

Mobile Learning: The Next Evolution

BY BILLY BIGGS AND ROB JUSTICE

Mobile learning may be the learning delivery method of the moment given the prevalence of mobile technology. There are several steps learning leaders can take to ensure m-learning programs are successful.

With the introduction of new mobile products such as the iPad, iPhone 4, Droid and Windows Phone 7, it is not surprising that mobile technology growth rates have quickly surpassed other digital technologies such as radio, television, personal computers and even the Internet. Statistics from the 2010 Tomi Ahonen Almanac show that more than two-thirds of the planet's population has a mobile phone subscription, and the adoption of user-generated mobile content and applications is exploding.

The almanac also estimated that there were 5 billion cell phone subscriptions worldwide at the end of 2010, meaning the opportunities for m-learning are seemingly endless. IDC estimates more than 35 percent of the workforce will be considered mobile workers by 2013 — some 1.3 billion. Combine those statistics with the fact that the millennial workforce prefers mobile phones over any other personal technology, and the opportunities for learning and development organizations to offer mobile learning seem to be limitless.

Ideally, m-learning should be viewed as a complement to a company's learning and development strategy, not a replacement for it. Identifying the problem to be solved is the first step in creating an m-learning strategy, and gathering information and measuring results play equally important roles in the process. Often, a pilot or phased approach with a small subset of users is the easiest way to gain momentum for these projects.

There are no hard rules or best practices for implementing m-learning initiatives as part of an integrated learning and development strategy yet. But the following

steps will help develop an m-learning initiative that will complement an existing talent management program.

Step 1: Identify business challenges and define strategy. For any learning initiative to be effective, leaders first need to identify what problem that initiative is going to solve. An m-learning initiative is no different, and due to its relative infancy as a learning delivery method, this is an important step to ensure an organization is adopting it for a reason and not just because everyone else is doing it.

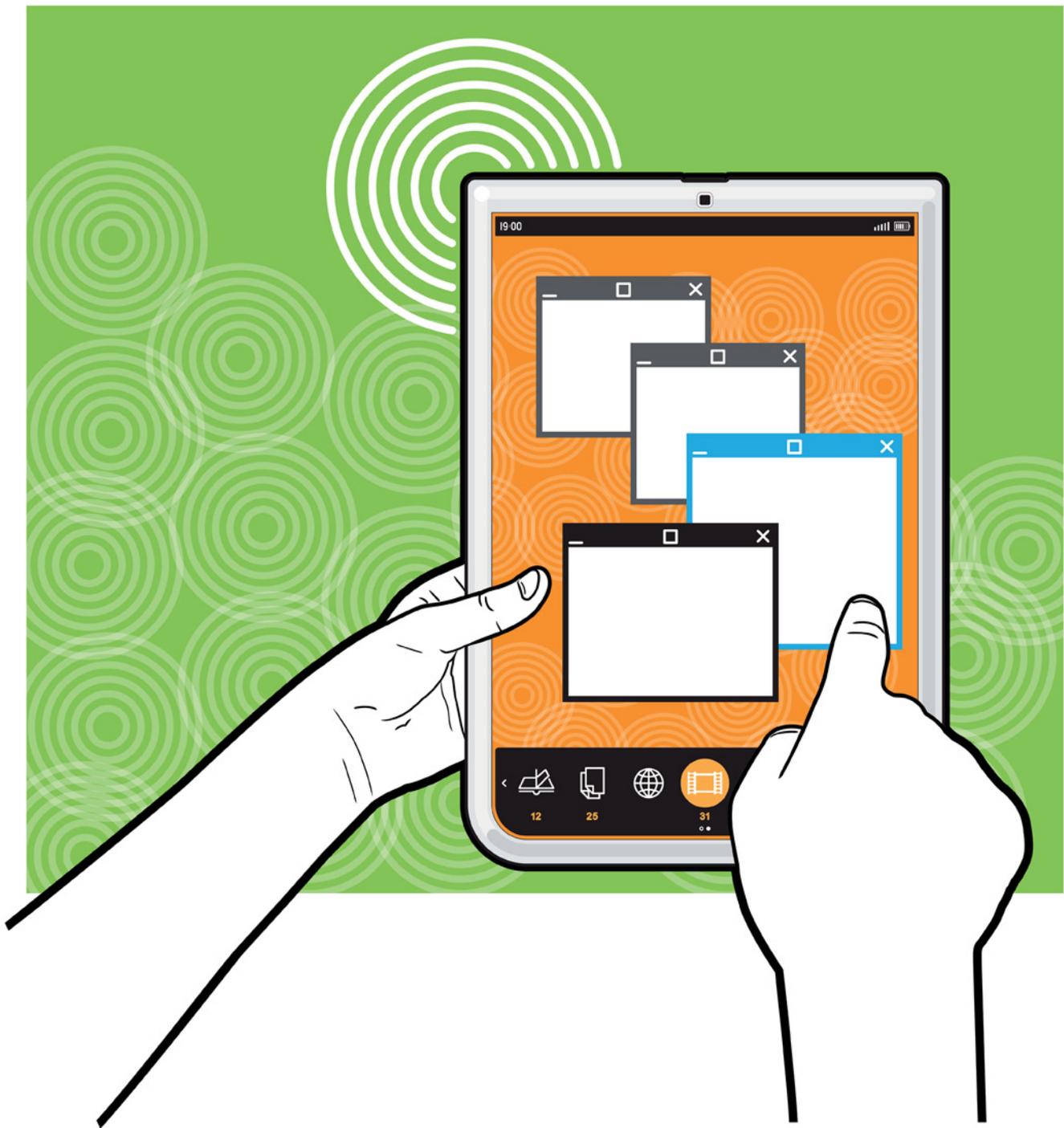
Common business challenges where m-learning may have value include:

- Enabling access to training content and services across a globally dispersed workforce.
- Offering performance support services to field or sales agents in a rapidly changing industry.
- Delivering just-in-time learning.
- Implementing on-boarding training.
- Delivering straight-to-the-point compliance training.

The second important piece is to define the m-learning program strategy: "Where do we want to be?" As part of strategy definition, learning leaders also should be sure to establish success criteria for any pilots. Those success criteria should address the question "How do we get there?"

Step 2: Define the solution. When defining a solution to address business challenges and fulfill strategic vision, it is important that learning leaders consider specific areas within the organization related to the elements of an m-learning ecosystem. These areas include:

1. Technology or infrastructure: Choose among the countless mobile devices and mobile authoring



tools available and consider how they integrate with other learning technologies.

2. Culture: Consider different workforce groups. Millennials prefer mobile phones over any other technology, social learning and just-in-time learning.
3. Content: Consider content conversion strategies for mobile devices and how to make modifications to instructional models to support m-learning programs.
4. Instructional design: Modify traditional instructional design processes to effectively deliver m-learning.

It is easy to overengineer an m-learning solution. When defining a strategy, remember that m-learning is not simply converting e-learning content and making it accessible on a mobile device. This training content can be delivered in multiple modalities,

such as handheld computers, MP3 players, notebooks, iPads, iPods, USB drives or mobile phones. M-learning is about the mobility of the learner interacting with portable technologies and enabling learning that focuses on society's and its institutions' need to accommodate and support an increasingly mobile population.

As a learning delivery method, m-learning enables a shift away from larger e-learning courses in which content is presented in 30- to 60-minute segments to smaller, bite-sized learning experiences. These smaller learning chunks can be anywhere from three to five minutes and allow learners to retrieve specific information relevant to their immediate tasks, whether on the sales or factory floor. Further, these smaller learn-

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ing experiences allow content to be easily digested on the mobile device.

M-learning offers many options besides viewing courses on mobile devices. Short message service (SMS) and informal learning are prime examples.

SMS: Consider the ability to conduct a synchronous training session, whether virtual or in person, and allow people to actively participate via text messages with the instructor on course content. SMSs, such as Poll Everywhere, allow for that by displaying live responses in programs such as Keynote, PowerPoint or over the Web. SMS is one of the most basic technological elements for mobile phones. While often overlooked, leveraging it as the first part of the m-learning strategy can provide a quick win for a learning program. Other possible SMS solutions include surveys, questionnaires, polls and voting.

Informal learning: While there is some debate over how to define informal learning, many agree that offering informal learning via mobile device is a good approach. One of the most notable areas of informal learning is social media: social learning, networking and collaboration. In an August 2010 report, Ambient Insight predicted the second generation of m-learning largely will be about mobile collaboration. Organizations that allow for open collaboration have reaped benefits in productivity and efficiency for years. Expanding that collaboration with an m-learning program could enable even greater benefits.

Ultimately, when considering an m-learning solution, it is most important to consider the type of learning the organization is trying to accomplish. Certain types are appropriate for mobile, others are not. Many experts refer to Conrad Gottfredson, senior partner and chief learning officer at TRClark, and his Five Moments of Learning Needs when discussing when to use m-learning:

1. When learning for the first time.
2. When wanting to learn more.

3. When trying to remember.
4. When things change.
5. When something goes wrong.

While organizations can leverage m-learning in any one of these cases, the last three provide the best fit. Consider using job aids, performance support or other just-in-time training when learners are trying to remember something.

Step 3: Pilot the m-learning solution. Using a pilot approach can help to ensure program success. This has become a best practice in the learning industry. M-learning initiatives are no exception, especially given the lack of lessons learned and guidance currently available.

It is vital to match the structure and approach of an m-learning pilot to an organization's unique needs and requirements. "No two m-learning pilots are alike; one size does not fit all," said Robert Gadd, president and chief mobile officer of m-learning solutions provider OnPoint Digital. "We have enterprise customers — who actually operate in the exact same markets delivering identical yet competitive services — approach mobile learning in completely different ways. One organization might seek to provide just-in-time training to sales professionals via their ever-present smart phones. Another would look to deliver mobile performance support to field engineers. What's common in both scenarios is the need to seamlessly deliver, accurately track and securely manage all the device-side interactions back into a centralized LMS platform."

While there may be significant differences in approaches or implementation related to the pilot, the important takeaway is to understand that pilots limit risk and cost and ensure the m-learning strategy is refined to be successful at the program or enterprise level.

Step 4: Gather information and measure results. Most successful high-impact learning organizations implement strategies to measure learning effectiveness. M-learning pilots should do so as well.

Strategies to measure training program effective-

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ness are available in a number of formats. Organizations that have been successful with other training initiatives likely have measured the effectiveness of those programs and made adjustments as necessary. The same successful methods can be put to use for m-learning programs. Bersin & Associates' Primer for the Measurement of Corporate Training framework contains nine measurement areas that allow organizations a structure within which to evaluate training program effectiveness. Understanding the effectiveness of mobile training programs from an individual, as well as organizational, improvement standpoint is a key area of focus when gathering information and measuring results.

Return to the agreed-upon success criteria for the program or pilot during this step. Total enrollments, student hours, completion rates and user satisfaction surveys are all basic areas to focus on with regard to individuals participating in an m-learning pilot. To transition from pilot to program, CLOs need to tie training program measurements to organizational objectives.

Step 5: Adjust the program as necessary. Thoroughly walking through Step 4 should provide the information needed to adjust the m-learning strategy if necessary. Adjustment is not a negative, but rather an integral part of the process to ensure enterprise program success.

Organizations looking to add m-learning as a complement to their existing learning strategies will benefit the most from such initiatives. Simply put, m-learning will not, and should not, replace other learning initiatives, such as traditional e-learning content development workflows and processes or enterprise learning technologies.

Success in m-learning cannot be enjoyed without first understanding common hurdles that exist for organizations embarking on this journey. According to Gary Woodill's *The Mobile Learning Edge: Tools*

and Technologies for Developing Your Teams, the three main obstacles are:

1. Lack of expertise in mobile instructional design and conceptualizing how corporate learning can take place formally and informally via mobile devices.
2. Lack of awareness of the full scope of costs, benefits and risks at the enterprise level. This plays out in the struggle to formulate accurate and compelling business cases to move forward with mobile learning. Executive stakeholders continually push, and rightly so, for further articulation of a comprehensive strategy and business case before considering or approving m-learning initiatives. These leaders essentially seek an enterprise-level strategy in order to understand how one-off projects fit within a larger context of enterprise issues and complexities.
3. Conflicting accountabilities, interests and procedures among content stakeholders — learning creators and business budgets holders — and IT implementers.

M-learning is no longer considered a fad or something only select organizations with larger training budgets implement. The millennial generation currently represents 22 percent of all workers. By 2014, it is expected to represent almost 47 percent of the workforce. Forward-thinking companies will explore m-learning as an increasing number of tech-savvy millennials enter the workforce and insist on the speed, access and mobility of this learning delivery method. The question surrounding m-learning is no longer if, but when. Technology and training are moving ahead so rapidly that organizations must be ready to implement a mobile learning strategy sooner, not later. [CLO](#)

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