

Get Practical with mLearning - the missing link



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A lot of hype is currently being placed behind the new kid on the block of online learning. With the recent global release of smart phones companies are starting to envisage a world in which they can train their employees no matter their location.

Whilst this concept is automatically appealing, there is little information currently in the public domain about the potential issues you might face integrating this type of learning into your existing online learning infrastructure. This paper focuses on the practicalities of training people using mobile devices and the supporting framework required to make such training meaning full to a corporate audience.



So what does mLearning really mean?

One definition of mLearning is:

Learning that happens across locations, or that takes advantage of learning opportunities offered by portable technologies.

So in a sense mLearning has been occurring since 3100BC where the Sumerians of Mesopotamia developed the first known written text and using this text they transcribed information onto stone tablets that could be carried by an individual and given to another person to learn from.

This view of mLearning is fine if learning is defined as any activity in which a person gains knowledge from observation. This view does not however fit well for a corporate environment where the effectiveness and therefore value of learning must be measurable and recordable so that a company can be satisfied its employees meet their knowledge and qualification requirements.

The mechanism used by most companies to record and report on this learning data is a Learning Management System or LMS. These systems are usually relatively large database systems that are only accessible via a dedicated internet link or through an internal network, with the LMS designed to be viewed and manipulated through a PC or Laptop.



eLearning courses are then pushed out to learners through the LMS with a dedicated link between the learners PC and the Database in order to record course data such as:

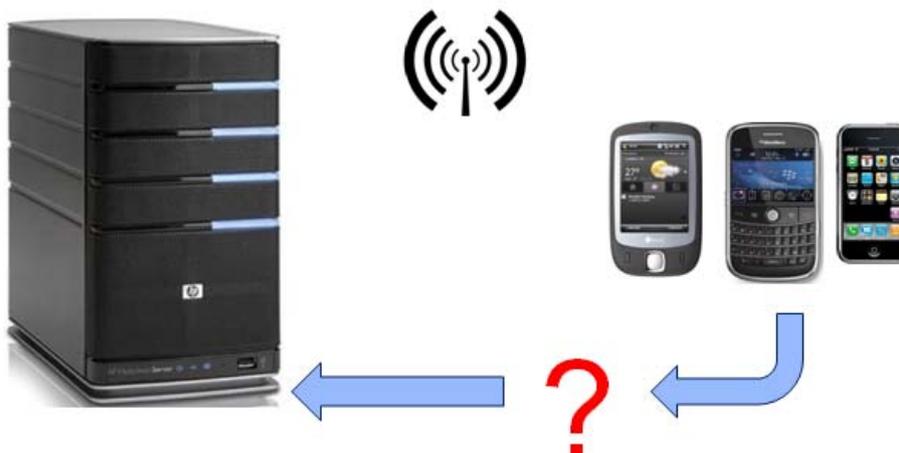
- Time in Course
- Date
- Course Score
- Pass/Fail
- Question Responses

The collation of this data provides the company with a metric that describes who has completed their training, when it was completed, how long did it take, did the learner successfully complete any assessment elements etc.

This data can then be reported to internal management or more importantly industry regulatory bodies where required.

The missing link

This creates an obvious issue for companies wishing to take advantage of mLearning. The lack of a dedicated link means that the recording of course data back to the central database cannot be guaranteed, therefore completion statuses may not be recorded and noted on any relevant reports. Adding to this is service drop out issues for mobile devices.



mLink

So in order to gain true value from mLearning you need to ensure you have an mLink application that can sit between the mobile device and the LMS to act as a buffer. This application needs to store relevant course completion information until it has all been received from the mobile device, then once completed it passes this information through to the LMS. This removes the issues related to service drop outs and also significantly reduces the size of the data file being sent from the device back to the LMS.

The application also needs to act as a reconciliation tool that aligns user records with the device, allowing the training records to be recorded against the correct person based on the device ID the information was sent from.

The complete process for effecting a piece of online learning on a mobile device is:



The development of mLink applications along with the continued development and acceptance of smartphone like mobile devices is making meaningful mLearning a reality.

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