

## DiFree Newsletter- Issue 7, February 2025

*In this Issue: Caroline Gatti, freelance instructional designer and e-learning specialist, outlines the role of instructional design in shaping digital learning experiences for companies and universities, with a focus on the growing freelance market; Emma De Luca, Digital Content Creator and contracted language instructor at UNITUS, explores how social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram are being used to deliver educational content and engage younger audiences through dynamic e-learning strategies. Finally, Chiara Moroni, Associate Professor of Sociology of Culture and Communication at the University of Tuscia, examines the rise of social recruiting and the importance of managing one's digital reputation to stand out in an increasingly competitive job market.*



*The final months of the DiFree project have been marked by collaboration, knowledge sharing, and a shared commitment to preparing students and recent graduates for the realities of the digital freelance economy. The Multiplier Events held in Viterbo this January reflected this mission by uniting experts, educators, and students to explore emerging trends in remote work, digital learning, and online professional development.*

*Hosted by the University of Tuscia from 28–30 January 2025, these events served as the concluding chapter of the Erasmus+ DiFree project. They focused on equipping higher education students with the skills, resources, and insights necessary for job hunting and cold pitching, while raising awareness of the complex challenges freelancers face in today's multifaceted digital labor market—where recruitment practices, freelancer procurement, and gig hiring are shaped by technological advances, AI applications, and social media platforms.*

*Across three days, participants engaged in panel discussions, keynote speeches, and workshops, featuring prominent speakers such as Chrissie Nerantzi, Fadia Nordveit, Letizia Cinganotto, Mario Pireddu, and Giovanni Luchetti. Multilingual, hands-on workshops covered CV and résumé writing and client scouting for freelance talent. Highlights included expert insights into the legal and fiscal aspects of freelance work, the role of AI in lifelong learning, social recruiting and digital reputation, and the growing phenomenon of digital nomadism. International partners from Portugal, Greece, and Spain also presented DiFree's core outputs, such as the self-assessment tool, freelance mentorship program, and the multilingual digital repository.*

*Practical sessions provided participants with valuable tools to navigate job interviews, manage their freelance careers, and develop multilingual application materials. The event successfully blended theory and practice, reinforcing DiFree's commitment to empowering students and graduates in the digital economy.*

*This final issue of our newsletter builds on the topics and discussions that emerged from these sessions. Caroline Gatti outlines the evolving role of freelance instructional designers and their contributions to shaping digital learning environments. Emma De Luca explores how social media platforms are transforming the creation and delivery of educational content to new audiences. Finally, Chiara Moroni examines the increasing importance of social recruiting and digital reputation management for today's freelancers. Together, these articles offer a comprehensive look at the tools, skills, and strategies essential for navigating the freelance world in a digitally driven labor market.*

*Dear Readers,*

*DiFree has been a long, challenging, and rewarding journey. On behalf of the entire partnership, I would like to thank you for following us. I hope you enjoy this final, extended issue and that you will continue to follow our work through our channels. Our educational materials will remain fully accessible on our website, and with your feedback, you can help us improve and expand them in future initiatives.*

**Warm regards,  
Anna ROMAGNUOLO.**

## **The Work of a Freelance Instructional Designer**

Caroline GATTI

In recent years, the demand for digital learning professionals has significantly increased, particularly due to the acceleration of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there has been some degree of walk-back in smart-working in the post-Covid era<sup>1</sup>, many companies, both large and small, have embraced remote and hybrid modalities as convenient, cost-saving and time-saving strategies, and will not be summoning their employees back to the brick-and-mortar workplace any time soon.

Although the existence of e-learning dates back at least a couple of decades, familiarity with EdTech tools did not soften the impact of Covid-19 in the world of academia and education. Classrooms and lecture halls all over the globe emptied, and kitchens and bedrooms became 'centres of knowledge' pretty much overnight. Teachers had to become EdTech-proficient in the blink of an eye, parents had to become assistant teachers, and young school children and university students alike had to learn to focus despite multiple distractions at home.

Six years later, we can look back on that period with relief that it ended, but also with a level of acknowledgement that some of the changes it brought about are here to stay – and that not all of them have been negative.

The forced 'EdTeching' of education by the pandemic not only awakened many educators to the affordances offered by digital technologies but also pushed one education-related profession to the forefront of job markets: instructional design. It has long existed in the traditional, non-digital sense, but has flourished due to post-pandemic global demands both from educational institutions wishing to conserve elements of e-learning in their catalogues, and/or companies perceiving e-learning as a flexible and convenient form of professional training.

<sup>1</sup>See for example Cooney, C., Léonie Chao-Fong, Herman, A., Gambino, L., & Greve, J. E. (2025, January 28). Order to pause federal grants to cause "chaos" and "uncertainty", critics say – live. The Guardian; The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2025/jan/28/donald-trump-executive-orders-transgender-troops-dei-covid-us-politics-live>

## The evolution of instructional design

Instructional design, in its most basic form, has existed for centuries. Traditional teaching methods, such as Socratic dialogue, apprenticeships, and classical rhetoric, relied on structured learning experiences designed to transfer knowledge and understanding effectively. However, the formalization of instructional design as a discipline did not begin until the early 20th century.

In the course of the last century, [Behaviorists](#) such as Thorndike and Skinner, who held that learning was as a response to stimuli and reinforcement, vied with [Cognitive Learning](#) theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky to pin down the definitive, most effective approach to delivering knowledge and understanding. However, it was the need for training programmes during World War II which ramped up the need for systematic, large-scale applications of instructional design, and the consequent need for instructional designers.

While the work of early professionals revolved around traditional print-based materials, classroom curricula, and audiovisual training aids, the dawning of the digital age brought a whole new and ever-expanding range of digital tools, programmes and applications to design and sometimes to develop:

- digital components to be included in hybrid or blended (in-class and distance) courses;
- whole online curricula, programmes, courses and digital learning experiences;
- multimedia content using tools like Articulate Storyline and Adobe Captivate;
- programmes and courses on learning management systems (LMS);
- gamified and interactive learning solutions;
- storyboards and scripts for educational/training videos or animations;
- exams, tests and other forms of assessment to be carried out online.

Furthermore, other tasks which fall to the instructional designer might also include:

- liaising with Subject Matter Experts (academic, corporate and technical) to fully familiarise with content of a topic they are not familiar with, and very often carrying out further research to achieve the level of understanding of the material with which they will be working;
- carrying out needs assessment for companies prior to designing professional training materials;
- project managing teams of graphic artists, developers, coders and animators used for complex, articulated, large-scale projects.

## Freelance instructional design for academia

It must be said that educational institutions – tertiary in particular – often have their own EdTech department staffed with full-time employees, who, when it occurs, can help implement e-learning and EdTech solutions. However, even though universities worth their salt can now boast an LMS, a wide variety of digital tools and training in their theoretical application and practical implementation are not always made available to those who teach, leading to many affordances of EdTech and e-learning remaining unknown and unused.

Having said that, there is, I feel, a pressing interest in improving the quality of e-learning offered by educational institutions throughout Europe. For example, the European Union has made funds available to member nations aimed at strengthening the provision of European education services to become more competitive, resilient and knowledge-intensive<sup>2</sup>.

## Freelance instructional design for the corporate world

The corporate world offers a completely different set of opportunities for freelance instructional designers. The demand is substantial and stable, fuelled by laws which require companies to offer training to their employees in diverse topics and many companies may opt to supply all training to their employees via e-learning.

The approach of these tailor-made courses is often less theory-based than in education and can even be slightly formulaic. In the corporate instructional design world, professional training is often constructed around the A.D.D.I.E. framework. This acronym stands for Analyse (learner/company needs), Design (to establish the learning objectives, create a design document, write content, scripts, design activities and exercises, and, of course, an assessment strategy), Develop (the phase in which detailed storyboards are created, and designers, developers, animators and coders start to produce the elements of the finished digital artifact), Implement (the phase in which the course is rolled out) and Evaluation (when feedback from learners and assessment results are analysed to see if changes or improvements are needed). Regardless of the setting—corporate, academic, or freelance—successful instructional design relies on aligning learning objectives, course content, and assessments.

## Skills and Tools Required

The foundation of an instructional designer who wishes to work in the academic sphere must necessarily be built on solid theoretical ground, and this implies a degree in instructional design and, generally, experience in teaching. In the corporate world, however, the move into instructional

<sup>2</sup> See for example the Italian Ministry of Education and Research's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), available at: <https://www.mur.gov.it/it/pnrr/missione-istruzione-e-ricerca>

design can occur from different starting points. These can include human resource specialists, technical writers, data scientists and so forth.

Aside from knowledge of learning and instructional design theories, good communication and project management skills are essential. Working from your home office, and not in a busy company or university department, means you do not have quite the same opportunities to compare notes or progress made with others, to ask for a quick opinion or feedback, or to double-check you fully understood a brief. While you can, most certainly, reach out for a second opinion to your contact in the company you are collaborating with, you will be working with multiple companies over the course of time, often simultaneously, and not necessarily continuously; therefore, the chance to establish the kind of camaraderie one might expect to develop among co-workers may not exist. Consequently, like freelancers of all professions, your skill set must include self-discipline, self-direction and good time management, which is necessary to meet the agreed deadline for your part in a project you are paid for.

Solid writing skills are a must-have. The ability to use digital creative tools, create digital sketches, graphics, manipulate photographs and edit video and audio are all feathers in an instructional design cap.

### The Pros and Cons of Freelance Instructional Design

The advantages of freelance instructional design are multiple. Like all those who freelance, you have flexibility in how and when you work, and creative freedom in many projects while also enjoying the variety of projects that land on your virtual desk.

As your experience grows, so will your earnings, however, I fear that here in Europe we will never reach the kind of income levels enjoyed by American instructional designers - the top US senior level instructional designers can expect to earn over \$100,000 a year! While the financial circumstances of European instructional designers are somewhat different, here too it is possible to work as an instructional designer in digital nomad mode.

The demand for instructional designers is as subject to cycles and fluctuations as any other field, however, it is unlikely that in our post-Covid world companies decide to switch back to in-person corporate trainers. E-learning courses can be started and paused as required, new employees can be offered essential training as part of their on-boarding without involving others or having to hire a trainer just for them, and participation and scores can be monitored closely so that employers know how each individual has performed. Likewise, in academia, global education has embraced e-learning as elements or entireties of courses, as it both permits the expansion of course catalogues

and represents an effective response to student needs regarding flexibility and accessibility. In other words, it is a professional field which is here to stay for the foreseeable future.

That said, there are some disadvantages. For starters, you work mostly in isolation. Client acquisition, especially initially, can be challenging and disheartening, with a consequent inconsistent and unstable income. Finally, sometimes you will either get the timing calculations wrong or you will accept a job which you know cannot be reasonably completed in the time allocated. And that means you will be working evenings, early mornings and all through weekends to meet deadlines!

Is it worth it? I believe so. And if you agree with me, my advice for you is:

- learn some e-learning authoring programmes (use trial versions for free);
- brush up your graphics skills at least to a basic level (programmes like Krita are free and relatively simple to learn);
- as soon as you have some material, put together a portfolio;
- create a network of contacts among both established instructional designers and novices;
- be cheeky and reach out to senior instructional designers to see if any would consider mentoring you – the worst that can happen is that they say no!

Good luck!

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## Social Media and Platforms for E-Learning

Emma DE LUCA

The world of culture and information, whether in the humanities, technical, or scientific fields, is increasingly present on digital platforms, particularly on social media. In recent years, more educators have been using these platforms to enhance their teaching methods, making them more diverse and engaging, especially for younger students who are already active in digital spaces. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, students and teachers, isolated at home, discovered in online learning and social media a new virtual meeting point and space for interaction.

This shift accelerated the transition from early 2000s closed e-learning platforms—characterized by simple content delivery—to second-generation e-learning, driven by web 2.0 tools. These tools are dynamic, interactive, user-centered, and social, allowing for the immediate production and sharing of content, fostering interaction not only between teachers and students but also among students themselves. Social media belongs to this second wave of web tools.

### Always Connected: The Virtual Is Real

On average, individuals spend around 2.5 hours daily on social media—young people often spend even more, primarily on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram.

The spread of the internet and web 2.0 tools has empowered people to communicate in new ways, transforming how information is produced, shared, and consumed. Smartphones and their constant connectivity have made this form of communication omnipresent, influencing crucial aspects of our lives such as politics, commerce, information, and education.

We can no longer dismiss digital life as "unreal"; our online and offline lives are now fused. What happens online can have real-world consequences—people have lost jobs or missed opportunities due to past social media posts. Philosopher Luciano Floridi coined the term “onlife”<sup>1</sup> to describe this blended reality where online and offline are no longer separate but part of a single, hybrid dimension.

### The Pitfalls of Social Media

We now know that excessive use of social media carries risks:

- Information overload or “infodemic,” making it harder to find reliable sources.
- Dilution of relevant content among inaccurate or misleading information.
- Constant distraction from daily life.
- Addictive behaviors related to overuse.
- Fake news, which spreads easily online, often boosted by algorithms.

Yet, social media can still be powerful tools to enhance traditional education. Let's explore their advantages.

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Treccani online encyclopedia at [https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/onlife\\_%28Neologismi%29/](https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/onlife_%28Neologismi%29/)

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, [https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/infodemia\\_\(Neologismi\)?search=infodemia%2F](https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/infodemia_(Neologismi)?search=infodemia%2F)

## E-Learning on Social Media: Strengths

Second-generation e-learning using web 2.0 tools is interactive, dynamic, social, flexible and user-centered.

What makes social media learning unique is its collaborative nature. Students become active contributors, transforming passive learning into a creative, participatory experience.

## Challenges of Creating Educational Content on Social Media

Communicating on social media while attempting to convey complex topics is extremely challenging and exposes the educator-content creator to several “communication risks.” Science communicator Pietro Greco once referred to this issue as a kind of “uncertainty principle” of science communication<sup>3</sup> (a concept that, in my view, can also be applied to other specialized or technical fields). According to this principle, it is impossible to communicate a scientific concept with both maximum communicability and maximum rigor at the same time. As communicability increases, some rigor is inevitably lost, and conversely, as rigor increases, communicability diminishes.

Social media platforms are inherently fast-paced environments that discourage complexity and in-depth exploration. The content they host is often rapid and geared toward speed—what we might call a “2x reality”—which inevitably pushes creators toward simplifying messages considerably. This tendency can lead to the risk of oversimplification, stripping messages of their deeper and more nuanced meanings.

Content creators in education and science must navigate this challenge carefully. They must navigate an ideal triangular framework, whose three points are entertainment, information, and education. The closer the content moves toward entertainment, the further it tends to drift away from information and education. Balancing these forces is one of the greatest challenges faced by creators in the digital learning space.

## Can TikTok and Instagram Be Used for Learning?

Yes, but with limits. Topics must be broken down into smaller, independent but complementary segments. Since attention spans are short (few seconds), creators must hook viewers quickly. Videos rarely exceed 90 seconds, so brevity and clarity are essential.

In general, teaching and disseminating technical and specialized subjects requires significant time and space. A teacher who wants to teach Latin translation or explain the theory of complex systems will need several hours of lessons and exercises. So how is it possible to use social media, where content rarely exceeds 90 seconds, for educational purposes?

<sup>3</sup>  $\Delta r \Delta c \geq K$ .  $\Delta r$  is the error associated with rigor –  $\Delta c$  is the error associated with communicability –  $K$  is the constant



First, it is essential to accept that no single digital content can fully address a complex topic: the educator-creator must acknowledge and embrace this reality. Instead, it will be useful to break topics into many smaller parts—independent yet modular and complementary—so that the learner can choose between a fragmented, episodic approach or a more complete pathway leading to a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

Videos on Instagram and TikTok are extremely brief (as mentioned, they rarely exceed 90 seconds) and the attention span of viewers is minimal (just a few seconds). Moreover, only a small percentage of viewers typically watch the content to the end. The educator-creator must constantly stimulate curiosity and engagement, because on these platforms, content is fast-paced and fleeting, and users can easily lose interest and swipe to the next video with a single finger movement. So, what is the best method to create educational content on these platforms? Let's try to answer this question by examining the process step by step.

### How to Create Educational Content on TikTok and Instagram

1. Choose the topic: Research and break it into digestible parts.
2. Identify your target audience: Adjust language and avoid jargon.
3. Write a script: Use short, simple sentences with a strong opening hook.
4. Record the video: Ensure good lighting, clear audio, and high video quality.
5. Edit: Add subtitles, visuals, transitions, and music to maintain engagement.
6. Publish: Use keywords and hashtags for better algorithm reach.

### Final Considerations

Students use social media primarily for entertainment and often risk being distracted from lesson content; therefore, educators must creatively integrate learning into these spaces. This does not mean replacing traditional teaching but using social platforms wisely to enrich and complement formal education, making learning more engaging and enjoyable. As many educational reformers and renowned educators and thinkers have noted, when learning is enjoyable, its impact can last a lifetime.

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## Social Recruiting and Digital Reputation

Chiara MORONI

The labor market—whether for hiring employees or engaging freelancers—has been significantly reshaped by the growing influence of digital technologies across both professional and personal spheres. Companies, organizations of all types, and self-employed professionals have consequently redefined how they conceive and apply the resources needed to sustain and grow their work. At the center of this transformation is intellectual capital: the collective knowledge, skills, abilities, and mindset of an organization's members. As Thomas Stewart wrote in *Fortune* (1991)<sup>1</sup>, intellectual capital represents “the sum of all the skills possessed by each individual (and all individuals) within the company, which enables it to achieve a competitive advantage in the marketplace.” In today's knowledge economy, intellectual capital is a driving force. Ideas, concepts, and creativity are the foundational elements of value (Rifkin)<sup>2</sup>, making knowledge, skills, and competencies critical success factors, tightly linked to business performance. As Stewart further noted, the most vital capital an organization holds is the expertise of its people - the only truly irreplaceable asset. This growing emphasis on knowledge capital has fueled the ongoing search for talented individuals. Talent, in this context, is the combination of a person's innate qualities - aptitude, ability, and natural inclination toward a specific activity - combined with the capacity to maximize these traits through acquired knowledge, interpersonal skills, and professional competencies.

### The Organizational Search for Talent

Organizations seek talent not only to enhance their competitive edge but also to foster innovation and growth. Talented individuals help organizations see the world through new perspectives, recognizing threats and seizing opportunities. They apply critical thinking to challenge assumptions, contribute to raising overall quality within teams, and positively influence others through collaboration. Their presence is often contagious, inspiring valuable professional relationships across the organization. To meet these needs, companies have increasingly adopted new recruitment strategies and tools. Strategically, businesses now proactively search for talent even when no vacancies exist, and they explore alternative sourcing channels, even during economic slowdowns. In this context, recruiting has evolved to resemble marketing, with companies actively promoting themselves to attract top candidates. On the tools side, social recruiting has gained momentum, with organizations leveraging both general platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as professional networks like LinkedIn.

<sup>1</sup> Stewart, T. A. (1991, June 3). Brain power: How intellectual capital is becoming America's most valuable asset. *Fortune*.

<sup>2</sup> Rifkin, J. (2014). *The zero marginal cost society: The Internet of Things, the collaborative commons, and the eclipse of capitalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

## What is Social Recruiting?

Social recruiting refers to the use of social networks to find, engage with, and build relationships with potential candidates, with the goal of adding them to your network and recruiting them. In recent years, there has been exponential growth in the number of companies active on social media, particularly on LinkedIn, but also on Facebook and Instagram. This has fostered recruiters' ability to check candidates' profiles and skills online, while also expanding candidates' opportunities to browse for information about both the company and the recruiter.

According to Adecco's Work Trends studies (2019, 2021, 2024), the use of social networks for recruitment has steadily increased, both for identifying candidates and for job searching.

In 2019, internet usage played a dominant role in job search activities, accounting for an average of 72% of the time spent by candidates and 45.1% by Human Resources professionals (with forecasts predicting a rise to 55.7% within a year for HR). Social media recruiting was more widespread among HR professionals (32%) compared to candidates (19%). Candidates primarily used LinkedIn (57.7%, up from 54% in 2015) for job searches, followed by an increasing reliance on Facebook (31.7%, up from 27%) and a growing presence of Instagram (10%). Human Resources departments primarily utilized social networks for candidate scouting, sourcing passive talent, and collecting applications.

In 2021, a survey of one hundred recruiters revealed that social media (58.6%) was considered nearly as effective as traditional job boards (62.2%), while company websites were seen as less effective (34.1%). The use of social media in HR practices was notably influenced by recruiters' educational backgrounds, with 81% of those holding a master's degree, 53% with a secondary school diploma, and 46% with a professional qualification actively using these platforms. Social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn were used by 60.3% of job candidates and 43.8% of recruiters. HR professionals primarily relied on social media to identify and attract talent, screen candidates, and promote employer branding.

In 2024, a survey conducted by the Adecco Group on a sample of 500 professionals revealed that over 51% of recruiters reported being negatively influenced by a candidate's social media profile during the selection process. Among them, 27% attributed this to problematic personality traits visible in shared content, while 17% cited instances of discriminatory behavior—such as sexually or racially insensitive comments—as key factors. Once a CV is received, 65% of recruiters reported analyzing a candidate's professional history online, while 47% reviewed the content shared on social platforms. LinkedIn remains the most widely used tool, with 96% of recruiters relying on it; 67% use it to collect applications, and 60% to identify passive candidates. This marks a sharp

increase compared to ten years ago, when only 12% of recruiters used social media for candidate screening, and a notable rise from 30.8% in 2021. According to the study, the presence of inappropriate photos was a decisive factor for 37% of employers, though other content issues also contributed to negative evaluations.

These data prove that social recruiting has become a fundamental step in evaluating a candidate's digital footprint. Social networks now serve as dynamic meeting points between job seekers and recruiters, reshaping how talent and opportunities connect. In this evolving landscape, a candidate's online reputation plays a decisive role, particularly for professionals seeking competitive positions or freelance engagements. As social platforms increasingly influence hiring decisions, maintaining a strong and professional digital presence is essential—not just to attract opportunities, but to safeguard one's career in today's hyper-connected world.

### **The importance of digital reputation**

Reputation is what others say about you. Just as candidates can research companies or recruiters before applying for a job, HR managers can evaluate candidates on social networks based on several factors, including professional experience, personality traits, shared content, references or comments from others, hobbies and personal interests, professional awards, personal details (e.g., age, marital status), photographs, and the size of their network. Recruiters may view negatively any information that contradicts the CV, includes prejudiced content, shows a poorly maintained or outdated profile, contains negative remarks about past employers, or features unprofessional photos or posts.

### **How to build a digital reputation that opens doors to new professional opportunities:**

To maintain a positive online presence, candidates should focus on authenticity while preserving professionalism. Keeping social profiles updated and aligned with their CV is essential. Removing any discriminatory posts that could be misinterpreted and avoiding vulgar or grammatical incorrect language is critical, as is using professional photos. Engaging thoughtfully with professional communities and refraining from negative remarks about former employers will enhance a candidate's digital presence and attract the attention of recruiters. Finally, adapting your tone to the style of each platform - more formal and institutional on LinkedIn, more personal and direct on Facebook and Instagram - will demonstrate your ability to master different professional registers. By curating your digital presence with care, you'll position yourself as a strong candidate in today's increasingly digital job market.