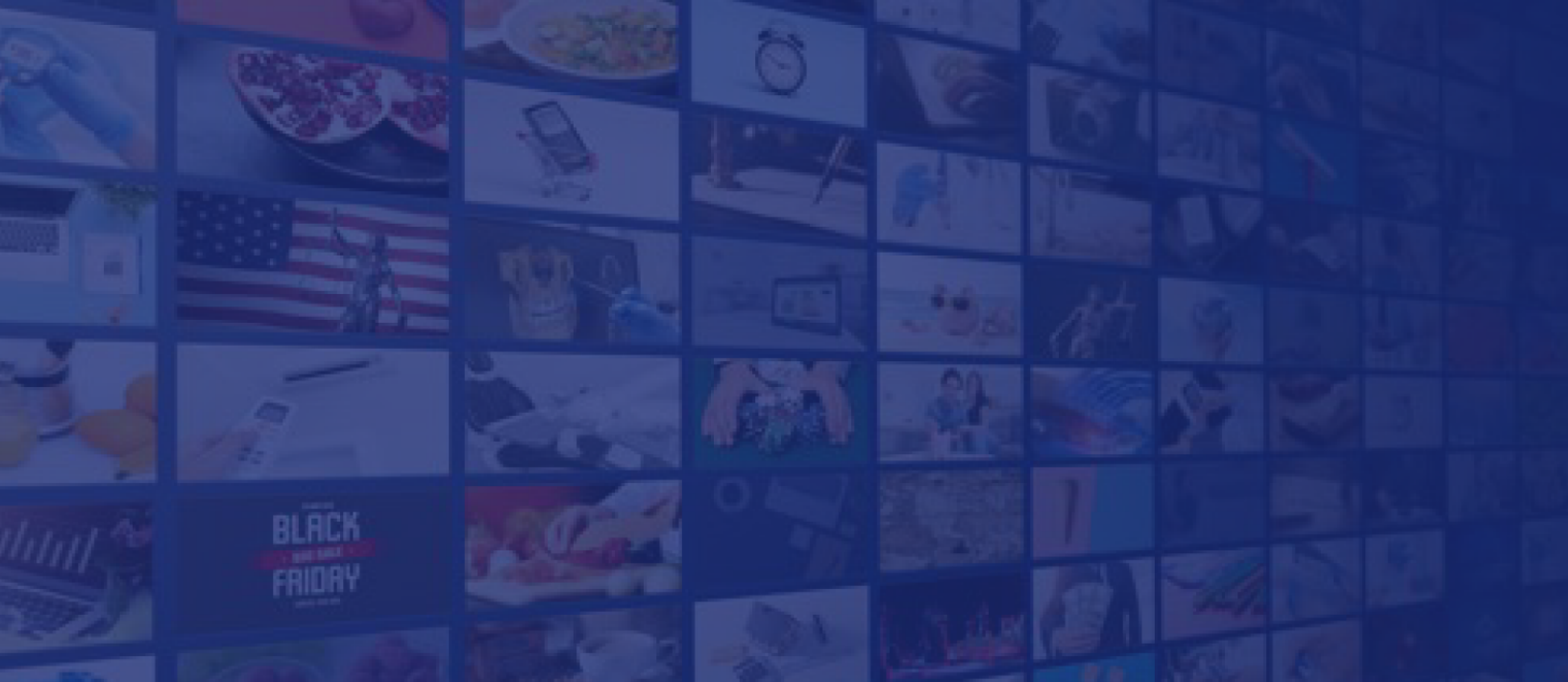


# SO YOU WANT TO BE THE **NETFLIX** OF LEARNING?

Great! Now What does that Mean?  
Insights from WeLearn



## Introduction

Like many of you, 2020 gave us the opportunity to consume a tremendous amount of content – whether it was attending zoom meetings, getting to the end of Instagram (twice), or getting lost in a favorite new/old bingeing obsession (hello Madame Secretary) it feels like we were all far more aware of the ways in which we sought out and consumed content.

As learning professional, we are always fascinated when clients say things like “We want to be the Netflix (or insert the name of your favorite streaming service here) of learning” – and we always try to get the bottom of what that means – is it the visual navigation they are trying to achieve? or is it the personalization of recommendation? Or is it the high production value of the content? – does being the Netflix of learning mean one thing only? Or is it different for each learning organization?

We took the time to put our heads to this issue – and the result is this paper – which originally appeared as three posts on our WeThink blog. We believe that this is a discussion that we will continue to have as a profession – especially as we emerge to a new world of work – and as we continue to consider both the ways in which we reach the learners we serve balanced with the access those learners have to technology and to broadband both at home and at work.

We hope you find our thinking interesting and invite you to share your thoughts with us. We are all in this together, and together we learn.

The WeLearn Team

# So, You Want to Be the Netflix of Learning?

## So what does that mean?

If you are like us – the pandemic may have provided an unprecedented opportunity to take in some great content – whether you were swooning over Bridgerton, obsessing over the Queen’s Gambit, or waxing nostalgic over The Crown – the odds are you could not get enough of your favorite shows and are likely hitting refresh on one of your browser tabs right now to see when your favorite show may be coming back. Netflix has mastered the art of earning our discretionary time and attention. Not bad for a company that started as a mail order video store slayer.

So, when we hear learning leaders or learning professionals talk about wanting to create the “Netflix” experience for their learning, we are often intrigued – and lately have begun to ask ourselves what exactly does that mean? We know it will mean different things to different people – but as we have centered in on this question, we believe it comes down to **psychology** (brain stuff), **technology** (user experience), and **content** (I mean come on – Bridgerton, House of Cards, The Queen’s Gambit to name a few!)



## Let’s get Brainy...

There are three psychological principles that are at the heart of what drives almost 15% of the world’s internet traffic to Netflix,



**The Principle of Reciprocity**



**The Cocktail Party Effect**



**and the Idleness Aversion Principle**

## The Principle of Reciprocity

As humans we all know the principle of reciprocity – quite simply, you must give to get.

So how does that play in the world of Netflix? Think about coming to the Netflix site for the first time, and how easy it would be to fall into a death scroll as you look through all the possible content to consume. It can be a bit overwhelming. Netflix realized this early on – they asked their customers what they wanted, and they said, “show me everything you’ve got!”

The result – cue a death scroll – no one signed up for Netflix, no one binged watched content. Showing too much content was good for window shopping, but not for consumption. Netflix adjusted using the principle of reciprocity and experimented with the use of imagery that would provide representation of a robust catalog, without requiring an individual to consume



the whole catalog – and viola – the path from browsing to consumption was shortened.

**So what does this mean for corporate learning and development?** The first thing it means is you need to consider your catalog strategy and how your learners experience it:

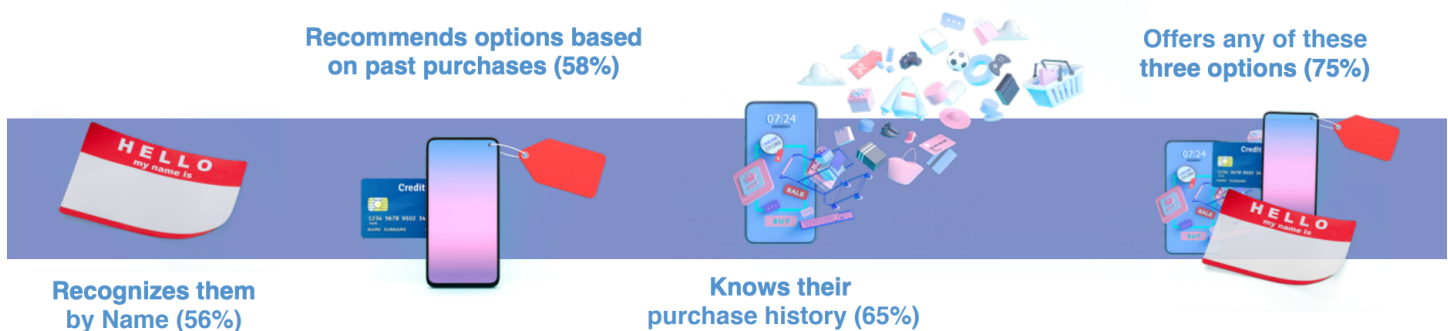
- How easy is it for a learner to understand the robustness of your catalog?
- Can they visually navigate to a content catalog that is most meaningful to them in their moment of need?
- Or does your content catalog cue the death scroll?

## The Cocktail Party Effect

“Did you hear that <insert your name here>...”, and across a crowded room, with tons of chatter, the clinking of glasses, and some sweet, sweet jams – you are laser focused on the story being told. This is the **cocktail party effect** – the brain’s magical ability to focus on what is more important to you – which in this case is you.

**So how does Netflix harness this in the ways in which they draw in their users?**

If you are a Netflix user like us, then you have no doubt taken a spin through their Top Picks for <your name here>. This algorithmic personalization makes Netflix feel personal to you – and it works – **more than 80% of shows watched over the past two years were driven by the recommendation engine**. The fact that consumers want personalization is not new, Accenture has **found that consumers are more likely to buy** from an online retailer that:



## The Idleness Aversion Principle

Brands have figured out how to give them our discretionary spending - how can we translate that into how we get our employees to give us their discretionary effort when it comes to learning? Does your learning technology feel personalized to them individually?

If a learning organization is not providing the level of personalization that the average online retailer is providing to consumers - or even that your organization may be providing to your customers - why would you expect your learners to give their discretionary time to learning on your LMS?

We have all had that feeling. We just watched the third episode of second season of <insert your current streaming obsession> and you get that nagging feeling that maybe it is time to do something else, something more productive -



but nothing comes to mind - and so you hit play, and skip the intro - and dive into episode four - cue the theme song - and the walk and talk with Josh and Toby.....

why is bingeing your favorite show so easy - it is because Netflix knows that humans in general abhor being idle. Humans prefer to be busy - sometimes even if we are forced to - this is the [Principle of Idleness Aversion](#).

### As a learning organization, how are your building catalysts to spark learners in your organization?

For example, are you sending out emails to invite learners back to the LMS or learning portal when they have not visited in the last 30, 60, 90 days?

### Are you notifying learners when new programs they may be interested in might become available?

What are the strategies learning can employ in order to be there in those moments of idleness - when your employees are ready to look for the latest fuffy puppy video - and encourage the use of the moments for meaningful learning and skills development?



# Is Your Learning Tech Stack Blockbuster or Netflix?



Netflix is clearly famous for their technology and enabling consumers to engage with and subscribe to Netflix. What is that Netflix approach as it applies to learning? Do we really want to be like Netflix for learning? Is it the ease of access, the AI or machine learning, navigated paths or something else?

When I think about what learners need, it's not a one size fits all... and it varies depending on specific business needs. Now, does the principles behind Netflix apply to bring learning to life in an engaging and almost habit forming way .. YES!

Think for a moment on your latest visit to a store (when we were not running in and out hand sanitizing out of the store without touching or engaging with people).

You remember back then...

**What were you attracted to?**

**Was it the promotional item on the end of the aisle?**

**Did you choose it because it was in line of sight or looked like a good deal? Or did someone give you a sample to try?**

**Did you buy the sample because it smelled and tasted good?** Of course, you did.



These techniques used in stores have been transformed to online techniques to entice people to consume without use of all senses. This is how Netflix has dominated the senseless attraction to consume. How one attracts people to consume is an important tactic to understand to tune into what's important to learners.

This is essential to understand a learner's optimal learning experience. Now think about going into a tech store thinking about those wonderful shiny objects. Yes, those sparkling and highly marketed ways you are enticed to buy based on feeling and not so much on your needs. Don't worry, we all get sucked into this, no shame here.

Understanding what attracts learners will help you develop a mindset you must have when you are looking to be the Netflix of Learning or anything else that is trending. I'll give you some easy steps to ensure you understand what you are buying and don't drop your wallet into quicksand of unneeded tech.



So how do you uncover the secret tech of what makes Netflix popular and sought after as the go-to for binge watching. It's broken down into four areas. Netflix has mastered the machine learning algorithms that help them understand:

- Who you are
- What you've consumed in the past
- What you might enjoy next
- Ties consumption to your core interests

Now you say, whoa is this big brother watching me like Alexa or Siri in the room responding when no one requests her? I know each of you can relate. While machine learning and AI have evolved and has helped enable us to do more with less time and enabled life-changing accessibility features, the technology in the learning tech industry is still evolving.

**So how do you find what's closest to that Netflix learning experience, is it one thing or a combination? How do you decipher when tech is just a dressed up pig with lipstick?**





**The first step of this journey is to understand your business requirements. We created a lovely **checklist** to help you begin to articulate your learning experience vision past – **I want to be the Netflix of Learning.****

### **Who are your learners?**

- o Are your learners managers, colleagues, members or customers?
- o Where are your learners located?
- o Do they go to an office or remote or a mix of both?
- o How many of your learners work with customers face to face?

### **What experience do your learners expect?**

- o How do you want your learners to engage?
- o How will you recognize their achievements?
- o Do your learners prefer training in their language of choice?
- o Do you have a digital accessibility policy?

### **What are your goals and intended outcome for the learners?**

### **What are your technology principles?**

### **What technology do you have in place today?**

- o How is the technology used today? What is the adoption rate?
- o How is customer satisfaction?
- o Are there gaps in your technology architecture?
- o Do you have a learning tech strategy?

### **How will you support your learning tech?**

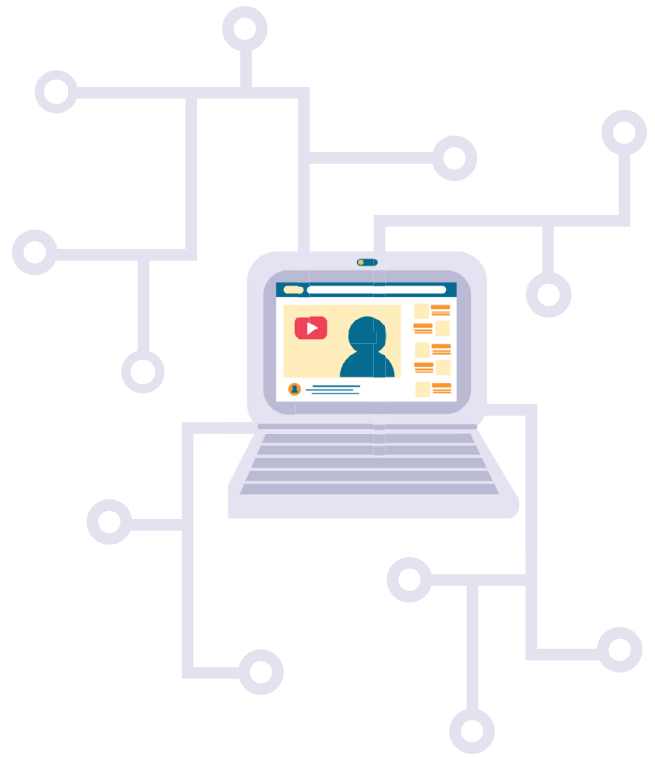
- o Does your organization have a learning function or dedicated learning team?
- o Do you have technical expertise in your learning function?
- o Or do you rely on internal IT resources?

### **How will you measure its success?**



Next, let's learn a little more about what machine learning is according to Wikipedia:

- is the study of computer algorithms that improve automatically through experience.
- a subfield of artificial intelligence
- intuitive algorithms that take content and disseminate based on a search query or other factors like popularity, history of consumption, ratings or reviews.
- using algorithms that discover patterns and generate insights from exposed data for application to future decision-making and predictions.



Now you know what machine learning/AI is, it's important to understand the types of machine learning that Netflix uses:

- **Supervised Learning** is a task of learning that maps out-puts and outputs which are trained with the correct answer to see if it results with the same answer. Netflix uses this algorithm to understand what you have watched (a data point) and responds to your selection to consume recommendations of new movies or Netflix originals you have never watched.
- Netflix **unsupervised machine learning** algorithm is how a person's addiction to watch Netflix original shows. The hope is that through mimicry, the machine is forced to build a compact internal representation of its world

(Wikipedia). Compared to supervised learning, there are no data points presented and the machine learns from your choice to select these recommendations therefore building a binge-worthy line-up of viewing opportunities.

- Let's say you are a new customer. There is no viewing history. **Reinforcement learning**, a type of supervised learning, describes how intelligent consumers ought to take actions in an environment in order to maximize the notion of cumulative reward (Wikipedia). This is a technique where Netflix suggests for you a couple movies based on what most people may choose. As long as you continue to consume these recommendations it will reward you with similar options until you fail to act on it.

Let's look at how these align to learning. These are the algorithm types to enable a learning experience that can make recommendations based on history, predict what you would like to learn, and entice you to continue to consume through creating a habit of continuous learning – that is the Netflix of Learning experience.

To learn more about what I referenced in this article, please visit [What Machine Learning Algorithm Does Netflix Use](#).

### Why is all this important?

In a [Cornerstone survey](#) of workers, 83 percent believed it is essential to improve their professional skills and 53 percent aren't sure they have the skills to withstand a future layoff. This means that there is a unique opportunity for learning leaders to think differently about how learning is experienced and fostered to build a continuous learning culture.

## To be the "Netflix of eLearning," Invest in Creativity

Netflix has something for everyone, from 20-year-old sitcoms we've all forgotten, to brand new series derived from steamy romance novels. No matter who you are or what you like, there's a Netflix show for you. It's no wonder that learning companies want to be the Netflix of eLearning, but it takes more than just having a catalog of eLearning products.

Off-the-shelf content is indeed where Netflix started. They contracted existing shows and movies from everyone from the big studios like Warner Brothers and Disney to small independent producers. Before long, their competitors started doing the exact same thing. It was an easy model to repeat.

Could some of the learnings from Netflix apply to how learners learn ... YES!

### What do I do to get started?

Enlist a trusted partner to work with you on your learning tech strategy, so you too can design your version of the Netflix of Learning experience that meets the needs of your organization.



**83%**

of workers believed it is essential to improve their professional skills

**53%**

of workers aren't sure they have the skills to withstand future layoff.



Netflix learned that if they wanted to stand out among their competitors, they had to offer something their competitors didn't. Exclusive streaming rights with their content partners helped, but the only way to truly stand out was to create their own, original content. Of course, it's not enough to just make content—the content has to be entertaining...and people have to actually want to watch it.

So, if we're trying to replicate Netflix in eLearning, it's nice to have a catalog of decent, off-the-shelf products that fit a variety of learning needs; but, that alone will never make you the Netflix of eLearning. You have to create content that stands out among the competition, which means you have to invest in your creative team.

To start, you need strong graphic artists and video producers. How do you know if your graphic artists are strong enough for your Netflix aspirations? Well, if you ask them to create a graphic for a specific purpose, and their first thought is to download something from a stock photography website and plug it in place, they aren't strong enough.

You need artists who can create custom graphics that make learning feel polished, cohesive, and personal. Your graphics shouldn't look like everyone else's graphics—they should be original.

The same goes with your video production. Is everything you produce from the same templates you've used for the last five years? Can your producers create new text effects or intros/outros from their own materials? If your videos look like everyone else's, your Netflix dreams will be short-lived.

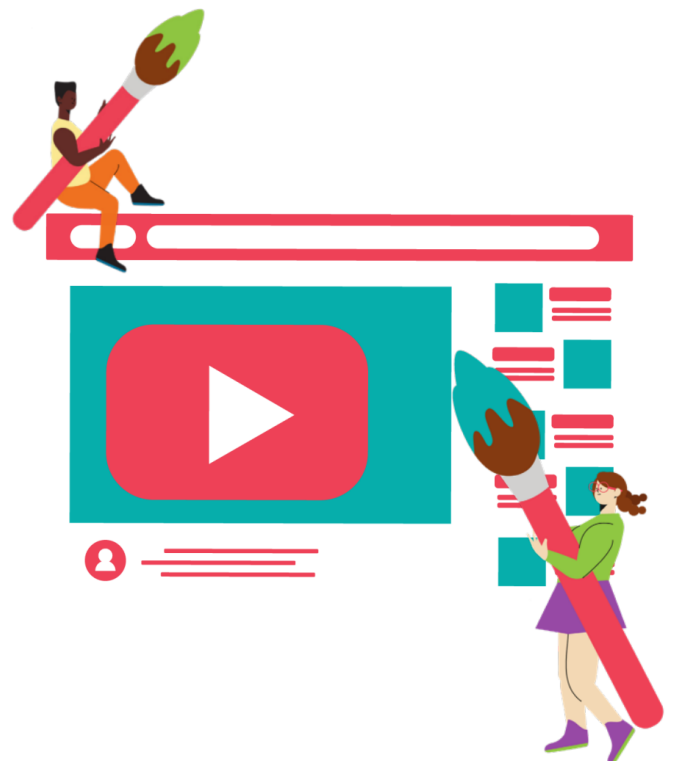
Now, don't run out and fire your graphic designers and video producers because they aren't making original content. Instead, help them upskill. Challenge them to create original work and support them with training to gain the skills they need. It's worth the investment.



Creativity isn't just for your graphic artists or video producers. If you're going to be the Netflix of eLearning, you have to create a culture of creativity on all levels. That means your content writers have to step up their game to create content in a way that people actually want to read it/watch it/learn it.

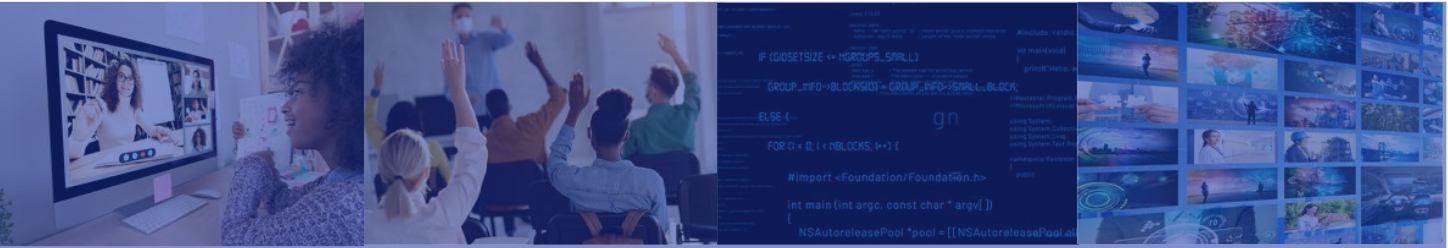
Your instructional designers have to shift their thinking to demand a new focus on true learner engagement, and not just information delivery. It means being willing to talk to learners to hear what they actually need and want. What does your learner feedback tell you about your current learning?

Likely, they're asking for more learning games and chances to practice, but also more media—and they don't mean talking head videos.





Becoming the Netflix of eLearning takes a paradigm shift. It means constantly exploring new technologies, being open to new ideas, and seeking to connect with the learner meaningfully. It means allowing creativity to flow from everyone involved in creating your learning products. It means setting high expectations for your team to create stunning, original **content that no one else can replicate.**



## About WeLearn

WeLearn is on a mission to help organizations build better humans through learning. We provide a full range of services to assist our partners in building world class learning and a world class workforce. We are eliminating “the suck” from learning. We have all experienced sucky learning – and we are on a mission to eradicate it.

Whether you need a simple consult, a few designers to join your team, a whole new approach to learning, or something in between, we are here to help. We are helping organizations tap into their untapped potential by creating new approaches to developing their workforces through reskilling and upskilling programs and building new pipelines for talent.

**We are all in this together, and together we learn.**

For a great discussion reach out to us at [hello@welearns.com](mailto:hello@welearns.com)



# Who's WeLearn?



**WeLearn**

If you'd like to learn more about our content development services or talk strategies



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