


Top Myths & Misconceptions of Mobile Learning

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June 9, 2010



“While it is true that mobile is not the ideal delivery medium for every type of training, many organizations can provide measurable proof that properly planned and delivered mobile learning can be just as effective as the available ILT and online learning alternatives. Mobile learners also benefit from their ability to access content and revisit concepts at the time of need or available schedule.”

As mLearning gets more attention, the misunderstandings about it grow. Here are my nominees for the top eight things that people don't get about mLearning.

1. **Mobile web browsers work fine for accessing existing e-learning content & sites.** While newer mobile phones have improved browsers and displays, most content prepared for desktop access/playback is not properly formatted for mobile-friendly access. As such, most elearning content 'out of the box' isn't ready for mobile delivery. However, much of your content generated with desktop-focused tools can be reformatted and repurposed for mobile delivery.
2. **Mobile content can't be as secure as online learning content.** While it's true that mobile devices are more apt to be lost or stolen versus a laptop or desktop computer, a growing number of enterprise-grade mobile devices and smartphones can actually be considered highly secure and easy to manage. Content can be encrypted on-device, over-the-air and on the server ensuring maximum integrity.
3. **Mobile content should be SCORM compliant.** A key benefit of any mobile device/smartphone is its ability to extend a mobile worker's access to business communications, email, social networks and training resources while on the go. Mobile learners are apt to access required content while traveling by air or in other areas where wireless coverage is not readily available. Strict SCORM compliance isn't always possible given the SCORM API that's required to run on a server may not be accessible to the user while they're mobile. On the positive side, most mature mLearning tools bridge this gap by collecting and managing training session details like "who, when, for how long, frequency, and test scores/responses" and can send these results back to an LMS as soon as direct access exists. Efforts are underway by standards groups like ADL and LETSI to include mobile learning delivery and tracking in the next round of SCORM specifications expected later this year.
4. **Mobile Learning is not as effective as either ILT or online learning.** While it is true that mobile is not the ideal delivery medium for every type of training, many organizations can provide measurable proof that properly planned and delivered mobile learning can be just as effective as the available ILT and online learning alternatives. Mobile learners also benefit from their ability to access content and revisit concepts at the time of need or available schedule.
5. **Flash content works on any BlackBerry or iPhone.** This myth is widespread but actually wrong – at least today. At present, Flash content does not play back on any BlackBerry or Apple iPhone/iPad. Research in Motion has announced upcoming support for Flash Player 10.1 coming in BBOS 6.0 due out Q3 2010. Once released, newer BlackBerry smartphones will be able to render SWF-style content although user interaction within that content will remain limited. The industry doesn't expect Apple to announce Flash support on the iPhone/iPod touch/iPad anytime soon, but other tier one devices are moving to support Flash content including devices running the upcoming Android v2.2 OS as well as higher-end devices running Symbian and Windows Mobile operating systems. But much of today's Flash-based content created using tools like Adobe Captivate, Articulate Presenter and Camtasia Studio WILL STILL NOT be compatible for mobile delivery due to a lack of ability to easily interact with the standard navigation features and "hot spots" embedded in these forms of content. Small SWF files, played back as videos or audio clips, will be much easier to access and manage in the mobile realm.
6. **Rich media files are compelling but hard to prepare and distribute.** Rich media files (e.g., video clips, podcasts, slide presentations) are among the most compelling content users will access using a compatible mobile device, but training teams will need to learn how to convert (transcode) existing materials into mobile friendly formats. A variety of inexpensive tools are available to capture, convert and deploy content to every major smartphone device – turning training professionals into media experts.
7. **In order to be successful, you need to limit the variety of mobile devices your organization supports for mLearning.** In our experience, this approach actually limits the potential use and growth of any new mobile learning initiative. The easier it is to use ANY available mobile device your users may already have, the easier it will be to get your program accessed, adopted and used again and again.
8. **Integrating mLearning results can be very difficult.** Actually, there are numerous ways to get results from a mobile learning program back into an existing LMS (or HRIS, EPR, TM) platform including simple methods like import templates to more sophisticated platform-to-platform interactions including web services/REST, API tool kits, and even single sign-on connections.

Your mLearning Pilot: Blueprint for Success

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May 5, 2010



You wouldn't build a new office without an architectural plan, and you shouldn't start mLearning without one, either. In planning a pilot mLearning project you must be clear about your objectives, about the devices in use by your target audience, and about several other important elements affecting the outcome. Pay attention to these five points, addressing everything from objectives to audience to infrastructure and more, and you will be on your way to success.

According to recent research and surveys, a majority of training and development departments have already considered implementing mobile learning. However, most have been cautious in implementing full-scale mobile learning initiatives, opting to undertake pilot programs first to test the waters.

OnPoint, the premier provider of mLearning solutions for the enterprise, has created a pilot "blueprint for success" to help organizations better plan, deploy and evaluate the results of their first mobile pilot. Using OnPoint's CellCast mobile learning platform, organizations first consider the following five elements to map out a pilot project.

1. Learning & Business Objectives

It is important to define what objectives your organization is trying to achieve using mobile learning technologies. Are you trying to cut the cost of traditional training? Perhaps you want to provide another learning option for next-generation workers who prefer to consume their learning on their time and in non-traditional ways. Clarifying the reasons your company is exploring mobile learning makes your decisions on what content types to explore and what metrics to track easier to determine.

2. Device Selection Criteria

Does your company standardize one type of device or do mobile workers have a variety of cellphones and smartphones? Answering this question allows you to pilot with all the devices you would need to support for a full roll-out.

3. Length of Pilot and Mix of Participants

A mix of users from different departments, with a variety of skill levels and different devices will give you the best pilot group. Pilots are typically thirty to ninety days in length; this often depends on whether content is already identified and prepared.

4. Appropriate Content & Authoring Tools/Vendors

Based on your business objectives, you may choose to pilot with all or some of the available content types listed below (in order of easiest to most complex):

Level 1: Triggered Notifications & Reminders – Automatically generate and send personalized SMS or email messages using templates based on pre-defined business rules and conditions. For instance, you can send an SMS to a mobile learner asking them to confirm their understanding of a current policy or reminding them to complete an assignment. Use scheduled, message-based content as learning reinforcements or to deliver serialized training campaigns such as a "Sales Tip of the Day."

Level 2: Interactive Messaging – Use two-way messaging campaigns when a user response is desired, such as for mobile surveys or data collection. Questions are sent one at a time via SMS, and once the user answers the question, the next one is sent until all questions have been responded to.

Level 3: Voice-Based Content & Tests – Upload audio-based content and make it immediately accessible to mobile users. To measure understanding and knowledge retention, include spoken word assessments tests or quizzes. This content is generally fast, easy and economical to produce.

Level 4: Reference Materials – Deliver referential materials as supplemental learning or performance support documents (e.g., checklists, job aids). These materials can empower employees to perform tasks with minimum external intervention. Supported content types include PDF and Text/HTML files. You may have existing content that can be re-used and the effort required to create and deploy the content is minimal. This content can be delivered to any smartphone and most data-enabled cellphones.

Level 5: Content and Courseware – Deliver animated, narrated PowerPoints and HTML (with graphics, animations and stylesheets) formats to expand mobile learning offerings beyond simple reference documents and page-turner modules into more engaging, fully interactive courseware.

Level 6: Media-Based Content – Upload rich-media formats such as podcasts or video, allowing delivery of media-based content to support learning initiatives. Your organization may already have libraries of media content that can be converted to mobile-friendly content. This type of content is targeted firmly at the smartphone audience.

5. Measurement of Pilot Outcomes and Success

What you choose to measure will be based on the objectives you determined in Step 1. With OnPoint's CellCast Solution, all user interactions are tracked (including who, when, what, how long, frequency, etc.) as are all test question/survey responses regardless of modality (web, IVR or message). Reporting, dashboards and analytics features allow you to determine the success of the pilot program. By investing the time and effort upfront, you can crystallize a viable approach to your mLearning pilot and more easily transition to a full-scale implementation. For more information, visit www.mlearning.com.