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WHITE PAPER

Mobile Learning is Prepared for Takeoff

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Ready, Set...Grow: Mobile Learning is Prepared for Takeoff

As portable communication devices proliferate and on-the-go workers hit the road in record numbers, mobile learning capabilities are ripe for growth. Not surprisingly, the learning management industry is taking heed. That's because mobile learning—also known as “m-Learning”—is about more than the ability to move around. It's about truly leveraging technology advances to build a more competent workforce and a greater talent development strategy.

M-Learning offers new perspectives on learning techniques

The eLearning Guild, an online information centre for eLearning development, design and management professionals, characterized mobile learning as “any activity that allows individuals to be more productive when consuming, interacting with, or creating information, mediated through a compact digital portable device that the individual carries on a regular basis, has reliable connectivity, and fits in a pocket or purse.”¹

In other words, part of what defines mobile learning is a resulting increase in employee productivity—and not simply because users have more convenient access to information. It's also because m-Learning initiatives can offer dramatically new learning experiences that change—or even improve—the way employees and students acquire knowledge.

Consider these examples:

- Using a mobile-enabled product training program, a new employee for a retail outlet is asked to locate a certain product. She carries a mobile device into the stock room, locates the product in question, and confirms accurate completion of her task through scan code detection logic.
- Employees taking fire safety training use mobile devices that ask them to physically proceed to the nearest fire safety station. Leveraging each device's location awareness capability, the application's assessment feature automatically pinpoints the users' locations and confirms that they can quickly find the nearby safety equipment.

Clearly, the use of mobile devices in learning applications can significantly impact the manner in which we teach, learn, and apply information. We can create new avenues for learning that enable workers to translate static data into actionable understanding that will ultimately contribute to a stronger talent base.

Are we there yet?

The above examples are not far-off dreams. Application developers and learning technology providers are already working to turn these scenarios into commonplace activities. They are being propelled forward by the unstoppable growth of the mobile industry as a whole—where the number of device users is continuously expanding, where the capabilities of those devices are becoming more advanced, and where the expectation of greater mobile functionality is mounting daily.

Also fueling the fire is the rampant popularity of the Apple iPhone®, which followed its 2007 debut with version 2.0 in July 2008. This revolutionary piece of technology not only gives users unprecedented features, but also now offers developers free reign to create iPhone-specific

¹ 360° Report on Mobile Learning, eLearning Guild, July 2008.

applications that can help mobile workers keep business tasks constantly at hand. This translates to tremendous possibilities in the world of m-Learning.

In a Learning Solutions article published in March 2008², Tom Hall readily agrees. He writes that the initial version of the iPhone skyrocketed in usage in its first nine months, accounting for “over 70% of Web connections from mobile devices, and 20% of Bank of America mobile banking transactions.” Given these statistics, and the fact that the newer iPhone seems destined for even greater numbers, Hall seems certain “that the iPhone will also be the dominant m-Learning client.”

SumTotal is ready for this possibility, with a new version of ToolBook specifically designed for iPhone application development. Using ToolBook for iPhone, developers can create rich learning applications that not only keep on-the-go workers engaged outside the office, but also encourage iPhone users to leverage the value of their mobility. With mobile learning, they can harness information differently and acquire greater hands-on knowledge.

M-Learning adoption underway

In its recently issued 2008 360° Report on Mobile Learning, the eLearning Guild conducted an extensive survey of its members and strongly concluded that—despite a few obstacles and misperceptions—m-Learning is an inescapable and imminent reality.

Here are just a few of the report’s critical findings:

- 60% of responding eLearning Guild members say they are presently researching m-Learning initiatives, while 10% have already implemented mobile learning within their organizations.
- Of those members that had put m-Learning into practice and that were able to evaluate a return on investment, 88% reported positive results.
- Nearly 45% of members say that they plan to do more mobile learning in the next 12 months.

Summary

We cannot turn back from the influence of mobile devices on the business world, particularly as they continue to become more ubiquitous and advanced. As such, we no longer question if the use of mobile learning will see a dramatic upsurge, but rather when we might expect it to begin.

Many signs now seem to indicate we are positioned for massive growth at any time. Undoubtedly, those companies ready to leverage available m-Learning tools and applications will reap serious rewards.

² “ToolBook for iPhone Sneak Peak,” Tom Hall, Learning Solutions, March 10, 2008.

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For more information on mobile learning visit www.toolbook.com/mobile

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