

Go Slow, Quickly

It's time to get on the mobile bandwagon • BY BRANDON HALL



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There are now 1 billion smartphones globally. Each is a powerful computer in one's hand. As learning professionals, we have a use for these devices. Mobile learning will grow tremendously and eventually become dominant. We have gone through the big promise and the retrenchment; now it is time for deliberate action.

Compare this to the emergence of e-learning in the '90s. Two problems ensued: some people went too quickly, releasing terrible e-learning later referred to as "shovel ware," and many more went too slowly. They hesitated, got behind the curve and were eventually replaced by those who had invested time in learning.

The successful early adopters got up to speed on the new tools and technology; they researched the best examples, discovered the good design principles and experimented. They were prepared to look for the business ROI and roll out innovative solutions that delivered. They became heroes.

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So it is with mobile learning. Mobile will be to today's learning what e-learning was to the classroom. It's a transformative, disruptive technology that changes learning forever. Mastery of mobile will be a requirement for the next generation of learning leaders, as mastery of e-learning was for today's. Tomorrow's heroes will be those who rethink performance improvement from within the context of a mobile-enabled workplace.

Let's learn from the past. Heed the lessons from early e-learning with these warnings: Do not jump too fast for the sake of the technology itself, and do not delay learning, discovering and experimenting. Fools rush in. More fools wait too long.

If you are hesitating now with mobile, in wait-and-see mode or too busy with today's demands, then it is time to take deliberate action and get started. Assign your team to research the tools and find examples. Study what works, brainstorm uses and run a demo. Once you live with the possibilities for a while, you will see the significant business opportunity to develop your strategy and become a hero.

We might be stuck with calling it mobile learning or m-learning, but both terms are misleading. The strength of mobile is not learning; it is performance support. It screams for delivery of when-you-need-it, where-you-need-it, and only-as-much-as-you-need assistance. Whenever you see mobile learning, read it as mobile performance support. The following companies are.

Sonic: With roller-skating carhops at 3,500 fast-food restaurants, Sonic was already pretty mobile. Now it will launch mobile learning for store managers. E-learning Manager Stephany Wilson gave a preview for executives and store owners who demanded more, sooner. At the end, the president said, "This will be a game-changer for us."

Every month new recipes and crew activities are required for the rotating menu. "PCs deliver training for the crew, but managers need the information as they walk through the store," Wilson said. They can review steps with a team member, show a quick video, view store reports, contact experts and query their online community. Satisfaction surveys have scored in the 90s.

Lowe's: The most common question in a hardware store is "Where can I find . . .?" Lowe's is providing retail associates with iPhones at 1,700 stores for instant access to location information, product details and communications to better serve customers. Those customers can create a MyLowe's account at home, add improvement plans, make shopping lists and keep track of last year's paint color. In the store, Wi-Fi allows customers to access it on their mobile.

Allen Interactions: The ZebraZapps tool was created to ensure mobile content has LMS connectivity. The next version is being built in Haxe, an open source, high-level language for delivery on every platform including Apple iOS. Demos of mobile learning are available.

Aris Games: Author and consultant Clark Quinn of Quinnovation believes the next big mobile opportunity will be place-based learning. He points to the system developed by Aris Games, whose site offers demos and a free authoring tool.

Looking to be an innovator or contributor? Opportunities await. I am not saying, "Quick, launch a big program." I am saying start now to learn, discover and experiment so you will be ready to see and seize the right business opportunity. **CLO**