

Mobile Learning: Are You Catching the Wave?

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Ready or not, mobile learning (m-learning) is making its way into the training realm. With personal digital assistants (PDAs) becoming more common than land line telephones, a new dimension in self-directed learning is breaking through. Used as a follow up to traditional learning media, m-learning can reinforce key concepts and provide useful information when employees need it. When managing an m-learning initiative, here are some tips and considerations to keep in mind:

"M-learning will be an effective learning and job support tool."

Take it slow when converting from classroom or e-learning to m-learning.

Begin by providing a standard training lesson on how to use the PDA for learning and job support. You may choose to create an e-learning lesson that uses a simulation to show how m-learning can work for them. Just don't rush in and convert everything at once, or dump all of your training materials into m-learning. Give people a chance to digest the capacity of the technology and the content.

Just like e-learning, the content must be relevant, reliable and engaging.

If there is no interest in learning the information, the portability or convenience of the medium won't matter. Make sure that the lessons and job information are pertinent and helpful.

Use tools such as job aids and guide books delivered via the mobile medium to provide employees with on-demand job support. You want the information to be easy to access on the mobile device.

Think small when developing m-learning modules.

Given the small screen and immediacy that the information is needed, try to keep the information to 5 minute chunks, not hour-long lessons.

Don't be afraid to explore various avenues of m-learning, such as 'point and shoot' learning where camera phones are used for sending images and accompanying information; location-based mobility that give the user practical information based on his or her location; and educational gaming, which is a growing trend.

Remember that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to learning, or to technology.

Just because there is excitement around PDAs as learning tools, different kinds of learning require appropriate strategies, tools and resources. Make sure the learning content is conducive to the type of learning that must take place. Using a PDA will not get a new welder the practice he/she needs, but it may be a good source of information if the welder has specific questions about an aspect of his/her job.

The research up to this point suggests that m-learning will be an effective learning and job support tool. Featuring new strategies, practices, tools, applications and resources, m-learning is a feasible way of reinforcing learning, because it responds to the on-demand interests of connected populations in an information-centric world.

