

Learning Uncut Disruption Series
Shannon Tipton and Jo Cook – Getting Started with Live
Online Learning
Hosted by Michelle Ockers



Michelle Ockers:

Welcome to this special episode in the Learning Uncut disruption series. Guests today are Shannon Tipton and Jo Cook. Shannon, would you like to introduce yourself?

Shannon Tipton:

Sure. My name is Shannon Tipton and I am the owner of Learning Rebels and I work with organizations to help them think differently about their training delivery. Very apropos of where we are at right now.

Michelle Ockers:

Very true. And Jo, your introduction please.

Jo Cook:

Well, hello everybody. And I'm the owner of Lightbulb Moment and what we focus on is webinars, virtual classrooms, design delivery, and just making sure you get live online and you do it well. Which as you say, just about the right timing for what we've got going on at the moment.

Michelle Ockers:

So a lot of people are having to go live online for the first time at the moment or to scale up in a way and use it at a volume they haven't before. So let's get clear, first up, on what live online learning is. Jo, would you like to kick us off with your definition of that term?

Jo Cook:

Absolutely. So online learning, a lot of people use, and that's absolutely great for things like MOOCs, for videos, for courses, self-service, all of that stuff. The live part of this is really important because what you have is a facilitator, a teacher, a trainer, delivering something to people live, synchronous, in the moment.

Michelle Ockers:

And people use the terms webinar, also virtual classroom. Jo, what's the difference between the two?

Jo Cook:

In some ways, right now it might not matter. To me, a webinar usually is with lots of people. Lots could be 30 or it could be 3000. And a virtual classroom is much more, in my world, about 10-ish people and you are really facilitating something just like you would face to face. Whereas a webinar is a bit more in the broadcast sense.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And Shannon, that distinction between the two, when would you use each because both may be applicable to different scenarios in the current situation?

Shannon Tipton:

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Right, absolutely. And I would agree with Jo. Where I would use a webinar is if I'm looking to broadcast knowledge. So if you are looking to disseminate a message amongst many people, then a webinar is the way to go. If you are looking to mimic a classroom environment or your instructor-led environment and you're looking for specific learning outcomes, then that's where your virtual learning comes in.

Michelle Ockers:

And I think what we'll do today is, generally, we'll talk more about that face to face virtual classroom. And then if there's something different for a webinar we can mention that because it's more about scaling back rather than scaling up, right?

Jo Cook:

Yep.

Shannon Tipton:

Right.

Michelle Ockers:

So Jo, in what ways are online learning sessions like face to face instructor-led sessions? Let's build a bridge.

Jo Cook:

Whenever I'm talking to people about, how do you design this, how do you deliver it, what can we do? I always say, "Start with whatever you would do face to face." Because live online, generally, there's an equivalent. If you want to do flip charts, there's a whiteboard. If you want to do syndicate rooms, there are breakout rooms. If you want to get people to turn to the person next to them and chat, you can use private chat. So don't worry too much because there's an online equivalent and you can go and find that in whatever your system might be.

Jo Cook:

So you can still have all of those great discussion, you can still have all of those great activities, it's just a little bit different because of the technology.

Michelle Ockers:

Apart from being a little bit different because of the technology, are there any fundamental differences between face to face and virtual online sessions?

Jo Cook:

The biggest one that people have to get over is usually, "I can't see my attendees." So you can have webcams on, and I recommend it, it's a really good way to go. It's not always appropriate. That's the biggest issue is that, and silence. We're used to being able to look around a room physically, see people nodding, smiling, frowning, whatever. So it's the lack of the visual and the lack of the body language that people are really worried about. But you can overcome all of that with good design and delivery and just getting comfortable and experienced.

Michelle Ockers:

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So Shannon, given those similarities and differences, what are some of the traps for beginners? Some of the things often done poorly by people who are new to designing and delivering in virtual online environment?

Shannon Tipton:

Well, I think first, to build onto what Jo just said is, when you're not... when you're thinking that you can just take your traditional instructor-led training, what you've done for two days and now just plop it online, it doesn't work the same. So part of that is really working on designing your curriculum appropriately for this virtual space. The second part is a build on that. So when you think about planning, you really do have to plan your virtual experiences differently than your instructor-led experiences. And that goes back to what Jo just said. It's planning for those conversations, it's planning for the acceptance of the pause, the pause is the good is a good thing.

Shannon Tipton:

And so, understanding those and then building in times for breaks and conversations. We don't do enough of that in the virtual space too, which we'll talk about when we start really digging in a little bit deeper about some of the engagements that you can do in the virtual space. So all of those we will discuss in detail, I'm sure.

Michelle Ockers:

We will. Jo, are there any other rookie errors that you would add to that list?

Jo Cook:

I think it's not planning, like Shannon says, but also not allowing time to play and practice in the software. We're all under time pressure, we're all under stress at the moment, completely get that. But the time you can practice in your platform, the better.

Michelle Ockers:

That's practice for you as a facilitator, ahead of the session, rather than practice [crosstalk 00:06:07] participant session.

Jo Cook:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

Right.

Jo Cook:

And also it's just things like, "How do I get my slides up? What button do I click? How do I unmute? How do I switch between these as seamlessly as possible?" Rather than being flustered in the moment and going, "It's not what I thought it was going to be."

Shannon Tipton:

Well and Jo, I don't know what your opinion is on this but I think, built on what you just said, a common rookie mistake is not planning for a producer.

Jo Cook:

Yeah.

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Shannon Tipton:

Right?

Jo Cook:

Yeah. Somebody to help you. And whether that's an actual producer or whether that's just Bob down the hallway, or one of my students to help me pick out the questions so that the chat window doesn't run past me so quickly. Getting some kind of support.

Shannon Tipton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Of to handle the technical issues.

Jo Cook:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

Yep.

Jo Cook:

Yeah.

Michelle Ockers:

And we're going to dig more into the role of the producer in a separate disruption series episode with Jo, so stay tuned for that one. Let's stick with planning and communication. Shannon, what should be considered when planning a live online session?

Shannon Tipton:

I think the... when you think about planning... First off, it really is about deconstructing your instructor-led content, which is something that I've worked with many businesses to do. It's pulling apart all of your ILT and thinking about the appropriate spaces for the virtual learning. So if you think about, you have your instructor led training, you have the first part, which is the setup, we're setting the stage for your instructor-led. And then you start getting into your modules and your lessons. So now, pull each of those apart and think about the activities that you might do in a virtual sense that supports those lessons and those modules.

Shannon Tipton:

So you're thinking, exercises and engagement first, then the lecture part second. So you want to really plan for that up front. So that's the first part. And then the next part about what should be considered is the communication plan. So what's the communication plan behind that? And I think we're talking about that in a bit as well. So I'm sorry if I'm off track there, Michelle.

Michelle Ockers:

No you're not, keep going Shannon. Communication, tell us more.

Shannon Tipton:

Okay. All right. So with the communication, again in two parts. So in your first round of communication, that is setting the login time for the participants. Now notice that I say login time, not start time. Okay. So there's a big difference, if you tell people to show up at eight

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o'clock in the morning, they're going to show up at 8:00, 8:01, 8:02, 8:03. But you really need them to be logged in and ready to go at 7:45. So it's like a significant other that is perpetually late all the time. You tell them to be there early and so then they're early and you can catch all of the technical issues that you want to get. And that's part of your communication plan, that first round.

Shannon Tipton:

The second round is the sizzle reel, as I would say. So the second round of communication that goes to your participants, it's all about building the excitement. Because a lot of people see virtual learning, or webinars, and everybody does a collective groan. "Ugh, I can't believe I've got to be online." And you want to avoid that so you're going to create the, why they're there. You want to build the excitement. You want to give them their participant guides at this point, or any handouts or any downloads that they can have to be prepared. So this way they feel as though they are part of that bigger educational picture. That it's going to be like the instructor-led process. So planning for those engagements ahead of time, practicing, set the expectations and the outcomes, create your sizzle reel. So if I had to say, this is what you probably need to do and have it organized before you actually turn on the button to go live, those are the things that I would recommend.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And of course, Jo, you mentioned technology before and practicing with all the features and functionalities of your platform, working with your producer. How do you select or find a platform quickly? Some of our listeners may not have previously used an online platform. What are your options? How do you go about finding one? What are you looking for? Talk us through all of that.

Jo Cook:

So whatever platform you already have is a really good platform. And whether that's Skype, Skype for business, Teams, WebEx, whatever it might be, go with what you have. Because IT systems, whatever, they're all already implemented. Is it going to be the best one in the world and what you want? Maybe not, but you've got it and that's really important. If you are at the point of going, "Right, we're starting from scratch, we need to select a platform. It could well be that you've already got something like Office 365 or you've got the Saba LMS and there's something that naturally fits really nicely with that.

Jo Cook:

The other thing then you need to look at, obviously there's a cost element, how much can we spend on this? There's how quickly it can be set up and there's also what we need to be thinking about in terms of what we choose is, how many people are likely to be attending? Because most of these systems will have a license of up to a hundred people, up to 500 people, et cetera, and those prices are different. So really think about, what's the maximum we're going to need, including our subject matter experts, our presenters, our producers, whoever else is going to be there and helping to deliver?

Jo Cook:

The other element to think about is, how are we delivering this? Is it just individuals delivering their own webinar or virtual classroom session? Are they working with the producer? Is it more like a panel or are you going to have lots of subject matter experts coming into your sessions? Because those can make a difference. If you've got whatever platform, great, you'll make it work. If you've got a choice, if you know you're coworking with

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people, lots of time, I would use something like Adobe Connect. It's got a great back end area, you've got private chat, it's really easy, you can set things up brilliant for that. But other systems work really well as well. You've got private chat, which you can communicate between you and so on.

Jo Cook:

You can have co-hosts, in Zoom as an example, where you've all got controls over things. So it's finding out that element. In terms of features that you might need, this depends a little bit on what you're delivering. If you're at the webinar end, it might just be, people can see my slides and hear me. That's maybe not my utmost tip but it could just be that that's all you need. I recommend a chat window. So I would avoid something like GoToWebinar because there's no chat window on GoToWebinar and you really need the interaction. If you're not having interaction between people, between yourself and the people attending, I don't see any reason for it to be live online, you might just as well record a video.

Jo Cook:

So I would say you definitely, 100% need chats. You 100% need emoticons, even just a hand up would be beneficial. But if you can have a green tick or green check mark and a red "X" for yes and no and other similar things as well, it really adds to the equipment that you've got, your tools for designing and delivering and getting interaction.

Michelle Ockers:

And what about hardware? Is there any special hardware needed for either the presenter and producer or for participants?

Jo Cook:

So for the participants, I'd say, whatever they've got, whether it's an iPad or a laptop, they're probably going to be okay. If they can get a headset that will help them, especially if you're working from home, if there's a few of you, if it's going to be busy and noisy. For the presenter, I would say, if they can, they need to be on a wired connection. Wifi can work but it really affects audio. Video eats up bandwidth. If you can get an RJ45 or an RJ11 connector, whatever it is, plugged into your computer, go for it.

Jo Cook:

The other thing I would recommend is a headset, so having something that gets rid of all the other noise that's around helps you focus on the participants that may be quiet if they don't have a headset themselves. And you have a good microphone on that headset that travels with you if you move your head around. That, I think, is really good. And just a USB headset is really good. I really like the Logitech H540, I've used them for about eight or nine years. I've still got the same one I bought originally and I find that's a really good one. But any USB headset with a microphone will be great and that will really improve the sound for your attendees.

Michelle Ockers:

And Shannon, I know you have some equipment on your website, do you have any headsets or anything like that? We'll just point people in the show notes to your website.

Shannon Tipton:

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Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes. So I agree, the Logitech headsets are always great, regardless of which one you buy. Even their low cost headsets are really good. So I think it's important to note that you do not have to invest a huge amount of money, as long as you have something. The Rhode microphone... So even if you use a lapel mic, it's better than no microphone.

Jo Cook:

Yeah.

Shannon Tipton:

Because even if your video quality is a little shaky, your audio quality needs to be really good. So if you're going to sacrifice one over the other, then be sure that your audio is spot on. So any Rhode mic lavalier microphone, they come in larger or smaller ones. My... The one that sits on my desk is a good old fashioned snowball. And I love my little snowball and it works perfectly. And it's a low cost item that anyone can use.

Michelle Ockers:

Great. Let's move on to the actual session itself and interaction and engagement during the session. We'll start with you, Shannon. What tips and techniques do you recommend people try, to make it engaging? Particularly given people may be doing this for the first time.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. And Jo touched on this at the very beginning, and I would like to build on that, which is allowing for conversation. And this is hard because my biggest tip for this is to allow almost a third longer for people to respond. Because let's think about the process. When you are in a classroom, you ask a question, you scan the audience to see who has that look on their face, who, they seem to be ready to pounce and answer a question, they raise their hand or shout it out. In the virtual space, what happens here is that you ask a question, people have to think about the question, they have to ponder their response, and then depending on the forum that you're in they may have to type out an answer in the chat. So that alone is going to take you twice as long to get an answer than you would have before.

Shannon Tipton:

And so a lot of times when organizations come to me and they say, "We don't use virtual learning because there's no conversation." My biggest tip is, because you're not allowing time for people to engage. So allow for time. So when it comes to creating engagement, that's number one. Number two, for goodness sake, be fun. Be fun, be personable, start off with a fun welcome activity. So if you've got people who have their video cameras on, maybe they can show the most interesting thing on their desk right at that moment. Or lift up their cat and show a face of their cat or their dog if your dog will allow to be picked up. So start off with something fun because that's going to set the tone for the rest of your time together.

Shannon Tipton:

So if you kick off boring, that's as good as it's going to get. So then it's like, well you're going to continue to be boring. And then I think another way that you can go here is to be sure to incorporate many activities as you move along. So that means then, your slides, less is more. So if you thought in an instructor-led situation, you should have less text on a slide, it's even more so in a virtual space. So in the virtual space it's just almost a placeholder, if nothing else. And this is where you can slide in your mini activities. So your mini activity could be an open ended question on the slide that's going to allow for people to annotate

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directly on the slide or use the chat or use the draw feature. I've played Pictionary on virtual learning courses. So people can do that and it becomes another fun thing for people to do but still get the learning outcomes where you need them to be. So think about those mini activities.

Shannon Tipton:

And then, if I were going to give you one more, so Jo talked about raising your hands and using the whiteboards. I think that the continued use of polls and surveys. So you can incorporate tools like Poll Everywhere or Kahoot into your virtual learning activities. Where you can create games, you can create challenge activities or you can promote problem solving techniques, creative thinking. So using all of those techniques, which are standard in your webinar tool, or rather your WebEx for education tools, then that's what you want to do. So I agree with Jo when she said earlier that an ILT can be converted. I do many live workshops, I do many virtual workshops and the differences between the two are negligible. Because if you think like a whiteboard being a flip chart, you can upload pictures, you can do round robin activities. So those are the things that you can incorporate to make your virtual learning spaces so much more interesting and engaging.

Michelle Ockers:

Jo, are there any other specific types of engagement you'd like to suggest people consider using?

Jo Cook:

I think Shannon had an absolutely amazing list there and completely agree with everything that she said. I think I would look at planning something every few minutes is a really important thing. So if you read any of the books or stuff out there, it will say every three to five minutes. I think if you've been talking for five minutes in your virtual classroom, that's about three minutes too long, quite frankly. And it might seem really weird but I really like what you said earlier on, Shannon, about deconstructing what you do, and that's what I talk about as well. Because what you're doing, as you say, you normally would look around the room for the person who wants to pounce with the answer or who's frowning with a question. We can't do that live online if you don't have the webcams on.

Jo Cook:

So what you have to do instead is use your tools, the ticks, the whiteboards, the chat, all of that stuff, and you have to design in the questions and those mini activities so that you can actually get that information back from people. Because that's how you'll know how your sessions going. You can't do that without any feedback. And so the way to get over not seeing people, the way to get over that remoteness, is to have those activities. So yeah, completely agree with everything that Shannon just said.

Michelle Ockers:

Can you overdo it with activities, particularly if you are a new facilitator?

Shannon Tipton:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jo Cook:

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Gosh, yes. You can definitely overdo it with the same activity. So I've had this on sessions before where people, let's say they're sharing Excel, and it's like, "Green tick if you can see Excel, green tick if you can see me typing in Excel, green tick if you can see the sample, green tick if [inaudible 00:22:30]." Oh my God, it's awful. So you need to mix it up, that's the other key thing.

Jo Cook:

You can use ticking cross or ticking red "X" as a closed question. And then say, "Okay, if you did the green tick or check mark, put in chat why you said that. If you said red "X", hand up, who wants to tell me why?" So it's about mixing and matching those things. And that comes with a lot of work, a little bit of confidence. But if you just mix up those things, start small, start basic, but then go, "Okay, green tick, red "X", now I'm going to go to chat, now I'm going to ask a hand up question." And do that every few minutes to keep that interaction and engagement.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay, I have two more questions to ask. Very specific questions about things happening during the session. First is webcams. Do we leave them on or do we leave them off for both facilitator and participants? When is it best to do either? Jo.

Jo Cook:

So I always put my webcam on at the beginning to say hello and introduce myself and I'm a real person. Often put it on again at "Q" and "A". It would depend a lot on the group, on the type of session and on the bandwidth that you've got. And a little bit, quite frankly, is if I want to do that as well. Because if I've got lots going on in the screen and I want to look at different things, the last thing you want is me looking down at my keyboard the whole time on webcam, that's boring. So I would say, put it on when it's useful and/or when your participants actually say we'd like it, please put it on.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And Shannon, let's move to microphones. General rule is to have them off when not necessary because you don't want a lot of background noise. However, there will be circumstances where you do want people, rather than just interacting in the chat box to use their voice, when is that a good idea?

Shannon Tipton:

I leave... So with your tool you may be, on your end, able to mute everybody. So you have control, so you can mute everybody. When you have a smaller group, I leave everyone on unmuted as default, unless I'm picking up a background noise or something that's happening in the environment and then I'll shut that person off. That way people can feel like they can talk. If you've got... and that's if you have five, maybe 10 people. But if you're looking at 10, 15, 20 people, then you have a lot of shouting over and you don't want to do that.

Shannon Tipton:

So usually what I will do is, for the larger groups, is everyone's on mute and then if I'm asking a question where it's okay for people to inject, then I'll turn the mute off and say, "Okay, who wants to answer this question? The first person who raises their hand gets to shout it out." And then that's when you allow people to do that. So if you mix it up in your webinars then you're going to get more engagement because then people will be like, "Ooh, I can't talk." And people like to be able to talk.

Shannon Tipton:



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Also, it gives you a chance to bring in that person who might be the wallflower person, maybe you haven't heard from them at all. And then that's your opportunity to say, "Jo, how's it going over there? Here's your opportunity, please comment on this."

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And of course, if you're-

Jo Cook:

Sorry to interrupt. One last, really quick, thing about that is I always put an activity right at the very beginning of the session to get at least one, maybe two people on the microphone. Because if you do that right at the beginning, they're going to do it. As opposed to an hour in suddenly going, "Why is nobody volunteering to speak on the microphone?"

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. And that leads nicely into the point I was going to make, which is that if your participants are not familiar with the tool, with the platform, of being in this environment, take some time up front to maybe do some little warmup activities to get them [crosstalk 00:26:18] to the different types of functionality you going to ask them to use for interaction.

Jo Cook:

Definitely.

Shannon Tipton:

Right. Quick example is, a lot of times we'll have the map up, you'll have the United States map up and say, "Put a smiley face where you are right now". So that gives them an opportunity to interact directly with the screen.

Michelle Ockers:

Yes. So that brings us to the end of the session. Jo, what, if anything, needs be done in the final wrap up of the session and following the sessions?

Jo Cook:

It's all your good LND training stuff anyway. It's your next steps, it's your contact details, your "Q" and "A". You also... I recommend what you do is, you stop your recording and then also say, "I'm here for any questions outside of the recording." So some people might not want to ask something if they know a session is being recorded. After that it's around the technical stuff. It's either closing down your session. If you're in Zoom, for example, it might be letting your computer process the recording that's done locally and then posting that to wherever it needs to be for your organization. If you're in Adobe Connect, for example, that could be clearing up the room because it's a perpetual room and you can use it again for another session. And then it's just whatever clean-up needs to be done after a session normally that you would do.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And one final word of advice from each of you. If there is something important or if you just want to reemphasize something you have said. Jo, do you have a final piece of advice?

Jo Cook:

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I think it's, practice, prepare, play and have fun. It's a stressful time, let's not make it so stressful on ourselves. People are with us, they want us to succeed, it's new for so many people, let's just enjoy this ride together.

Michelle Ockers:

And Shannon.

Shannon Tipton:

I completely agree, Jo. Have some fun with this. I would also say that your wrap-up communication is really important as well. So send out an email to everyone afterwards. So if you have captured any screens then send them in as attachments to show proof of their work. Congratulate them on a job well done. So this way it sets the word of mouth for your next one. But absolutely, I love that, prepare, play, practice, all the "P"s.

Michelle Ockers:

Okay. And we... thank you so much to both of you, really practical tips there, thank you. We do have, for listeners, some resources with some more information from both Jo and Shannon, to reiterate and expand on some of those tips. So go and have a look in the show notes for this episode. Thank you.

About Michelle Ockers

Michelle Ockers works with business and learning leaders to realise the untapped potential of learning in organisations. She is an organisational learning strategist and modern workplace learning practitioner. Michelle works with organisations to develop and implement transformative organisational learning strategy, and to build the capability of their learning team. She delivers keynotes, workshops and webinars for learning and broader professional or workforce groups at both public and in-house events. Michelle also mentors learning professionals at all career stages on career planning and professional development.

Michelle received the following prestigious industry awards in 2019:

- *Australian Institute of Training and Development Dr Alastair Rylatt Award for L&D Professional of the Year – for outstanding contribution to the practice of Learning and Development*
- *Internet Time Alliance Jay Cross Memorial Award – for outstanding contribution to the field of informal learning*

Michelle can be contacted at michelle@michelleockers.com.