HR Gets Animated

Memorably, although wistfully, *The Jetsons* animated what the future might look like.

In no less entertaining a fashion, Westlake Village, Calif.-based NINJIO is drawing the present.

Since debuting its 3-4 minute, Hollywood-style animated cybersecurity training videos in 2015, NINJIO (ninjio.com) has continued to redefine the art of hacker protection for businesses and families alike.

"We're raising the bar on content; it's not your boring Power Point lecture," says Zack Schuler, founder and CEO of NINJIO. "It's story-based content that viewers can get emotionally-connected to."

Such a connection has seen the company's influence burgeon in less than five years' time. Now working with nearly 700 direct clients via its flagship, cybersecurity AWARE series, NINJIO's reach further includes nearly 3,000 additional companies consuming content through channel partners.



NINJIO's HR episodes feature a marquee of celebrity vocals, including Jon Lovitz.

Complementing the real-time, creative and cultural approach of the AWARE videos, NINJIO's new HR arm is taking on subject matters for which most human resource divisions have no blueprint for training.

"Not only is it like a 'movie day' for employees, it's a 4-minute movie day," Schuler says. "So, we're really not infiltrating the work day in any massive way – which is completely opposite from how most cybersecurity or HR training is done today. It can totally take over a work day with overwhelming sessions. We're trying to not be overwhelming; we're trying to get the point across quickly and we're trying to do it in a fun way."

Storyboard structure accounts for the rapid growth. Backstories for NINJIO's videos are taken from real headlines, and each episode is penned by a member of the Writers Guild of America. Working in concert with the in-house animation team, the product is engaging, informative and, yeah – fun.

"It does two things," says Schuler of basing videos on real life stories. "It takes the excuse away from the employee that 'This can never happen to me or to our organization.' And this approach also draws relevance because we preface the episodes with detail of these actual situations and

actual companies, and people recognize these stories from having read about them or seen them on the news."

Seeds of success for the company have borne a new tree: NINJIO HR, which debuted in August, 2020. Complementing the real-time, creative and cultural approach of the AWARE videos, the new HR arm is taking on subject matters for which most human resource divisions have no blueprint for training.

The cleverness of NINJIO HR is that "we're covering potential issues within an organization before they occur," Schuler says. "We're talking about topics that are real-time, where there's no traditional playbook for HR departments to refer to. We're in unprecedented times."

Debut and future NINJIO HR episodes range from subject matters including COVID-19, social injustice, sexual harassment, bullying and diversity. Borrowing from real headlines for backstories, the #MeToo movement, the Harvey Weinstein saga and the murder of George Floyd will all serve as impetus for the new work.

"For example, our upcoming October episode is about how to have civil political discourse pre-election," Schuler says. "We're also doing an episode about how do you treat somebody whom you know has had COVID-19, and they come back to work in an essential business. There are privacy issues at play, along with potential discrimination issues. Again – there's no HR playbook for this. We're writing that playbook."

Human Resources industry veteran Marta Voda is a key part of NINJIO's new division.

"This HR version of training is so important right now. There are a lot of problems that people have never dealt with before," says Voda, NINJIO'S HR Practice Manager. "There's no best practice for, say, wearing masks at work, or contact tracing in the workplace, or how the recent protests and current political climate is coming into the office. The old go-to solutions just won't cut it anymore for how to address these modern subjects."

The novel coronavirus-driven rise in remote workplaces illustrates a crucial need for new methods of training.

"Whether someone is an essential worker outside the home or working remotely from home, burnout is happening," Voda says. "Employees are fatigued from the rapid changes required by the pandemic, and in many cases juggling kids amidst all of it. HR professionals need to think about how to get relevant resources to employees, while also considering the limited amount of time many have to dedicate to training."

Amid the ongoing months of pandemic, the dramatic rise of fresh cybersecurity and HR situations has seen NINJIO well-positioned to help combat the array of new attacks and modern issues.

"The number of cyberattacks and scams have gone up exponentially in recent months," Schuler says. "With so many people working from home, the same cyber protections aren't there that employees have in their office place. Hackers have a lot more opportunity to infiltrate."

With a hint of pause, the CEO grants that NINJIO has been ever-active in the days of virus. "We are one of those business that is seeing an increase in customers during the times of COVID," he says. "I'm not saying that with pride necessarily -- as there are so many unfortunate things going on in the world and our country right now -- but that is what's happened with the company in recent months. I'm glad we're doing well, I'm glad I haven't had to lay anybody off; but we're not celebrating these times."

The popularity of NINJIO's products is further evidenced via some familiar voices being added to the fray. NINJIO HR episodes feature a marquee of celebrity vocals, including Jon Lovitz, Robert Davi, Tia Carrera and Laticia Lee.

"It tells clients or prospective clients that we realize we need to continually innovate, and that we're a content-first, creative company," Shuler says. "And what better way to connect with an audience than to have a very recognizable voice as a character?" — By Judd Spicer, California Business Journal.

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