

M is for Learning

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Just when you thought you had mastered the principles and applications of e-learning, in comes m-learning. That's 'm' for mobile. M-learning defines learning that utilizes mobile devices such as cellular phones, handheld computers and mp3 players as the delivery vehicle. Although still in its infancy, m-learning is positioned to become one of the new standards in self-directed learning.

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Why the buzz?

M-learning is catching on quickly, especially with the iPod generation. Mobile phones and mp3 players are relatively inexpensive, portable and accessible in many parts of the world. In fact, it is estimated that there are more than 3x the number of mobile phones than there are personal computers. With the added popularity of mobile devices such as RIM's Blackberry, it's no wonder that organizations and institutions are scrambling to figure out the best ways to use this technology for learning.

How is learning taking place?

- Numerous institutions and companies are experimenting with m-learning:
- Students are listening to recorded lectures via mp3 audio files.
- Trainers and learners are communicating remotely via text messaging as learners apply new knowledge on the job.

- New employees are accessing knowledge databases or communicating with experts while on the road or with clients.
- Employees are participating in webinars (web-based seminars) using laptops and handheld computers.

What are the challenges?

There are certainly challenges faced by those who are embracing m-learning. Battery life and connectivity may be limiting. Accessing useful information on small screens and typing on miniature keyboards or phone pads is also a challenge. There's even the question of how and when to fit m-learning into an already busy schedule.

Despite these limitations, m-learning is tapping into the creativity of trainers and learners alike. M-learning has moved blended learning beyond coaching and self-study. It's tapping into the reality that only a percentage of learning takes place in the classroom; that learning is dynamic, taking place at the instant of opportunity. If you haven't dipped your toe in the m-learning waters yet, head right out and download a podcast to your computer and start considering the possibilities.