

Next-Generation Training

A new training program for the construction industry, On3 (online at on3.ai), has the potential to fundamentally change how we train the workforce. By “change,” I don’t mean it will necessarily displace effective programs or training providers. If anything, it is likely to enhance what they do. What excites me most about On3 is not the training materials or “content” on the platform, but rather the way those materials can be made by companies and delivered to workers.

Content is where most people focus because they are concerned about *what* a worker will learn. That’s certainly valid. We all, for as long as I can remember, have said that training the trades happens on the job. If a new hire has come through a trade school, or even another company, they still need to learn how things get done in a new organization. What makes On3 so smart, I think, is that it’s designed to allow each company that uses it to develop its own training material. “We are focused on ‘how’ training is distributed to users,” explains Bob Baldocchi, vice president of On3. The “how” is both the way the learner interacts with it and the way the construction company serving it up to the learner employs it.

IF ONLY INSTAGRAM WAS MADE FOR LEARNING

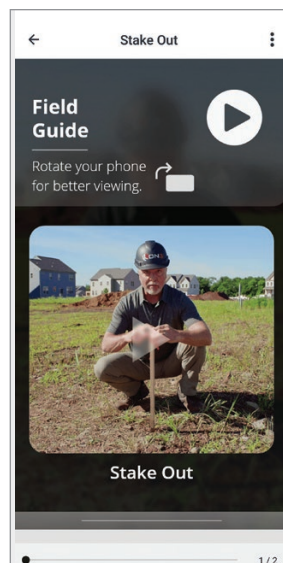
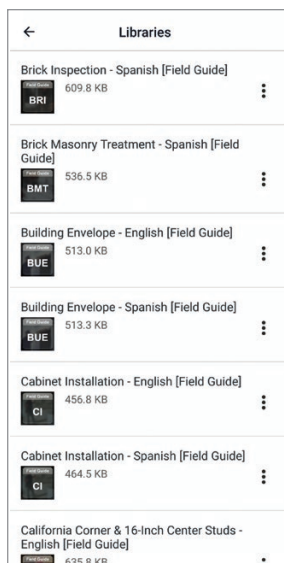
For years now, I have been impressed by what is happening on Instagram: A growing community of building professionals are shar-

ing what they do for the benefit of others. If you follow awesome framers, [mike_guertin](#), [stevenbaczekarchitect](#), [buildingsciencefightclub](#), [nielsencrestcarpentry](#), [jake.bruton](#), [catalystbuilt](#), [kasselconstruction](#), [carpentry_bymar](#), [aaronthomasquinas](#), [drywallshorty](#)—I am just scratching the surface of an immense group of passionate professionals who dedicate a lot of time posting content to help others build better—you know what I’m talking about. It’s an amazing community with enormous educational potential.

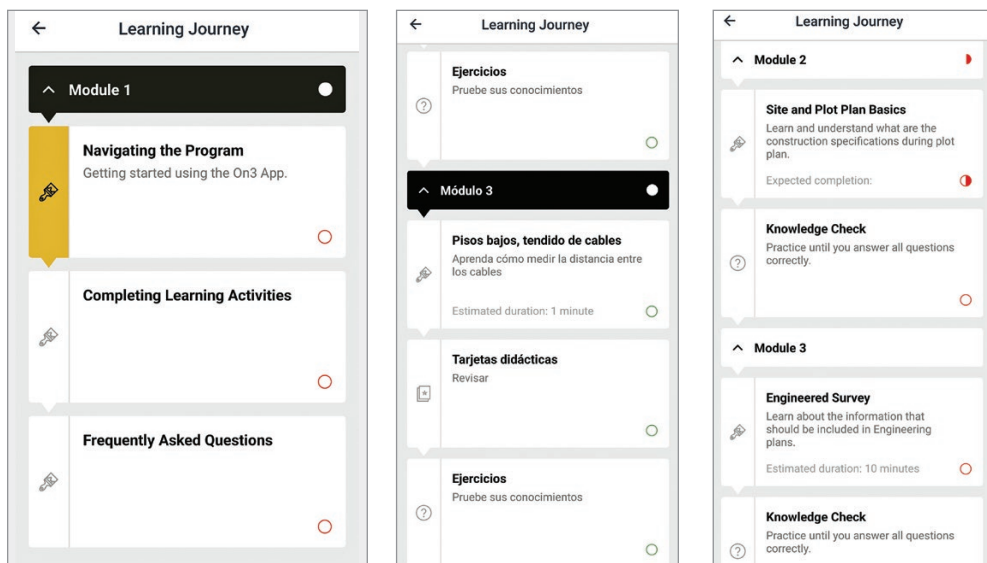
Only, Instagram is not searchable, so it’s frustrating if you kind of remember something one of these folks said and want to brush up on it. Good luck finding it again. As an educational experience, you have to be on it every day, learning constantly, which is not a bad thing, but it’s a big time suck. (That’s Instagram’s model: It doesn’t care if you’re learning, so long as your eyeballs are on it.)

A DIFFERENT MODEL

In contrast, On3 has the potential to be a more exciting educational platform because it’s purposefully focused on the learning process. It can offer some of what Instagram provides—namely, short, relevant videos covering specific building lessons that can be created on site. But the learning channel that users post to offers so much more as an educational experience than just the video. Here are some of the features that stood out to me.



Subscribers to the program can get started right away by choosing from searchable libraries of materials organized in “field guide” videos. These can be used as field references or curated into learning modules that combine the video instruction with learning objectives, flash cards, and quizzes. Companies using this as a training tool for employees can train on what’s needed, including creating their own video content with On3 support.



No one is going to learn construction only online. On-the-job training needs to be exactly that—done on the job. On3 seems like one way to support on-the-job training and create a deliberate program for employees. Doing this requires each learner to follow a “learning journey,” not just watch a video. These screen grabs give an idea of some of the ways learning modules can be organized in On3 to create that path for individuals. Spanish-language learning is an option.

Mobile-based. Nothing for online training these days makes sense if it’s not accessible by phone or tablet. This makes it available anywhere, especially on the job. On3 materials can be downloaded in advance, so they can be accessed at those remote sites that might have spotty connections.

Individualized. The materials are organized in a library of “field guide” videos. Subscribers to the program can get started right away by choosing from existing videos in the libraries. This material is searchable, so it can be used for reference in the field, or it can be curated by the subscribing company into learning modules that combine the video instruction with learning objectives, flash cards, and quizzes. These elements create a “learning journey” for the individual employee, and company owners or managers can track each person’s progress.

Strategic. Companies using On3 as a training tool for employees can train on what’s needed. They build the modules they want their employees to learn. That can include videos the company creates and uploads to the libraries. (Companies can keep these proprietary, though it’s less expensive if you join the On3 community and contribute the videos to the On3 knowledge base). As Baldocchi explains, companies are able to use the platform strategically to train employees on “pain points,” such as the flashing details or other procedures that the crew or subs continually get wrong.

In addition, training can be developed for building awareness of new products that a company is rolling out. This is where the platform could be especially useful: As an industry, products are becoming more specialized, more “engineered,” even to the extent that ICC Evaluation Service Reports or other technical documents from manufacturers have become the accepted code requirements for installing more and more products. On3 could provide a way to get those critical technical details out to installers.

Adaptive. The “.ai” part of the On3 web address is an interest-

ing dimension to the tool. Each employee using it has their own learning path. Experienced users don’t have to slog through a bunch of basics if a company doesn’t want them to; they can be assigned more advanced materials. But the company doesn’t need to have an HR department tracking progress; the On3 program can do that. It will keep track of progress and even push out reminders to individual learners to retake a lesson they didn’t score so well on. It’s not a one-and-done sort of learning experience the way a lot of online training can be.

Coachable. If a company manager wants to step up their engagement with an individual’s training, they can assign themselves or someone else as coach to a learner. That person can then create a module for, or push one to, an individual. They can also ask a learner, for example, to create their own video as an assessment: “Tell me what you learned from this module” or “shoot a video of how you would lay that out,” or “make a checklist of what you need for that job,” or the like. The learner can make that video on their phone and upload it to the coach. This sort of dynamic interaction takes this way above the sort of flat, impersonal level of most online learning.

BUILDING EXPERTISE

We have been talking about moving the needle on the lack of skilled labor in the construction workforce for a long time. On3 is just one program, but it’s the first one I’ve seen that might be able to deliver on that. The trades are difficult to learn. You can’t march in and be productive if you don’t have a strong education, and there are very few institutions that offer that. On-the-job training is our only real option.

“The goal is to build expertise,” Baldocchi argues. “Once someone becomes an expert in their trade, they are much more likely to stick with it and not jump to another profession.”