

# The Simple Guide to Mobile Learning and Modern Learner Engagement

Insights from Clarity Consultants





As the world grows increasingly hyper connected and forms more global networks, the proliferation of mobile technology is naturally growing to unprecedented levels. Phones, for example, are not what they used to be. People consider them computers now, relying on them to stay informed about the world, be entertained, and connect with others on demand.

Enter mobile learning, or m-learning: a way of passing along and enhancing knowledge through the use of personal electronic devices. To mimic the way mobile technology works, m-learning often utilizes chunking (the creation of micro-lessons), self-paced work, and the ability to be accessed through multiple contexts.

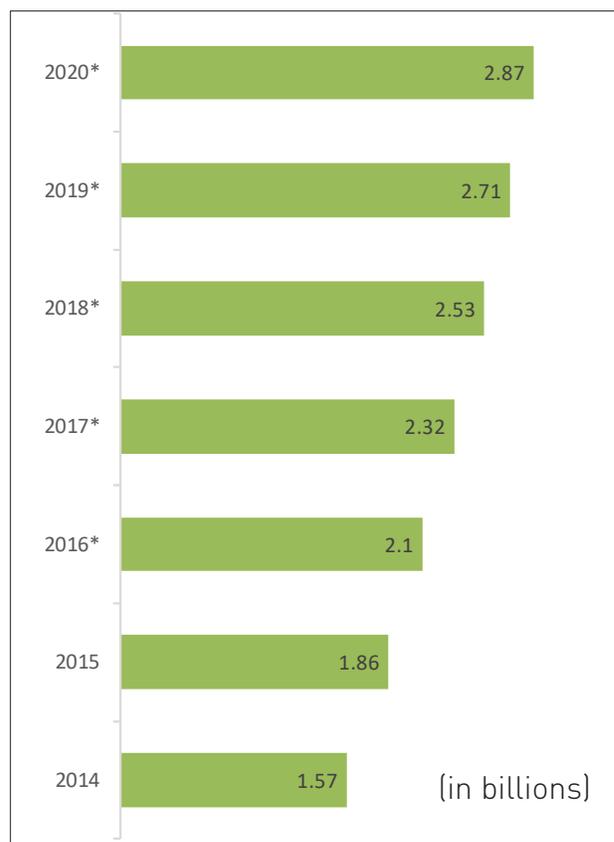
M-learning takes many forms. Consider these examples: employees accessing corporate training modules on tablets; college students communicating with peers on an institutionally supported LMS forum via their laptops; or even an average consumer who desires a piece of knowledge and uses his phone to Google it.

## A Brief History of Mobile Learning

In 1968, computer scientist Alan Kay was ahead of his time when he envisioned a personal computer “in the shape of an ordinary notebook” that looked quite similar to what we now know as the iPad. But it took shifts toward learner-centric instruction in educational philosophy in the last three decades of the 20th century, combined with a rapid advancement in commercially available technology, to pave the way for what we know as m-learning today.

By 2013, nearly one billion smartphones were sold annually, making 20% of the world’s population smartphone owners. This number is expected to increase to 34% by 2017. Other drivers of m-learning in the corporate sector include the expansion of global companies and the growing reliance on nontraditional workspaces. For many, the concept of a classroom has expanded to anywhere, anytime.

### Smartphone Users Worldwide 2014-2020



## Who Is Going Mobile?

According to the *Ambient Insight Premium Report: The 2012-2017 Worldwide Mobile Learning Market*, consumer and academic markets are the most utilized arenas for mobile learning. Well over half a million tablets were distributed to students in the LA Unified School District alone by 2013, with similar programs appearing globally (20 million tablets distributed in India, for example).

Although the same report found less usage in the corporate sector (and in fact reported an overall “absence of mobile learning...for corporate training” across the globe), there is plenty of evidence to suggest that companies who have adopted the technology have seen benefits.



### Three recent examples include:

- **Merrill Lynch.** The financial services company partnered with developer Intuition to offer three compliance training courses via Blackberry for over 2000 investment bankers and stakeholders. Final evaluation showed outstanding results: 99% liked the format, 100% would do more training in this format, and 75% praised the convenience and time management. Just over a third of employees completed the training while business traveling, with roughly equal numbers finishing it at home or while commuting to work.
- **T-Mobile.** The mobile communication company captured sales pitches for front-line employees (many of whom are millennials) on its own devices. Prompted to share the videos via social media, the employees reacted with enthusiasm, with many of the high-quality final products going viral within the organization. Beyond the generation of employee enthusiasm and widespread knowledge share, the company benefited from the connection made between front-line employees and management.
- **Nike.** Sales associates at the sporting goods corporation wear mobile devices around their necks on a lanyard. They can access product info at any time, on the floor or elsewhere, to share with customers. Once these devices were implemented, the company reported seeing an immediate increase in sales.

**Employees are not at their desks 50-60% of the day**



## Why Use Mobile Learning for L&D?

Mobile technology is especially powerful in organizational learning and development through three particular uses: training, performance support, and collaboration. Employee learning programs, product knowledge tools, and more embedded and engaged communities within the workforce are the target areas for this technology.

### Here's why:

#### It's convenient.

Learners can connect to content anywhere and at any time, which means they can access when they know they are most engaged. This will be different for every learner, just as employees are likely to have unique schedules that make desktop-based (or classroom-based) training more difficult to accommodate. According to Global Workplace Analytics, employees are not at their desks 50-60% of the day. Employees are far more likely to engage with learning content when it suits them—such as while commuting or at home.

#### The learner is at the center.

Learner-centric models of instruction place an emphasis on the experience of the learner and deploy any number of instructional techniques. In this view, what a learner already knows and what tools he has at his disposal are important pieces of data that show what and how he will learn new information. It's quite different from instructor-centered models, which focus on simply presenting information to a passive learner. Learners who have more autonomy in the learning process (such as being able to set the environment and context for learning) are more motivated and feel more satisfied with the process.

#### There's less physical "stuff" to manage.

Classrooms, blackboards, desks, textbooks, projectors, and tables are a thing of the past with mobile learning—cutting overhead and making the course delivery process much simpler.

#### Geographically disconnected employees are connected.

M-learning makes it possible for all employees, regardless of location, to complete training without travel costs or delays. In fact, they are able to connect and share information with remote colleagues instantly, creating a sense of shared community and space that is not always easy to achieve across distances.

#### Young employees demand it.

Based on consumer market reports and tablet distribution numbers in school districts, it's clear that the workforce's next generation is not only going to be deeply connected to mobile learning, but they will have come to expect it as a standard part of learning. Trying to offer on-the-job training that doesn't keep up with technological standards is likely to be seen by young employees as a waste of time.

## How Do You Create a Corporate M-learning Program?

Of course, there are challenges to implementing an m-learning program in a corporate setting. It requires that all employees have a mobile device, which may unveil a cost barrier that prevents some from adequate access. High-quality instructional designers are needed to meet the challenge of micro-sizing lessons to suit the context. Security issues, such as data privacy, may need more stringent monitoring for m-learning than standard desktop-based LMS systems or in-person trainings. And last, work/life balance notions may be challenged by some employees, who see mobile training as an infringement on their personal time.

But there are ways to mitigate these challenges with careful preparation. In particular, the following strategies are recommended.



**1. Find out how mobile technology works in your employees' everyday lives.**

Don't just adopt an m-learning program because it's a trend—make sure it will work for your company. If 90% of your employees use Android tablets, for example, launching a course with functionality that works only on iPads would be a costly mistake.

**2. Start small.** Rather than dumping all of your compliance trainings onto a new platform, choose a small course to pilot through m-learning. Engage employees throughout the entire process to learn where the holes are before moving on to bigger ventures.

**3. Invest in designers.** Remember, m-learning is more than simply migrating pre-existing courses onto mobile-friendly formats. You'll need both instructional designers to organize the learning strategies to fit the context, as well as visual designers to help create an environment that learners have grown accustomed to on their own devices. Strengthen your own L&D department by incorporating external consultants to help manage change, bring in new perspectives, and add technological expertise in the places you need. The more you can create a seamless experience that feels familiar to the learner, the better learning outcomes you'll see.

- 4. Get good feedback.** Always plan ahead for a comprehensive review process, both immediately after launch (to best evaluate the technical success) and 6 months to a year after (to evaluate whether or not the learning goals were achieved). Tweak future m-learning programs as necessary, keeping an eye on current digital trends that can enhance the process even more.

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## The Bottom Line

Mobile learning is a natural evolution of a mobile society. Patterns of increased mobile-device use in academic and consumer sectors signal a new generation of learners who rely on mobile devices to share information and connect with others. Investing in m-learning programs in corporate L&D sectors is the best way to increase engagement and learning outcomes, especially as millennials begin to fill the workforce.

The best way to harness this newly ubiquitous technology is to create a team of L&D professionals and designers that includes both internal stakeholders and external consultants. Utilizing pre-existing skills while expanding current capabilities with independent experts is the right combination for staying ahead of the curve in this competitive field.