

Learning Uncut Episode 193: Optimising Learning Technology at Starbucks Australia – Peter Elkhuisen



Michelle Parry-Slater

Welcome to Learning Uncut. In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community, particularly the Kombumerri People, whose land I'm joining you from today up here in Queensland. We pay our respects to elders, past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present or listening today. Australian listeners and viewers, because we are, of course, on YouTube, you may wish to take a moment to consider the traditional custodians of the land where you are today.

This episode is brought to you today by HR Fest Australia, and we'll give you a taste of what is coming on the 18th November at Timber Yard in Melbourne. In our last episode, Adam Hepper and Audrey Chan walked us through the RFP process. They looked at it from both sides. And once you've chosen your platform, well, what next? What happens next is the story that we're going to pick up today.

We're thinking about that launch and that follow-through. We've got two years in the making of platform to discuss with our guest, Peter. Peter is from Starbucks Australia, and he's one of the featured speakers at the aforementioned HR Fest in Melbourne. So this is a bit of a preview before he takes the stage, but a different story. If you want to hear the full story, do get yourselves down to HR Fest. It's built around practitioner sessions, honest lessons, real conversations about what works on the ground. This is exactly the same as you get on this podcast, which is why we're very happy to support HR Fest. They're taking us, in that event, from AI to culture through to constant change, all of the things that we know are happening at the moment. So if you like what you're hearing today and you want to attend, we've got a special discount code for you. I'll tell you it at the end. So do listen through all the way in order to get those details and check out their website if you'd like to go along.

Now, Peter, welcome, tell us about your role and where learning sits in Starbucks Australia.

Peter Elkhuisen

Thank you so much. I'd also like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land in which we're recording today, the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung and the Boonwurrung peoples of the Kulin Nation. As you mentioned, we pay our respects to the elders past, present and emerging and recognize the ongoing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to country, culture and community. Thank you so much for that intro.

I'm Peter Elkhuisen. I'm the partner capability and growth manager at Starbucks Australia. I'm super excited to be sharing my story on the podcast today. My journey with Starbucks, I've been with Starbucks for around five and a half years, and in that time have looked after the learning function as part of my broader partner capability and growth remit.

Michelle Parry-Slater

So five years with Starbucks and what does this whole partner network that you support look like?

Peter Elkhuisen

We currently have around 1,660 partners that are split across the four states in Australia. We operate in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia. For us that basically means we're quite geographically diverse and far reaching in terms of our partner network. In our support centre we sit with approximately 40 partners, and our partners kind of represent our entire national network. So yeah, quite a diverse network and a lot of our partner base is Gen Z, and so a lot of our unique challenges require our intervention from a learning perspective, mean we are constantly on the ball and really tech focused with where we need to be.

Michelle Parry-Slater

That geography can cause a big challenge. For anyone who's outside of Australia, let me tell you, this is a huge country, a continent-sized country. Having just recently driven 2,400 kilometres, I can tell you how big it really is. That will cause a few challenges for you, so I'd love to unpack those as we go through your story. Those partners that you mentioned, what are they expecting from you? What sorts of challenges, not just geographical but generationally as well, is Starbucks Australia facing?

Peter Elkhuisen

For us, a large portion of our cohort are baristas or entry-level roles. Our big challenge is turnover. Our turnover sits in the high seventies within that cohort, which is really high. Those partners particularly need something that's fast paced, meets them where they are and is tech based. For us, having a learning solution that meets their needs and allows us to support a vast partner network that is reliant on accelerating foundational knowledge helps them get set up when they enter the business. It's also about a blended learning methodology, have a platform or e-learning, having a digital solution that complements in-store training element that is going to meet the vast number of partners, where they are.

Michelle Parry-Slater

So you've got challenges around geography and marrying up the in-store and the online. Traditionally hospitality has quite high turnover. Do you also suffer with that as a business challenge?

Peter Elkhuisen

We most certainly do. It's the nature of the environment we're in. It's very competitive. There are a lot of options for potential partners joining our business. How do we provide a compelling reason for them to choose us as a large global brand and as a place where they can grow and develop a career? Having the ability to provide a compelling reason through technology and what we've implemented has given us that point of difference and speaks to the large volume of our cohort.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think it makes total sense why you've chosen the digital route. I'm curious to see how that fits with your in-person approach. Thinking about the digital piece, we talked last time in episode 192 with Adam and Audrey about choosing technology and the RFP process. They talked about how important context is when you choose a platform. The platform you've chosen, I understand, is gamified and mobile. You've picked something other Starbucks regions have used. Why was that context right for you? Why was the platform right and how did you start to think about launching it?

Peter Elkhuisen

For us it was the right time. Context and fit are critical. Prior to launching the platform we were very paper based and archaic in how we were operating. We wanted bite-sized learning that was accessible and met partners where they are. The option we went with, the Attensi platform, was used by other markets, specifically Starbucks UK. As part of our RFP process we thoroughly unpacked how other markets were using the platform and what it would do for us.

Contextualizing the benefits allowed us to solve basic problems, such as completion tracking. The platform provides an amazing gamified, scenario-based learning experience and allows us to track completion and put core-based learning online that was previously paper based and manually driven in store. Two years on, it's been a journey and continues to be. Optimization becomes critical as you go on the journey. We've learned a lot through other markets and gotten great support through Attensi, and as we see return on investment for learning interventions, we continue to shape the way forward.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Let's skip back to launch. You've decided this is the right platform, and I can understand, if it's worked in other places, solving similar problems in other Starbucks, you've chosen this gamified platform, you've chosen Attensi. How did you launch it here? My understanding of the Australian market, generally speaking, is that face-to-face is king. You've already talked about the blend. How do you launch

something like this? Tell us more about what's on it and what makes it special for Starbucks.

Peter Elkhuizen

The key was having something that spoke to our partner volume and was super engaging. The platform is heavily built around gamification and learning through repetition. Content is generated into mini-games that require partners to go through quizzes that test their knowledge. The premise is that they learn by completing modules multiple times, it's designed to encourage repetition.

The platform is engaging from a sights-and-sounds perspective. For our Gen Z cohort, it's mobile friendly, available on a web version and is customized with sounds and visual feedback, bells and whistles when you get a correct answer. The unique element is short, sharp microlearning that our partners are requiring, from what they need to know from a core based learning. 10 to 15 minute modules that complement in-store training. The choice for us, was not just only that other markets are using it, we could tap into existing content from other markets, but also that we have a solution that allowed us to reach nearly 100-plus stores quickly.

The launch and rollout focused on communications and getting engagement from all levels of the organization around the use of the platform. When something's new and shiny, everyone's excited, but how do you generate long-term engagement? How do you ensure it has a great amount of traction? Our plan included core-based learning as part of the rollout and then laddering up. As we've continued to evolve with the platform, we've added more content, it has driven engagement, that wasn't just some initial excitement at launch, it's been a lot longer and the platform became stickier, given us great traction to continue to build on that platform.

We also focused on understanding the motivation of our partners, a lot of it is around those short, sharp mini games, using leaderboards, competition and recognition as intrinsic motivators. Having that ability to see yourself at the top of a leaderboard, at an individual level, encourages partners to return and complete modules, which is very different from traditional manual or in-store core learning that hasn't had that engagement or enthusiasm.

Michelle Parry-Slater

You've launched and understood your target audience, it's clear that you've focused in on what they like, what appeals to them. Practically speaking, launching something like this, Australia's huge and there are time zones to contend with. What pragmatic things should listeners think about when launching a new learning platform?

Peter Elkhuizen

Our platform is based in the UK, so we had to contend with time zones. The launch meant several late-night meetings and logistics around support. Much of the work

was done via email, but we needed regular connects post-launch to ensure implementation success and ongoing support. I probably naively thought everything would sync instantly. The reality is multiple iterations happen along the way and there's a lot of work to do. Two years in, we've learned a lot but there's still more. Continuous improvement and leaning into the platform, optimising it and support are essential. We were lucky to have other markets on the platform to leverage best practice and reduce heavy lifting. But there is an element of you don't know what you don't know, you need to lean into the platform and to have the support has meant we haven't needed to do this on our own.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Let's come back to that community-based element in a moment. But when you launched, did you go out to everybody or role-specific groups? How did you decide that pragmatic launch piece?

Peter Elkhuisen

We were very targeted. I would have loved a full-scale launch, but our support office is around 40 partners, so from a resource perspective we had to be thoughtful and realistic from a platform approach, as that's a significant amount of pressure from the back end.

We started with baristas as the major cohort of the organisation and targeted their learning journey. Targeting one key role at a time allowed us to control the rollout workload and gave us a control group to report on and iterate as we were making certain adjustments along the way.

Since then we've expanded to all of the roles, from barista to shift supervisors and store managers and we continue to bolster modules. The initial rollout taught us that iteration and continuous evolution are key to making modules fit for purpose and engaging, and to addressing turnover challenges. From the learning perspective, the learning isn't one of those factors, that is causing people to drop out.

Michelle Parry-Slater

It's a good measure to see if it aids retention and stop some of that attrition. But it is notorious in the hospitality industry, that's for sure.

Now I'm curious about the blend you mentioned, earlier you talked about how the platform isn't everything, you still have in store. How do you know what to put on the platform versus in store? How do you check consistency?

Not every platform is perfect, there are always compromises along the way, what compromises have you made and how have you blended that through with in person.

Peter Elkhuisen

There is still an element of in-store learning the platform can't replicate. There is still a lot of work for us to do in that space. We put foundational learning on the platform to accelerate practical in-store learning, so time in store isn't wasted on theory. So having a more considerate approach to how do we ensure that the learner is getting the best experience, so when they go to their in store, the assessments are being done side-by-side with a trainer in store, the challenge for us is how do we capture that, at the moment in store is still manual and not recorded by the system.

We're working closely with the platform on future improvements to capture that. We capture a lot of feedback along the way to ensure the right mix of content, that is on the platform and that in-store requirements that can't be replicated on the platform, is captured effectively. Ideally we'd love to fast track an end-to-end solution on one platform, but for now it's fit for purpose and we are setting up for future state.

Then as we grow, there will be pressure we need to put on the platform to enable us to have a one stop shop, that is better for everyone.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I appreciate the honesty around this Peter. Many platforms claim to be the best. From our last conversation, honesty and pragmatism matter.

There is no single solution that is suitable for every setting and what you mention there is "how we grow", things change, so having a relationship with your vendor to be part of that roadmap conversation can be really helpful.

Do you have other platforms in play?

Peter Elkhuizen

No, that's part of our challenge, we have multiple platforms. The gold standard would be a one-stop shop, but that's a future state. It's a challenge for us, to get the most out of each and optimise without overlapping.

Attensi has become a central hub for our learning activity, which has been a real game changer for us. We've put role-based training, compliance modules, campaign and promotional material – which was previously in store, is now delivered on platform and virtual sessions can also be held on the platform rather than using Teams or other tools. That has driven greater engagement and optimisation. The limitation is resource rather than platform capability. There is still more we could do, and your right, having a good, honest, transparent discussion with the vendor and getting good insights and feedback back and forth, has been positive for us. We're lucky that they share features and developments that we could be taking advantage of.

For us, resource and what's possible is the limitation, opposed to what's realistic on the platform. So having a balance between the two is important. Our roadmap is for growth and to work more effectively with the tools we have to deliver efficiency, from

both a partner perspective, but also from a support office, managing a platform or system.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I wonder if learners care about a one-stop shop. People use multiple apps on their phones, building their own ecosystems. I wonder if people wouldn't see it as a problem. When I started in the Learning industry 14 years ago, we were trying to build a habit on one platform, but given that this is mobile, I wonder how much people are bothered if they go to one platform for their payslip and another for their learning. What do you think?

Peter Elkhuisen

Selfishly thinking from a back-end perspective, around reporting, a one-stop shop simplifies reporting. But learners are tech savvy and used to multiple apps. The key is ensuring the solution meets learners' needs and is future fit. Vendors need to get us up to speed quickly because switching vendors shouldn't mean another six months of implementation. Quick implementation is important, then launch and iteration. How do you know the platform is earning its place? Reporting and integrations are the nirvana.

Reporting is paramount. The platform has great dashboards and self-service reporting so stores and managers can run reports themselves. Adoption and engagement are ways to measure impact. For me, it's about making it a one-stop learning hub and to stop solution meets the needs of those learners. And I think being so fast paced, our environment now is ever changing. It's more about that adaptability and ensuring that solution is fit for the audience and going to be future fit in terms of future proofing the way forward.

Michelle Parry-Slater

I think what that does for us as a profession is the vendors need to be able to get us up to speed quickly, don't they? They need to be able to get this going. Because if we switch between vendors because we have to, because the circumstances have changed, we don't want to be rolling out another six months' worth of implementation. So being quick to implement seems to be important. But then we've got that launch piece and then we've got that iteration that you've talked a lot about.

How do you know that the platform is kind of earning its place in your ecosystem? Everyone's always on about the ROI of learning. How do you know that? Because you just touched on reporting there. And of course, yes, that is the nirvana, isn't it? Can we get it to report? And can we get these platforms to talk to each other to report as well? So how do you know it's earning its place?

Peter Elkhuisen

Yeah, definitely. I think for us the reporting is obviously paramount and something that is so widely asked.

The first question that's asked across any organisation is "what's the reporting like? What's the back end like?" We're lucky that the platform has a really great dashboard and it's built on the premise of self-service reporting. So there's not a lot of requirement for us to be in the back end running reports, a lot of stores or store managers can run them themselves.

I think the adoption piece, the engagement with the platform, so having more ability to drive a greater level of usage of the platform is a way that we can measure the impact or the success of where it's fit within our ecosystem.

For me personally, it's really about our ability to make it a one-stop learning hub and to stop having multiple locations where things might have been in the past. In the past we fell into the trap of having the same resources across multiple platforms. The idea being that the more accessible you make it, the fewer access issues partners face.

I think being really clear in communications and in the way the platform is referenced outside of learning and across the organization matters. Organically, I've seen that happen with our use of the platform, senior leaders across the organisation are now referencing it in conversations. A throwaway line might be, "We'll just put something on Attensi," and to me that shows it's ingrained. It's part of the fabric and it's been given the right level of engagement and support across all levels, which means it's here to stay for the long term. Doing a lot of the heavy lifting early on to be an advocate has paid off, and now I can take a step back and look at the work that's been done more broadly and the advocates from stores and across the organisation who are promoting it at every opportunity. It's now moving to the next phase, how do we continue to optimise and future-proof the platform?

Michelle Parry-Slater

I love that your senior leaders are talking about it. Once it's part of the culture and becomes everyday, that's the perfect nirvana, it helps build a learning culture. From the learner's perspective, earlier you mentioned learner motivation and gamification. Gamification isn't for everyone, but I can see how your context would revel in it. How does it feel to be a learner? How does the gamified piece work? Are they competing store by store or region by region? What goes on there?

Peter Elkhuisen

It's competing on an individual basis. I can go in and complete a module under my username and then see other users from other stores or regions across the network. It drives that competition. Our cohort really loves a leaderboard and seeing themselves at the top is an intrinsic motivator that drives friendly competition and engagement.

We've seen partners replay modules several times, not because they need to for completion, but because they want to get to the top of the leaderboard.

The learning is bite-sized and catered to our cohort, delivering concepts in an engaging way rather than jamming a lot of content into a gamified experience. It's logical, fun and centred around learner experience rather than ticking a box.

We also provide complementary resources; the platform hosts quick reference guides for learners who like to read more. Having them accessible and readily available on the platform means that you're catering to everyone's particular needs as they go through.

The platform includes interactions and simulations set up in a store-based environment, which brings the store environment to life on the partner's device. That makes the learning feel relevant and familiar.

Because we can customise and do a lot of work in the back end, it doesn't feel like "another online module." Feedback from partners is that it's fun and engaging.

Michelle Parry-Slater

You're clearly building for your audience. It's not about the technology; it's always about the learner. Similarly if you deliver face to face, it's not about the sage on the stage, it's about the learner.

You mentioned learning from colleagues in other regions. It's the most fundamental way humans learn, from each other. Being part of a global company gives you a community of practitioners from across the company. Is that how it's worked? Who have you learned from across Starbucks?

Peter Elkhuisen

Yes, we're super lucky. Having Starbucks UK, who have been on the platform for five-plus years, and Starbucks North America recently moved to the platform as well. Having a cohort of Starbucks markets actively using the platform creates a community for sharing best practice. Starbucks UK were happy to share content and work they'd already launched, which accelerated our optimisation and content conversion.

We meet once a month with other markets to share what's working and what's not. Sharing some of the learning that they are rolling out on their platforms. We're still in our infancy compared to other markets, so it's more absorbing and learning from them rather than them learning from us. I've put the challenge out that I'd love for us to showcase and lead in future.

Another advantage is that the platform host webinars and events that help accelerate our learning. If you're evaluating a platform, research who's using it and how they're optimising it, that insight is valuable.

We're lucky it's the same brand, the same insights, you don't always have that luck, but that has helped us accelerate.

Two years on, it's a continual evolution. We're still early compared to other markets, but having a clear roadmap to sustain momentum and the right amount of content will help maintain engagement. Our roadmap includes adding psychosocial learning, a big legislative focus over the last 12 months, which would be a game changer and a step forward beyond core learning.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Community learning and future focus are powerful. The UK being ahead is an advantage. Attending in-person events like HR Fest helps practitioners learn from each other, especially if you're a one person team in an organisation. That's why I liked to go to events, meeting other practitioners, hearing their stories, when I was global head of learning in an organisation.

Thank you for sharing your story and for speaking at HR Fest on November 18. As we wrap up, you've launched, iterated, what would you do differently, knowing what you know now?

Peter Elkhuisen

Being able to have ensured we were having the right level of engagement across the organisation early on, and bringing them on the journey with you when launching a platform, such as what we did.

We brought stakeholders in later in the journey; if I had my time again, I'd involve them sooner.

But that is almost a contradiction, because we have a great amount of engagement across the platform; it's become a key part of the organisation

Investing time at the start to understand how and where the platform will meet a particular need is important.

We were specific and targeted with our initial cohort at the launch of the platform, which helped. If we'd tried to be overly ambitious and target everything at once, we might not have seen the same engagement.

So it's more the lessons of what we did right, not necessarily huge changes. Obviously, the time zone differences were a factor, but investing time up front to secure vendor support and engagement from implementation onwards paid off tenfold.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Brilliant. Thankyou, I'm sure this is going to be really useful for anyone looking to implement their learning technologies. Anything else you wanted to say?

Peter Elkhuisen

I'm happy to share the journey. I know other organisations will have similar experiences. If I could share anything is that there is so much in the community itself

and learn from others, such as this great podcast, it's about leveraging what we learn from others, the better it's going to be for us as a whole learning community going forward. I appreciate the time and look forward to sharing more at HR Fest.

Michelle Parry-Slater

Brilliant, apart from HR Fest, where can people find you?

Peter Elkhuisen

I'm on LinkedIn, so more than happy for anyone to reach out with questions about our platform or journey. I'll do my best to respond.

Thank you.

Michelle Parry-Slater

We'll put Peter's LinkedIn in the show notes. If what Peter shared resonates and you're launching a platform, it has to suit your audience. That's the one thing I am taking away from this. Build community through learning and blending in-store and digital elements is the huge success being Peter's story.

So I ask you to think about what's one thing you could do this month on your learning platform to keep people engaged? To keep learning effective.

Thanks so much to Peter for joining us. If you've enjoyed this conversation, head over to HR Fest Australia on November 18 at Timber Yard in Melbourne.

The lineup is packed with HR leaders sharing practical playbooks on succession, AI integration and retention, no corporate buzzwords, just real solutions. Just like the Learning Uncut Podcast has been for the last 8 years.

Visit <https://humanresourcesfest.com/australia/> for the full agenda and tickets. Use the discount code **LearningUncut** (one word) at checkout for a special rate.

Thanks to HR Fest for offering our listeners this special discount.

That is all for this episode we will see you next time.

Thank you for listening. If you know anyone implementing a learning platform, share Peter's story with them. Until next time, take care.

Learning Uncut Episode 193: Optimising Learning Technology at Starbucks Australia – Peter Elkhuizen



Learning Uncut [About Learning Uncut](#)

Learning Uncut are learning and development consultants that help Learning and Development leaders and their teams become a strategic enabler so that their businesses can thrive. We work in evidence-informed ways to drive tangible outcomes and business impact and are strong believers in the power of collaboration and community. We specialise in helping to build or refresh organisational learning strategy, update their L&D Operating Model, enable skills development, and conduct learning evaluation. We also offer workshops to shift learning mindset and practices for both L&D teams and the broader workforce – as well as speaking at public and internal events.

Learn more about us [at our website](#).



Learning Uncut

© Learning Uncut Pty Limited 2026