



THE PROBLEM IS WE'RE STILL TALKING ABOUT THE POSSIBILITIES

WHY IS MOBILE LEARNING NOT MORE POPULAR?

It's now been three or four years since access to the Internet by mobile devices exceeded access from the desktop. Given that, why is the use of mobile learning light years behind desktop e-learning?

Mobile learning is a funny subject. Despite the fact that it's barely being used by

the majority of companies today, you won't find a single negative thing said about mobile learning in the L&D community. Don't get me wrong, I'm a fan. It should be a no-brainer in today's mobile-obsessed world. I remember enthusiastically demonstrating learning applications on a smart phone at

least seven or eight years ago, and talking about all the possibilities for mobile learning.

The problem is we're still talking about the possibilities instead of mobile learning as the primary way to deliver learning electronically.

Figure 1

Mobile Learning Today and in the Future

To what extent does your organization take the following actions today in regard to mobile learning?

Responses	Not at all	Small extent	Moderate extent	High extent	Very high extent	Correlation with LEI*	Correlation with MPI**
Design learning programs so they can be accessed by mobile devices	62.5%	24.5%	9.6%	2.7%	0.7%	.34%	.08%
Have the internal expertise to design learning systems accessible by mobile devices	52.4%	29.4%	11.9%	4.8%	1.5%	.34%	.08%
Make use of the "augmented reality" applications, where information is displayed on top of real-life images, videos, etc.	74.3%	17.0%	6.6%	1.6%	0.6%	.28%	.08%
Make use of smart phone "apps" for the purposes of learning	74.5%	16.4%	6.6%	1.7%	0.8%	.31%	.06%

*LEI: Leadership Effectiveness Index; **MPI: Market Performance Index

In ASTD/i4cp studies on this subject, only 3.4 percent of companies reported (to a high or very high extent) that their organizations design learning for mobile devices. Why is it so low? Probably because the vast majority of companies don't have the internal expertise to develop mobile learning applications; in fact, only 6.3 percent said they do (again to a high or very high extent). This is a real shame, because as Figure 1 shows, companies that design learning for mobile devices have a real correlation with overall market performance (revenue, profitability, market share and customer satisfaction).

Developing mobile learning poses a few more challenges than your standard e-learning development does. In most corporations there are a myriad of mobile operating systems. Authors need to decide if they are developing applications that can run on iPhones, Android devices, BlackBerrys and/or Windows phones, among others. Not to mention the increasing array of tablet devices (although I have an issue with calling learning on a tablet "mobile." Is it really that different from laptops?). Finding the right authoring tools, the lack of Flash on some devices and issues linking to the LMS on the backend all add to the slow adoption.

While research shows that these tactical issues have delayed mobile learning from truly taking off, it isn't the only reason. Lack of support of senior leaders and the lack of available budget are two of the most often cited obstacles to mobile learning implementation.

However, I contend that it's really the imagination of course developers that holds us back. As many have recognized, mobile learning is really all about performance support, rather than anything resembling traditional learning. I don't envision lots of leadership development courses on smart phones anytime soon. As MIT professor and artificial intelligence pioneer Seymour Papert said, "You can't teach people everything they need to know. The best you can do is position them where they can find what they need to know when they need to know it."

Imagine a technician in the field trying to diagnose an equipment problem. A quick scan of the part's barcode with the phone's camera, and a troubleshooting guide is displayed. Just-in-time, always-in-context learning can save a company a tremendous

amount of money while improving productivity.

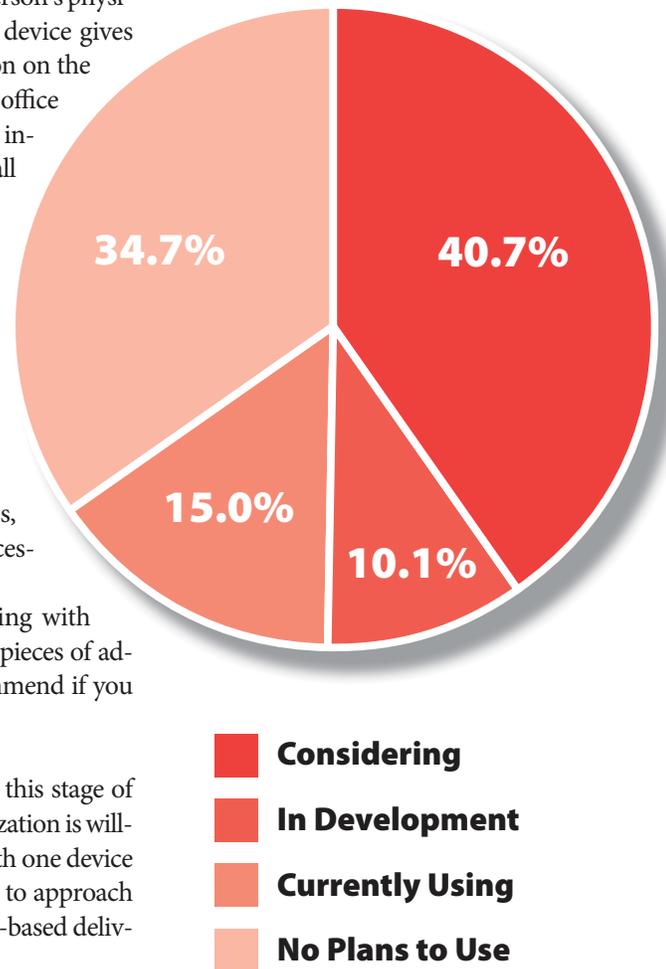
Another often-cited scenario: a salesperson is in the field trying to close a difficult sale. Just prior to the meeting, a tutorial walks the salesperson through the consultative sales steps necessary to seal the deal. Taking advantage of the salesperson's physical location, his GPS-enabled device gives him key up-to-date information on the company as he's entering the office building. While in the meeting, instead of having to memorize all of the pricing and inventory information, a quick tap on the touch screen brings up the latest information, updated to the second.

In fact, that last scenario helped one of our member companies at i4cp win a critical sale. It's easy to imagine many other useful applications, but today imagining isn't necessary.

If you haven't done anything with mobile learning, here are four pieces of advice my analysts at i4cp recommend if you are considering it:

- 1. Try to remain agnostic.** At this stage of the game, unless your organization is willing to provide employees with one device and platform, it may be best to approach mobile learning from a Web-based delivery perspective.
- 2. Pilot programs.** It is not necessary to develop a complete and polished mobile learning initiative right away. Start with small experiments. It is the only way to figure out what works without wasting time and resources.
- 3. It has to make sense.** Ask "Do we need to deliver this on a mobile device?" If there is no obvious benefit to delivering a piece of learning this way, it's not worth the effort.
- 4. No fear.** Mobile computing is not a flash-in-the-pan fad. It has become an acceptable and preferred method of accessing information for high-performing companies. Organizations need to embrace this and find ways to leverage the technology. Address internal barriers such as security and network concerns.

Figure 2
Mobile Devices for Learning
In support to the learning function, at what stage of development is mobile learning within your organization?



Adoption boils down to something that always holds new technology back: the killer application. What mobile learning needs is a widely cited, "a-ha!" kind of application, that opens up the eyes of senior leaders and developers alike. Preferably this would be an application that shows immediate return-on-investment to the business, and increased productivity or corporate competitiveness. Until that killer performance support application arrives, I feel we'll continue to be stuck in the "promise land" of mobile learning.

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