 20 September 2019
- ³ Junglemap, <https://www.junglemap.com/nanolearning>, accessed 20 September 2019
- ⁴ Información y TIC, Curso con tutor; MOOC, NOOC o SPOOC: ¿cuál te va mejor? <https://informacionytic.com/2018/05/20/curso-con-tutor-mooc-nooc-o-spooc-cual-te-va-mejor/>, accessed 20 September 2019
- ⁵ E-learning module, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/e-learning/index.html>, accessed 20 September 2019

Biographies:

Ann-Christin Karlén Gramming has worked as an information professional at Vinge law firm (Gothenburg office) for over 18 years. She enjoys taking an active interest in the LIS community, serving on the board of several organizations, organizing conferences and guest lecturing at the Swedish School of Library and Information Science. She served as chair of The Swedish Association of Information Specialists (SFIS) 2014–2017. Together with her colleagues, Ann-Christin has given talks at various library conferences including BIALL 2017, 2019 and the 11th Nordic Law Librarians Conference.

Elisabeth Ejemyr. Since graduating from the Swedish School of Library and Information Science in 1990 Elisabeth Ejemyr has been working at Uppsala University Library and the Library of the Swedish Parliament. As a corporate librarian she has built up a library and knowledge center at the audit firm Ernst & Young in Stockholm. Since 2011 she has worked for Vinge law firm in Stockholm as an information professional/librarian. She is interested in the following topics: the role of the corporate librarian, internal marketing of the library service, digitalization and information retrieval. She is a member of the Swedish Association of Information Specialists (SFIS). Together with her colleagues, Elisabeth has given talks at BIALL 2017, 2019 and the 11th Nordic Law Librarians Conference, 2018.

Elin Thunell. After Elin Thunell received her master's degree in library and information science from Lund University in 2008, she spent about a year working at public and university libraries in southern Sweden. Since 2009 she has been a part of the librarian and information specialist team at Vinge law firm (Malmö office), where she has had the opportunity to work with her special interest in library development, digitalization and information management. She was a board member of the Swedish Association of Information Specialists (SFIS), south department 2015–2018. Together with her colleagues, Elin has given talks at various library conferences including BIALL 2017, 2019 and the 11th Nordic Law Librarians Conference, 2018.

Legal Information Management, 19 (2019), pp. 246–251

© The Author(s) 2020. Published by British and Irish Association of Law Librarians

doi:10.1017/S1472669619000574

Designing Client-Centred Knowledge Services

Abstract: In this article Sophie Thompson describes what design thinking is and gives practical exercises to see how design thinking can be used to give a fresh perspective on delivering knowledge services. The article is based on a parallel session delivered as a workshop at the BIALL Annual Conference 2019.

Keywords: design thinking; service design; knowledge management; knowledge services

DESIGN THINKING CAN HELP US RE-IMAGINE KNOWLEDGE SERVICES

When I first heard about design thinking, it really hit some key notes for me. I trained about 10 years ago in PRINCE2, the project management methodology, and subsequently ran a number of knowledge projects. When

I started to read about design thinking in the legal press, it was always in connection with innovation projects. I was intrigued and began to dig a little further. The more I dug, the more I liked the sound of what I was reading. It chimed with my experience of what made a project successful, particularly with its emphasis on putting people front and centre in your thinking and challenging you to