

# mLearning: Part 1

It's here to stay

By Gauri Reyes



Learning is going mobile. That's not a new idea any more. However, if you haven't taken your training program mobile yet, it could be daunting to **gear up for mobile learning**. Or, if you have taken your training mobile in the past, new technology and advances in mobile learning design may require you to rethink your mobile learning — or mLearning — strategy.

The **stats** on mobile phone usage are all over the internet, and the numbers differ slightly from article to article. However, no matter whose stats you choose to follow, there's no denying that the number of mobile device users are increasing year-over-year. For example, claims are made that there are about 2 billion smartphone users worldwide today, and the number of mobile phone users (not necessarily broadband-enabled) today is said to exceed Earth's current population.

So why do these **trends** matter to those of us in the learning industry? Before delving into why mLearning matters to us, here's a (very brief) mLearning refresher.

## An mLearning Refresher

Mobile learning, or mLearning, is learning, education or support delivered on mobile devices. Mobile devices can include smartphones, tablets, notebooks, MP3 players, wireless gaming consoles, or any technology that allows the learner to leave the desk and move while learning. Typically, mlearning (like eLearning) is collaborative as content sharing can occur instantaneously. The learner can pull information down to the device as needed, or push it out to other learners and collaborators.

mLearning can be used for school and higher education, corporate training, partner or reseller training, or consumer education. Traditionally, school and higher education are taught in a very formal environment and require the teacher and students to be physically co-located in classroom. The perceived requirement for **synchronous training** and physical presence tends to diminish across the list as you move towards consumer education. However, mLearning can be, should be, and has been used successfully in all types of learning environments.

## So, Why is Mobility Important?

The reasons to go mobile with training are manifold:

**1. Learners are Everywhere:** More people are learning remotely, and recent studies claim that employees are happier when they have the **opportunity to telecommute**. Even when you are talking about

employees who are assigned to work within a given office building, many perform all or part of their work away from their desk (for example, at remote job sites or at a customer's office). With advances in online education (for example, think **MOOCs**, which are in the spotlight today) more students are learning outside the classroom. And you certainly can't issue a mandate to customers to come into your office to get trained on your products — nor does it make sense to do so as your sole consumer education strategy.

**2. Learning is Everywhere:** The ability to take your learning content to the place you want to be learning (be it at the job site or at your favorite café) allows learners to take advantage of learning at the **point-of-need**, during "down time", while commuting on public transportation, or while waiting in line or at your child's martial arts class. Learners want, and need, instant access to information and learning — without necessarily having to wait for a computer to boot up.

**3. Device-Enabled Learning is Engaging:** Newer devices are being equipped with geo-sensors, state-of-the-art audio and graphics, dual cameras, larger screens, integration with wearable devices, 3D imaging — and more technological advances are lurking around the corner. Therefore, mLearning has the potential to demand command of all five senses, be more collaborative, more immersive, and more relevant than learning via more traditional vehicles. All this at a relatively lower price point (often) than PCs and laptops.

**4. Encourages Learning Retention:** By being able to use mobile devices to extend learning from the classroom to the real world, there are more opportunities to take learning from the theoretical to the actionable. Formal and informal learning can be **blended** and embedded for an enhanced learning experience and greater applicability (and therefore retention) of learning concepts.

**5. Enhances Productivity:** From increasing training compliance by having more people complete courses on their own terms to saving costs via digitally-enabled learning, the ROI on training can increase by providing learners with learning experiences that are relevant to their needs as well as to business needs. As often as possible, **link employee job satisfaction requirements to bottom-line business needs through education**, and workplace productivity soars.

**6. Enhances Collaboration:** Educational materials that promote learning can be rapidly shared (e.g., podcasts, advice, lessons learned, forms, and checklists). Communication time lags can be reduced with alerts, status updates, voting, proactively asking for help, search, and performance support. User-created content can be easily shared (for an example, see curated content from the **mLearnCon backchannel** on Twitter).

## Get Up and Go Mobile! TEL

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# Mobile Learning: Part 2

Can your organization benefit from it?

By Heera Edwin



In this article we revisit the five instances we discussed in the [first part of this series](#) – when traditional and online learning fail to provide fruitful results. Here, we see how mobile learning can come to the rescue and aid of both organizations and employees.

**A Mobile Workforce:** As ‘mobile workforce’ becomes the norm rather than the exception, organizations find it hard to provide their employees with successful training. Employees often miss out on classroom training sessions or online training because they are not present at the training location or because they have no internet access. Enter mobile learning. Mobile learning is all about being able to access learning on any mobile device – be it a smartphone, netbook, tablet – and in some cases even on a very basic cellphone.

The problem of low bandwidth and/or no internet connectivity is negated because it is possible to download training in the online mode, and then view it at a later time in the offline mode. Tests and assignments can be completed offline and uploaded when the employee has access to the internet.

**A Mobile-savvy Workforce:** Majority of today’s workforce belongs to Gen Y. Accessing information on mobile devices is not rocket science to this generation. The Gen Y employee is adept at using the mobile phone, and has a history of gleaning information through his personal device. In short, mobile learning makes use of technology that s/he is familiar with.

It also provides him/her with instant gratification (another important factor for this generation) by providing him/her with instant access to answers that s/he seeks out. Instant and up-to-date knowledge is always available at his/her fingertips.

**A Shortened Attention Span:** Apart from being a mobile-savvy workforce, today’s workforce suffers from a shortened attention span. This could be attributed to a variety of reasons. While the reasons are not important, it is important that training reaches out to these employees in a way that maximizes retention and keeps their attention alive.

Unlike classroom training and online learning, the courses that

are provided via mLearning are short, crisp and concise. Short bits of information are provided to learners at regular intervals. Because these are small snippets of information, learners are able to absorb this matter and retain the information, thus overcoming the problem of a short attention span that is a universal problem among the Gen Y employees. Mobile learning provides just-in-time learning. This allows employees to access information when they need it – instantly, so they don’t have to worry about retaining loads of information all the time.

**Low Shelf-life of Information:** In the [first part of this series](#), we talked about how information changes at the speed of light. By the time a course is designed, created, approved and rolled out, chances are that it is outdated. In this second part of the series, we look at how mobile learning can make sure learners get up-to-date knowledge all the time, every time.

As mentioned above, the information provided via online learning is short, crisp and concise. Matter can be easily fed in, edited or completely replaced in a short span of time. As a result, keeping courses up to date is quick and easy.

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**Inconsistency in Training:** With organizations going global, employees are dispersed across various locations around the world. Customers too are present globally. How does an organization succeed in successfully providing uniform training to all its employees and customers? Mobile learning. Mobile learning can take care of all the problems that organizations face with a globally dispersed classroom, inconsistencies caused by different trainers, lack of trainers, etc.

While consistent training is necessary, it is also necessary to keep in mind that content has to be localized, to some extent, to meet the needs of various regions. Localization and translation of courses that are provided via mobile learning is easier to do using this method of training than with online courses.

Only a few organizations recognize and address these training challenges that organizations and employees face. **TEL**

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