Mobile Learning: Driving Business Results by Empowering Employees in the Moment

Shrinking markets, high employee turnover and evolving employee demographics are driving the need for learning content that can be consumed exactly when and how it is needed. Modernizing the learning infrastructure and content will be critical to succeeding in a business climate of rapid change.
Executive Summary

Major forces are driving change in organizational training and learning. Employees have limited time to attend training in its traditional format in the classroom mode, leaving their day jobs to lie fallow. The pace of business is simply too fast to allow this sort of extended break from corporate life.

Beyond the inherent inefficiencies and time commitment, the costs of traditional training have also become prohibitive. It takes dozens of development hours to produce one hour of classroom training. This is untenable, especially in an environment increasingly populated by millennial employees, who expect to direct their own learning, on their preferred platform. This generation of learners is adept at using all types of technology — social, mobile, cloud-based — to get the knowledge they need, anywhere, anytime.

Mobile learning (m-learning) refers to performance support materials delivered on-the-go. Thanks to m-learning, an organization can deliver targeted bits of content that help an individual in the moment, whether to present product information or access equipment documentation. Rather than heavyweight classroom or computer-based training, which remove the learner from his or her work environment, m-learning provides immediate knowledge to help individuals in the moment.

Today, awareness is building that employees must be equipped with the right tools, knowledge and capabilities to drive business results. M-learning initiatives are gaining significant funding, particularly in industries such as pharmaceuticals and retail, as organizations pursue advantages ranging from reduced costs to increased agility.

This white paper, which outlines the benefits of m-learning, is the first in our Future of Learning series. Part 2 will cover learning technologies’ move to the cloud; Part 3 will focus on creating resilient learning content strategies.
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M-Learning: The Next Wave in the Future of Work

Globalization is a major force in the business world today, as companies of all types and sizes can leverage expertise wherever it resides. The millennial generation is also reshaping everything from communication to innovation, both inside and outside the organization.

Technology is also shifting fundamentally. Virtual platforms are enabling real-time collaboration among team members, regardless of time or place. The emerging SMAC stack, consisting of social, mobile, analytic and cloud capabilities, is also reshaping the organizational computing model.

Meanwhile, the competitive landscape within many mainstream industries is contracting via vendor consolidation, while at the same time, service and product lines are expanding and morphing more quickly than ever to respond to fast-changing business needs. A sales representative who sold a finite array of products or services a few years ago now has a more daunting sales portfolio under his domain. These individuals must unlearn and then relearn key competencies to effectively compete in this new environment. Traditional classroom learning or computer-based training cannot provide the immediacy needed or the convenience that millennial employees (and those with a millennial mindset) have come to expect.

Given the speed of business today — and with information overload impacting nearly every professional pursuit — employees require information and knowledge just when they need it, in their desired format and on the mobile platform of their choice, particularly as the use of these devices has become second nature.

The rise in social content has also disrupted conventional learning styles, causing a shift toward self initiative on the learner’s part. Employees can see the content that is available to be consumed, and they are not waiting for anyone to spoon-feed it to them.¹

This is why the traditional training paradigm is shifting to just-in-time transmission of skills and sharing of knowledge and information to boost employee performance. M-learning solutions deliver content to be consumed at the point of need, enabling employees to make better decisions and satisfy customers.

With the increased popularity of mobility, organizations can more easily disseminate learning materials to employees, partners and anyone else who might need them. M-learning can be applied to everything from product training and sales/marketing-related learning aids, to IT and organizational compliance training. The correlation with business results is direct. In our experience, putting learning in the palm of people’s hands — exactly what they need, when they need it — can have an immediate positive effect on the bottom line.

Toward that end, companies across industries are using tablet computers and smartphones for knowledge dissemination, to showcase sales presentations and as a platform for training media. Certain sectors — particularly pharmaceuticals and banking — are taking the lead in developing content and learning infrastructure strategies aligned with their organizational mobility strategies. (See Figure 1, next page, for an illustration of how sales professionals can leverage m-learning).

The Evolution of Corporate Learning

Until very recently, learning in a corporate environment was content- and technology-centric, with most large organizations investing in a learning management
system (LMS) that hosted learning content. An internal group was tasked with building and deploying content, whether via computer-based training or in an instructor-led classroom environment. Traditionally, it was difficult for this group to gain funding and visibility for learning initiatives. Return on investment was often difficult to demonstrate. When resources became scarce, the training organization was often the first to be cut.

Today, there is a growing recognition that unless employees are equipped with the right tools, knowledge and capabilities, they will not be able to work effectively and contribute to business objectives. In fact, spending on corporate training saw a 9.5% jump in 2011, according to the Bersin & Associates Corporate Learning Factbook.² Corporate training is beginning to gain significant funding as organizations seek to take advantage of the new approaches inherent in performance-based mLearning.³

Talent development is no longer a sidelined function but a mainstream operation that is seen as contributing to achievement of business goals. It is now standard practice for learning team members to be embedded within business units supporting unit-specific learning needs, in addition to delivering mandatory organizational learning to dedicated teams. The influx of the millennial population, coupled with advancements in mobile technology and a significant shift toward self-directed learning, now places talent development teams in the center of business decisions.

Learning is now firmly learner-centric and able to address the needs of decentralized environments. In these environments, learning happens through varied inputs received via social structures, self learning and just-in-time content made available to help individuals improve their job performance. As such, employees can access materials from a myriad of sources, including social sites, the Internet, books, colleagues, friends, online course materials and m-learning content.
The Learning Modernization Landscape

M-learning shifts the focus of learning to provide a social, collaborative and convenient learning platform. This has particular appeal to millennials, who want to experience the same technology experience at work on Monday morning as they do in their personal lives on Sunday night.1 Learning needs to be modernized to blend with the social experience to ensure it meets younger employees’ needs.

M-learning offers a host of benefits:

- **Access:** Employees can access learning material from virtually anywhere.
- **Convenience:** Employees can engage with mobile-based learning content when they have time, much faster than on a laptop or desktop PC.
- **Retention:** M-learning is a powerful tool for training to enhance recall or refresh the memory.
- **Overcoming resistance:** Instead of having long, drawn-out classroom sessions, which many employees resist, mobile learning provides nuggets of information when they need it, however they want it. For example, a short help message might pop up when a user is working in an app or going into a sales call. M-learning can help eliminate the need for both traditional classroom-based training and computer-based training.
- **Acceleration:** Mobile devices can be excellent portable job aids, providing learners with instant access to topical and contextual learning or support material, speeding their time to competency.
- **Speed:** Traditional training material (classroom and computer-based) takes many hours to develop and roll out, while m-learning can be put together and made available comparatively quickly. M-learning nuggets can be created in a week or two and delivered instantly, boosting agility and reducing cost at the same time.

Figure 2 shows opportunities to build m-learning experiences within an organization.

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**M-Learning’s Sweet Spots**

- **Game-based learning** for impacting behavior changes, business problem solving and activities-based learning (e.g., soft skills, leadership development).
- **Simulation-based learning** for training, virtual classrooms and online/offline conferences (e.g., product training).
- **Learning aids** that help enhance job-oriented performance (e.g., job aids, live data feeds).
- **Learning applications** that integrate existing social media with learning needs.
- **Learning courseware** targeted at multiple mobile platforms (e.g., learning nuggets, videos).
- **Classroom assignment** compatible with mobile media (e.g., exercises, case studies).
- **Virtual World/Simulation Learning**.
- **Learning games**.
- **Classroom/Workplace Learning**.
- **Mobile Learning Courseware**.
- **E-classroom**.
- **ASSESSMENTS**.
- **Learning Support**.
- **Migration/Cross-Platform Portability**.
- **Social/Collaborative Learning**.
- **Native Apps**.
- **Web Apps**.
- **Assessments**.
- **Online assessments and quizzes**.
- **Migrating existing/legacy courseware to a mobile-compatible medium**.
Pharmaceutical Companies Embrace M-Learning

The pharmaceuticals industry is on the forefront of the m-learning revolution, with interest also coming from the retail and manufacturing sectors. From our work with clients in the pharmaceuticals industry (as well as other sources), we have noticed the following trends and developments:

- 80% of field agents in the U.S. will carry iPads by 2015.
- 70% of existing e-detailing materials are being converted to iPad-compatible format.
- Top-five organizations have a roadmap for converting training materials to iPad format.
- 40% of conferences are geared up to move to virtual mode.
- 55% of organizations have a roadmap to create a comprehensive, collaborative learning ecosystem.
- 30% of field forces acknowledge the need for social learning.
- 22% of learning organizations have strategies in place for dedicated learning apps.

We are seeing rapid uptake of learning modernization projects among our clients in the pharmaceuticals industry. Pharmaceuticals companies are now replacing tablets and laptops previously deployed to their field force with iPads. As with the rise in “bring your own device,” or BYOD, the iPad explosion places the onus on the organization’s IT services, brand marketing and learning teams to realign their strategies with the mobile landscape. (For more on BYOD, read our paper, “Making BYOD Work in Your Organization.”)

The learning and marketing teams not only have the responsibility of building the underlying technology architecture to support mobile learning, but they also need a clear roadmap for conversion of existing content, strategies for developing future content and a rigorous content approval process. Meanwhile, amassing the funding necessary for an m-learning initiative usually requires close collaboration between the business unit that needs the support and IT, which typically charts the organization’s mobile strategy.

M-Learning in the Real World

One of our global clients is currently implementing collaborative learning solutions in its commercial and clinical areas but is struggling to devise a clear operating model for these new capabilities, as well as governance for deciding which systems are most important.

Toward that end, we have recommended our OneLearning ecosystem, which integrates various existing learning tools into a single mobile-based platform. The company expects to realize significant benefits from adopting the OneLearning mobile platform, including 50% to 60% software cost savings in migrating its legacy system to the mobile-compatible platform.

Other expected benefits: greater than 70% cost savings through a radical reduction in the time it takes to create new features and increased learner adoption due to the flexibility of a platform that adapts itself to the learner’s style or business role. These benefits are expected via a well-organized structure of device-agnostic content conversion frameworks, online/offline content availability strategies and integration of learning management systems.
We are helping another client develop a strategic roadmap for its multiple e-health initiatives. Currently, each initiative uses different types of mobile technologies, each with its own architecture for connecting to the healthcare ecosystem. The challenge is to arrive at a strategic vision that encompasses individual technology choices and delivers real business benefits.

The pharmaceuticals industry is on the leading edge of embracing m-learning, but there are clear benefits for other industries, as well. For example, some retailers are evaluating or piloting gamification-based m-learning applications. A game-like training app deployed on a handheld device already in use at the store might be a good fit for a retail brand catering to younger consumers (and presumably with younger employees). Figure 3 illustrates how learning games can be deployed on several different mobile platforms.

Manufacturing is another fertile industry for m-learning as companies work to identify how product information they have already created can be deployed in an on-the-go format to help people on the shop floor, field engineers and other personnel.

We also developed SalesGym, a mobile learning framework that our clients are deploying to their sales forces. SalesGym has won recognition and awards from industry organizations such as Brandon Hall and Apex. The framework is customizable to an organization’s needs and can grow as the m-learning effort matures. Figure 4, next page, illustrates some of SalesGym’s features.

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**Learning Games**

- **Android mobile game on information security**
- **iPad-based game to “Learn your Leaders”**
- **Project management simulation games across mobile platforms (Android, iOS, Symbian, BlackBerry...)**
- **iPad-based game on the effects of a cancer controlling drug**

Figure 3
M-Learning: Questions to Ask

Once a company has decided to embrace mobile learning, the next step is to consider the following strategy-shaping questions:

- What does your organization hope to get out of m-learning? What problem will m-learning help solve?
- What behavioral changes will m-learning require from your employees? Do your organization’s demographics align with m-learning, or will change management be necessary?
- Which processes will change as a result of m-learning? Will compliance information be integrated into those processes?
- How will m-learning help drive business objectives?
- What level of security restrictions will you need in your m-learning applications?
- Will your technology infrastructure support m-learning? If not, what needs to be done?
- What is your m-learning timeline and budget?

The answers to these questions will begin to unfold as you move further into your m-learning journey. To take the first steps, it is advisable to convene a group of key learning stakeholders from your organization and start the dialog – sooner rather than later.

Given the forces ushering in the future of work, as well as a fast-changing business climate that demands instant expertise at low cost, it’s time for corporations to modernize their approach to training and learning. M-learning leverages popular technology trends such as mobility and social computing, goes hand-in-hand with
millennial workstyles and preferences and enables businesses to become more agile in shaping their workforce for the immediate future.

*Remember, m-learning is just the starting point. Watch for the next two white papers in our Future of Learning series. Part 2 will cover learning technologies’ move to the cloud, and Part 3 will focus on creating resilient learning content strategies.*

**Footnotes**


5 This data is based on our observations in our work with clients, as well as reports from our Mobility Practice, Bersin & Associates and the eLearning Guild.

6 A pharma industry term for detailed marketing/product presentation materials that sales reps use to sell their products.

About the Authors

Vidhyu Rao is the Practice Head of Cognizant’s Learning and Content Interactive initiative. She is an experienced organizational learning and development executive, with over 20 years of experience in the field of corporate learning. In her career, she has built strong learning organizations and learning technology infrastructures; consulted with several client organizations in developing learning modernization roadmaps and technology-specific learning solutions; and developed business-facing learning metrics and measures aligned with organizational goals. She has led teams that created solutions for many Cognizant learning transformation engagements across industry verticals. Vidhyu was the creator of Cognizant Academy in North America and Europe, where she built a fully functional online learning organization that addresses the needs of approximately 50,000 associates in these geographies. Cognizant Academy was created to support all technology, business and interpersonal skills needs of Cognizant associates. She holds a BSc from Bangalore University and a certificate in technology operations management from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Vidhyu can be reached at Vidhyu.Rao@cognizant.com | Linkedin: http://www.linkedin.com/in/vidhyu Twitter: http://twitter.com/vidhyu.

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Accolade

In September 2012, leading training research firm Brandon Hall awarded Cognizant a “Bronze” medal for Best Use of Mobile Learning.