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MOBILE LEARNING-KNOWLADGE AT THE HAND

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Do you have a mobile phone? Yes, of course…

We are at a turning point for the use of mobile communication devices. The release of new devices and applications, including the new Apple iPhone 3G, highlights the rapidly expanding interest in handheld devices that are both phones and computing capable. Our mobile telephones are evolving into platforms for collaboration, knowledge access and performance support. It is convinced that one the next frontiers will be designing learning and performance applications that fit naturally into our hands, pockets, purses and lives. We invite the learning field to think "out of the box" and take an evidence-based approach to exploring these capabilities.

So, what is a mobile-learning or M-learning?

The term M-Learning, or "mobile learning", has different meanings for different communities. Although related to E-learning (Electronic learning) and distance education, it is distinct in its focus on learning across contexts and learning with mobile devices.

One definition of mobile learning is: *Any sort of learning that happens when the learner is not at a fixed, predetermined location, or learning that happens when the learner takes advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies.* In other words mobile learning decreases limitation of learning location with the mobility of general portable devices.

The term covers: learning with portable technologies including but not limited to handheld computers, MP3 players, notebooks and mobile phones. M-learning focuses on the mobility of the learner, interacting with portable technologies, and learning that reflects a focus on how society and its institutions can accommodate and support an increasingly mobile population.

Why mobile learning?

M-learning is convenient in that it is accessible from virtually anywhere. M-Learning, like other forms of E-learning, is also collaborative; sharing is almost instantaneous among everyone using the same content, which leads to the reception of instant feedback and tips. M-Learning also brings strong portability by replacing books and notes with small RAMs, filled with tailored learning contents. In addition, this kind of learning is engaging and fun. Therefore, it is simple to utilize mobile learning for a more effective and entertaining experience.

The "buzz" about corporate mobile learning grows louder with each day. Organizations no doubt recognize that mobile technology for learning has merit. Handheld devices have the potential to effectively "push" and "pull" information and deliver learning whenever/wherever employee needs arise. Yet, despite all the excitement and curiosity, few corporations have fully embraced mobile learning.

You are left wondering: when will corporate investments catch up with all the excitement? For what applications/circumstances does mobile learning work? We are eager to see how mobile technologies will impact corporations globally. The potential is enormous.

According to market research conducted by Ambient Insight, LLC., it is estimated that "corporate and business expenditures for mobile learning products and services in the US alone will reach over $246.9 million by 2011." Their research indicates that the largest demand throughout the forecast period is for custom development services, content conversion, and media services and that the healthcare sector accounts for 20% of the total US market for mobile learning. In their 2008-2013 US Market for Mobile Learning Products and Services

report to be released later this summer, Ambient Insight expects to revise their mobile learning forecasts further upward. Several factors point to an increasing commitment to mobile learning.

We have grown to expect connectivity wherever we are. Cell phones are ubiquitous and are the 'go to' device for staying connected. There is no doubt that we are becoming a much more mobile society. The Netsize Guide 2008 revealed that mobile devices have penetrated over 85% of the US population. In fact, the latest study by Pew Internet and American Life Project of 2054 adults found that the cell phone is the technological tool Americans would have the most difficult time giving up. That is a change from the landline, which topped the list just two years ago.

The Pew research also indicated that 62% of all Americans have some experience with mobile access to digital data and tools away from home or work using a wireless laptop connection or with a handheld device. Cell phone users are also taking advantage of the new capabilities. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, text messaging utilization has increased from 41% in April 2006 to 58% today. On a typical day, 31% of cell phone owners use text messaging and 15% use the devices' camera features. About 8% use the phone to play games. It should be no surprise then that a large percentage of employees already access large percentages of their email through mobile devices, when it is most convenient for them. It's only natural that we should seek to more fully realize the impact mobile tools can have at work in general and in our individual work performance.

While you may initially think of mobile learning as delivering E-learning on small form factor devices, or often referred to as E-learning "lite", it has the potential to do much more than deliver courses, or parts of courses. We can define mobile learning as all "knowledge in the hand." It includes the use of mobile/handheld devices to perform any of the following:
-Deliver Education/Learning;
-Foster Communications/Collaboration;
-Conduct Assessments/Evaluations;
-Provide Access to Performance Support/Knowledge.

Today, any number of portable devices can quickly and easily deliver and support these functions. Cell or smartphones, multi-game devices, personal media players (PMPs), personal digital assistants (PDAs), or wireless single-purpose devices can help deliver coaching and mentoring, conduct assessments and evaluations (e.g., quizzes; tests; surveys/polls; and certifications), provide on-the-job support and access to information, education and references, and deliver podcasts, update alerts, forms and checklists. In these ways, mobile learning can enhance and support more traditional learning modes, making it more portable and accessible. Mobile devices can also serve as powerful data collection tools and facilitate the capture of user created content.

The future holds many experimental mobile initiatives, plus other context specific opportunities we have not yet discovered. Included today are games, simulations, sensor-driven tracking and feedback, location-based, and "point and shoot" learning.

Last week, the representative of MTS (A GSM cell phone operator) offered our University to develop a business project to introduce mobile learning in the SFU and who knows, perhaps soon I will learn not without the help of a mobile phone…