



HTML5 HAS FAST-TRACKED MOBILE LEARNING TO THE L&D PARTY

HTML5 has opened the floodgates for delivering learning via mobile devices. Rob Caul identifies five critical steps for L&D.

Imagine a world where there are more tablets and smartphones than PCs. Such a world is not hard to envisage as it's not too far in the future. The dawn of the smartphone age has implications for virtually everyone. We only need to look at industries such as media and advertising to see the disruptive capabilities of ever more powerful mobile technology. Mobile advertising, for example, has set a cat among the pigeons, with a target reach that TV can only dream about. The handset has become indispensable.

Industry forces such as Microsoft, Google and Facebook are staking their future on mobile – its power to engage is clear for all to see. Data analysis and research firm Strategy Analytics, estimates that there are currently over one billion smartphones in use worldwide and this figure is set to reach two billion within three years. This means that mobile technology will enable new working paradigms.

MOBILE APPETITE

According to International Data Corporation over 30% of the worldwide workforce is itinerant; 64% of whom carry a tablet; and 61% of a worker's day is spent within range of a Wi-Fi network. The adoption of mobile learning has also been gathering pace as a way of delivering formal and informal learning. The 2011 *Towards Maturity Benchmark Study* found that 76% of the 300 businesses surveyed planned to use mobile technologies for learning over the next two years (up from 35% the previous year).

A greater appetite among learners for on-demand information is driving this rise: the proliferation of new mobile products such as the iPad, iPhone 5 and the multitude of Android tablet and smartphone devices. In addition, infrastructure improvements such as 4G make it easier and faster to download large quantities of data.

MOBILE SPEND

According to Ambient Insight Research, the worldwide market for mobile learning products and services reached US\$3.2bn in 2010 and is predicted to rise to US\$9.1bn by 2015. In comparison, the e-learning market is expected to increase from \$32.1bn in 2010 to US\$49.9bn in the same timeframe, with mobile learning expenditure equating to approximately a fifth of e-learning spend in 2015.

Mobile learning is no longer considered a fad or something implemented only by organisations with large training budgets. By the 2014, Bersin & Associates estimates that 47% of US workers will be under the age of 35. This represents a massive shift in the dynamics of the workplace with a corresponding change in culture and expectations. Forward thinking companies will continue to deploy mobile learning, to meet the needs of tech-savvy Millennials

entering the workforce. They expect to learn anywhere, anytime, on any device, and they bring their own devices (BYOD).

MOBILE IS MAIN STREAM

HTML has long been the language of the internet. Currently, developers of online solutions have to completely rework content for different mobile devices but the widespread adoption of HTML5 will change this. It is designed to be platform independent and can be read on any device. So, the same learning content can run on a tablet, smartphone or laptop even if all these devices run incompatible operating systems and different web browsers.

Learning content will be easier for learners to access and cheaper for organisations to develop, enabling a seamless cross-platform delivery of multimedia content. Opinion is divided as to whether mobile learning is truly mainstream. In any case, it is wise to exercise caution when introducing a new learning technique into your organisation. However, there are a number of steps organisations can take to maximise the effectiveness of mobile learning.

1 PERFORMANCE

Firstly, it is important to consider the needs of both the business and the learner. Does mobile learning offer a potential opportunity to raise business performance? What problem can it help you to solve? Mobile devices tend to be used on the go and therefore mobile learning is particularly well suited for learners working off-site or remotely, and for the delivery of bite-sized nuggets for reinforcement or for on-demand access to information.

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2 INTEGRATION

The next step is to define your infrastructure and supporting technology. There are already countless devices and a variety of authoring tools available. A mobile learning strategy must consider how these tools will integrate with current processes in order to define a roadmap for the future.

3 CONTENT

The content rather than the technology needs to be the primary consideration. Content will define success or failure of your mobile learning strategy. Content development professionals need to have the end device in mind at all times. It is not just about viewing standard e-learning modules on a smaller screen. The learning needs to be more succinct. Mobile devices are particularly suited to shorter, bite-sized chunks of knowledge that are relevant, engaging and easy-to-digest while on the go.

4 EXPERIENCE

Another factor to be considered when developing content is the touch-screen capability offered by smartphones and tablets. This can be a real asset in increasing learner engagement. Mobile devices provide an opportunity for

content to be more interactive and media rich through the use of short videos and gaming techniques. While, currently, this may require the use of Flash plug-ins, HTML5 will offer a more seamless and universally supported experience for the user.

The use of bite-sized chunks of video in mobile learning (for example, a series of 30-second clips) helps to build a story and context for the learner and can really help bring the learning to life. Indeed, organisations are increasingly using video for storytelling in e-learning content. The use of this in mobile learning is natural but it needs a different approach to fit in with how it is adopted within an organisation.

Let's be clear though, putting dull material straight into a mobile learning programme is unlikely to make it more interesting and engaging. As with any content design, skill is required to develop a quality experience, regardless of whether it is classroom, e-learning or mobile learning.

5 ROI

With any training intervention, the measurement of ROI is essential for determining success. Developing content within a SCORM framework ensures your learning management system can accurately track training progress regardless of the delivery device. Mobile learning is already proving its worth in delivering ROI to early adopters. A recent report from The eLearning Guild shows half of all organisations are seeing a modest to very good ROI, while a further 43% said it was still too early to measure.

While there is much debate about the future, one thing is certain: Mobile learning will continue to grow as a means of enhancing traditional learning tools rather than a way of replacing them. It's all about providing the perfect blend of learning techniques. For many organisations, mobile learning is already proving to be a winner for just-in-time bite-sized learning.

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