

How to go Mobile

According to David Mellon, the primary factor for identifying mobile learning today is portability and access.

- **Portability** – Is the learning delivered via a device that is truly mobile, without wires, which can move with the learner with trivial effort?
- **Access** – Is the learning delivered by a device that has the potential for frequent, if not always-on and ubiquitous, access to new data and new content?

Corporate learning is entering a new era – one of social, collaborative and talent-driven learning. Today's workers still need formal training that is built around specific problems and talent needs; however, they also need the availability of a "learning environment" in which they can find information, collaborate and build their own learning plans. The learning organization must go beyond the disciplines of building content for use online – we must provide context and pathways through which people can learn. We must help the organization to be both better learners and better creators of learning. The internal currency of today's companies is knowledge; the mandate of the modern learning organization must be to stand as a center of excellence for the creation, acquisition and flow of knowledge in all of its forms.

On-the-ground in today's L&D departments, the visual evidence of this evolution is the significant addition of informal approaches – including on-demand, social and embedded learning – to the repertoire.

Delivery of learning through mobile devices (smart phones and tablets) will be on the rise (if not already). The primary drivers of this medium of delivery are learners themselves (and to a large extent helped by the organizations they work for). With the increase of penetration of such devices, learning is now increasingly become mobile. From another level, informal learning or the need for 'learning from anywhere' is also increasing. Blending delivery medium and learning concepts, developing content (both the actual content and the framework) will become critical for mobile devices. Then there are other factors that are driving delivery through mobile (more secondary and tertiary effects of the medium as a concept itself) like convenience, technology, platforms and others.

Organizations are taking to mobile learning to increase course consumption – for e.g., SAP increased its course consumption by 4 times. Because of the reasons stated above. But how does an organization decide what time is good to go mobile. Organizations are caught in the perennial dilemma of continuing with traditional learning methods and adopting emerging technologies – primarily for the reasons of investment and more importantly learner acceptance. So when SAP says it has increased course consumption by 4 times it is referring to a multiplier effect – learners have accepted the new learning widely and that has resulted in investment efficiencies. While the stated objectives of SAP were to positively influence attrition, productivity and employee engagement (the end result of any learning) it chose to do it through offering learning or more specifically blended learning (here the blending is coming from Mobile) that is relevant, easy to consume and most important timely (contextual).

Increase course
consumption by
going mobile

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Two-thirds of your learners are mobile

When two-thirds of employees are now connected through a mobile device (as defined by having the ability to perform office productivity functions like mail, texting, calling, file viewing, connecting and so on) it is imperative that organizations work out a strategy that encompasses learning through these devices. However this simply does not translate into repurposing traditional content to be delivered through mobile devices. Instructional design as much important (in fact if not more) in developing content that fits the characteristics of the delivery medium – interactive, small but fulfilling, engaging, quickly complete. And when you add the complexity of how do you develop such content that you need not forever keep reworking on them or working on them afresh for every type of delivery, then it calls for some serious expertise in terms of both the ability to develop custom processes/methodologies that enable reuse without being the same and the exposure of having worked with some of the pioneers/big names in mobile learning. When we have worked for and are the first choice for Fortune 100 organizations for mobile content development, it is because of the strategy, design and implementation that we have been able to provide.

The number one demand of learners is to go mobile

And it is no longer just a push from organizations to learners. It is in fact the first request from learners – to make their learning mobile. Whether it is seen as a mandatory course to be completed in a time bound manner or it is seen as a time-killer on the move or seen as anywhere-anytime learning, the requests are coming from the learners. The penetration of tablets and smart phones (both for professional and personal use) has pushed both the desire and habit of interacting with these devices. The many millions of apps on these devices have created a habit for the learners. They are now used to a particular way they interact with these devices and that determines the ID of mobile content. Being able to have custom processes/methodologies that allow for rapid reuse of the content wrapper across delivery mediums will allow for organizations to quickly start putting into trials mobile learning while at the same time continuing with their traditional learning methodologies. So if you were to capture the essence of mobile content development from OL it would be that we are the first choice of mobile content providers for Fortune 100 organizations because we have perfected the art of developing reusable content wrappers/frameworks.

Hardware and middleware in mobile learning pose minimal issues.

So we now come to the all-important question of how to go mobile. Going mobile is not a strategy based on costs or delivery mediums. It is driven by a higher order of learning objectives like increasing course consumption or making learning ubiquitous. Also we need to understand the differentiation between the medium itself and developing content for the medium. Like technology everywhere, the hardware, middleware and software aspects of mobile learning are challenging and mind boggling enough to deter organizations from even thinking about it. That, however should not be the case. The hardware side of this is getting addressed by learners themselves. Like highlighted before, two-thirds of the learners are already mobile and many more will be so very soon. The demand and consumption of mobile devices like smart phones is increasing in leaps and bounds part because of their utility value and part because of the natural evolution of technology.

The middleware scenario is getting consolidated in terms of the platforms. Whether Android has an edge over IOS or Blackberry is only a question of time and demand. But the one thing that is clear in all is that they are being developed with the consumer in mind and hence guaranteed to cause the minimal issues when it comes to delivering content – any type of content – like gaming, apps and yes, even learning. So all that is now left is the software part of learning.

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Developing content for mobile learning is different than for traditional learning (or even eLearning). The learning is byte sized. The content wrapper has to be designed in such a manner that it is able to embrace different platforms. But the most important of all is the extent of reuse that you can get from your existing content. For the long term you will be developing content strategies that will encompass the need to have content and therefore the development of content wrappers for different delivery mediums. For the short and long term what you should be looking at are content developers who have made the natural progression from developing content for traditional learning to pioneering mobile learning content. Such providers will have the depth of exposure and expertise in terms of maximizing the reuse of existing content – such that you can go mobile with your learning in the quickest possible time at the least possible investment. Then over a period of time be able to convert all of your ‘in use’ content to mobile delivery.

Going mobile is easy. It is also difficult if the wrong objectives are framed. It is possible to go mobile in a phased manner thus giving you the luxury of growing at your own pace in terms of mobile learning.