E-Learning Trends – The Mobile Environment

In the introductory chapter, we identified trends and opportunities for e-Learning in higher education. One of these trends, m-Learning, is the focus of this chapter.

Today, who doesn’t own a personal digital assistant (PDA)? A PDA is one example of a handheld device in which several technologies have converged – notebooks, e-Textbooks, online calendars and address books, email, music files…. m-Learning often takes place via a wireless device such as a PDA, but students in Japan use cell phones and any airline traveler knows how many laptops suddenly make an appearance when the seatbelt light goes out.

Recall that Quinn (2001) defined m-Learning as “the intersection of mobile computing and e-Learning.” Paul Harris extends that to an “anytime, anywhere learning experience.” Anywhere in the world, that is.
Donna Abernathy writes that m-Learning can include anything from job aids to courseware downloaded to your PDA to online Net-based learning. However, she makes the point that the "m" refers only to content delivery. "Learning and performance are still the big stars."

In this chapter, you will explore the implications of this intersection for message design – the development and delivery of content online.

**Key Ideas**

m-Learning is a relatively new development in the e-Learning world. Think of this chapter as a survey or overview of the current state of mobile computing in higher education.

- Commercially, there is a strong trend towards handheld devices for retrieving information, communicating, and learning.
- Corporate use may drive adoption of m-Learning approaches.
- m-Learning may potentially increase the digital divide.
- Content development has been the purview of specialist publishers.
- Readability issues relate to screen size and resolution, mobility, text input, multimedia capability, and other unique challenges.
- Higher education projects rely on partnerships with many sectors.
- Handheld devices are used to increase interaction in large enrollment classes.
- Librarians are developing policies and guidelines for use.

**Key Terms**

This chapter introduces a number of terms and phrases that you may not be familiar with. These terms are listed in the Handbook with enough space to define them in your own words or note examples, references, and resources (go to Key Terms in Chapter 10 of the Handbook).

- m-Learning
- m-Learning Environments
- Mobile computing devices
- Personal Digital Assistant
- Just-in-time learner
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