



By Don Vanthournout and Dana Alan Koch

Accenture's latest learning solution delivers required corporate training via mobile devices.

It's 3:30 p.m. when an email arrives on Julie's BlackBerry, notifying her of a new required corporate training course. However, at that moment, her priority is resolving a critical client problem.

As an Accenture senior executive, she knows that the training is also important. While finding a full hour to dedicate to the training would be difficult, there are always those naturally occurring periods of downtime—10 minutes here or there—and as Julie continues reading the email, she realizes that she can take the course right on her BlackBerry, and do so in small chunks of time.

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THE FUTURE OF MOBILE LEARNING

The future of mobile learning has yet to be defined, but Accenture is deeply involved in its creation. Here are a few of the scenarios under consideration:

MOBILE PERFORMANCE SUPPORT.

Right before going into a sales call, a professional can access selling tips, background on his client, industry trend information, and more. As he walks through the door, he impresses the client with his up-to-the minute knowledge of the industry.

WEB 2.0 AT YOUR FINGERTIPS.

Animation, high-quality video and audio, data merging, and other Web 2.0 capabilities will enable a rich, dynamic multimedia learning experience at the users' fingertips. It will be motivational, interactive, up-to-date, and fun.

PERSONAL PERFORMANCE COACH.

Imagine a coach whispering in your ear, "You are talking too fast." Accenture Technology Labs has built a prototype of a personal performance coach that uses mobile devices and Bluetooth connectivity to monitor speech patterns and provide real-time feedback with the intent of improving communication. It can also graph speech patterns on handheld devices, while the coach enables postconversation data analysis via PC.

She clicks a link that enrolls her in the course and automatically allows her to begin the training. Intrigued but skeptical, she quickly reviews the course. Surprised at how well it is presented, Julie uses her pockets of downtime over the next few days to complete it, actually enjoying the experience. When she passes the mastery test, she receives an email from the chief training officer, thanking her for completing the training.

From possibility to reality

After years of promise, training at your fingertips is becoming a reality. Julie's experience describes a circumstance under which training is available anywhere, anyplace, anytime, and in digestible segments—all connected to a learning management system.

Trainers have envisioned this scenario for years—bringing the right content, to the right person, at the right moment, and in the right size. The goal is to not only encourage corporate training uptake, but also to remove barriers to accessing a gamut of other training and knowledge resources so that professionals can build their skills and work more effectively.

Handheld devices such as the BlackBerry, a variety of smart phones, and the iPhone have all become feature-rich, faster, and more prevalent, making the possibility of training in the palm of your hands increasingly promising.

By design, executives use handhelds to increase their productivity—to call clients or colleagues, to read email, and to research contact information. Expanded capabilities, however, have made these devices fertile environments for providing other types of content, including training and performance support.

Throughout the last year, Accenture has designed, prototyped, and tested created prototypes for mobile training. And that journey to making mobile learning a reality has involved sponsor discussions, technology challenges, design obstacles, lessons learned, and pitfalls.

The business case

For Accenture, three factors converged to build a solid business case and gain sponsor support:

- a clear business need
- a receptive audience
- sufficient technology.

The business-need aspect centered on the recognition that key segments of the target audience for corporate training are traditionally difficult to reach. These groups understand the importance of required training and want to undertake it, but their schedules seldom allow the 30 or 60 minutes in front of a computer that is needed to complete the sessions.

This receptive audience, therefore, welcomes any convenience that makes training easier to complete. And these same groups are Accenture's most prevalent users of handheld devices. Collectively, they have sufficient technology and are technologically savvy.

Establishing a vision

To clearly communicate the company's vision to sponsors and stakeholders, learning leaders created a "future scenario," much like the situation described in the beginning of this article. This scenario visually depicted how their business case would be realized through a mobile learning solution.

The future scenario is a one-page document that describes the target audience, defines the learning problem, and explains how a mobile learning solution addresses the problem. Although it is a simplified representation of a complex effort, the scenario format has been effective in stimulating conversations on the value of mobile learning among stakeholders. It has also been instrumental in revealing challenges associated with the design, development, and implementation of a mobile learning solution.

Prototype and testing

With the business case established and a future scenario defined, Accenture created a prototype. Seeking to identify and address key mobile learning challenges,

we carefully selected 12 screens from one of our existing corporate computer-based training courses.

These screens contained a mixture of graphics, text, animations, multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank items, test results, and other features. The company knew there would be differences between the CBT version and the mobile version and wanted to understand the trade-offs. The goal was to minimize the differences between the two versions, and at the same time, capitalize on the advantages of mobile delivery. Through prototyping, Accenture learned several technical, user-interaction, and mobile learning design lessons that will be discussed later.

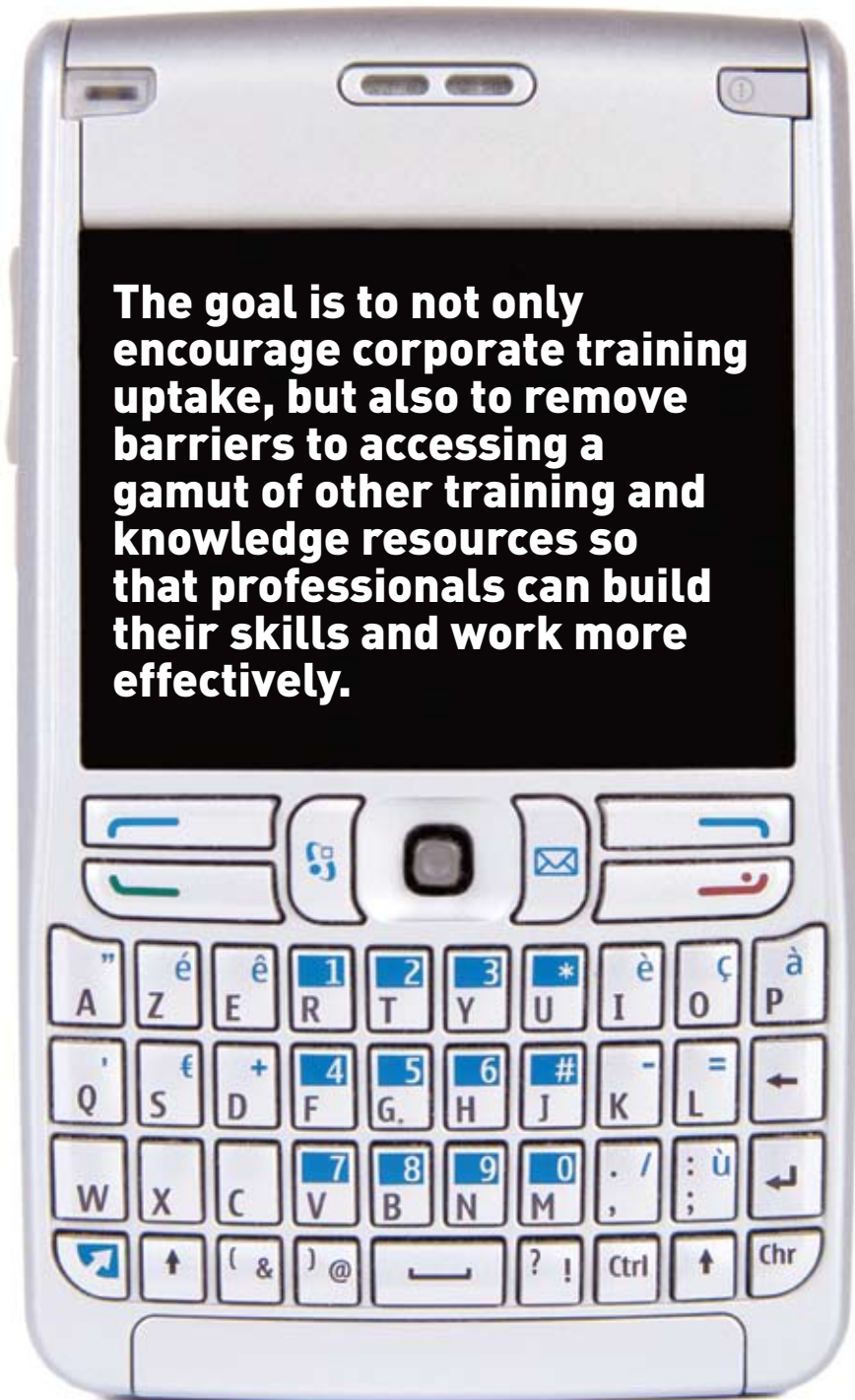
The prototype was tested on a sampling of senior executives to collect their reactions and recommendations on how to make this an effective learning environment for their needs. Their reaction was overwhelmingly positive.

Ninety-two percent indicated that they would use their mobile devices to do the required training. Most preferred training that could be completed in chunks of 10 minutes or less. More than half indicated that they wanted a solution they could download on their device, rather than one that would rely on a live connection. They felt that a downloaded option would allow them to take the training on an airplane, in a subway, and in other locations where connectivity is a problem.

Interestingly, some participants indicated that they used the prototype while sitting at home at the end of a long day. In other words, they used it during naturally occurring downtime. Accenture also learned that participants wanted performance support content available on mobile devices, and have since built a performance support prototype that is generating significant interest.

myLearning Mobile

Scaling from a single prototype to an enterprisewide mobile learning solution requires complex coordination



The journey largely included a definition of all critical processes, such as integration with the LMS, product branding, product development, testing, and deployment. It also included considerations around the organizational and cultural effect of introducing mobile learning.

from diverse teams. The Accenture team created a blueprint of the mobile strategy, the metrics by which it would be measured, and the journey required to fulfill it. The journey largely included a definition of all critical processes, such as integration with the LMS, product branding, product development, testing, and deployment. It also included considerations around the organizational and cultural effect of introducing mobile learning.

Each of the processes within our blueprint had a designated owner—a person responsible for defining and integrating it with other processes. In some cases, a vendor owned a process. In those instances, we also designated an internal owner, aligned with the vendor, to manage the relationship and the associated processes.

Accenture put the processes defined in the blueprint into play as the first complete, mobile corporate-required CBT training course called “The Fight Against Corruption” was built. This 30-minute course parallels the CBT course in content and in design, and users may take either version to complete the requirement. The mobile learning platform was named “myLearning Mobile,” since Accenture’s LMS bears the name myLearning. This branding helps ensure that users understand the interconnectedness of mobile training with Accenture’s LMS.

Implementation considerations

Mobile learning is all about connecting people to the learning they need when they need it. So, it is no surprise that implementing mobile learning requires connections of its own. Here are some of the important connections required to help ensure success of mobile learning in any leading organization.

Connecting with the right people and organizations. As a mobile strategy is defined, it is important to involve the information technology organization early in the process. Whether you have a general mobile strategy in place or are blazing new frontiers, this will pay off later, as you run into implementation issues such as configuration of mobile device services or security settings.

It is also important to connect with vendors who have a proven infrastructure. This will enable you to focus on content development and help ensure integrity of the overall learning experience. **Connecting to the LMS and existing systems.** In deploying a mobile learning capability, it is important to maintain the connections to any LMS you may have built over the years. Compliance and tracking will continue to be important, regardless of the delivery channel, as will providing a seamless experience for the end users.

Additionally, you should set your integration priorities; do not try to

learn everything at once. For example, our first releases included access to mobile courses, completion tracking, and reporting. Subsequent releases will include registration and postprocess activities, such as evaluation. This helps ensure that users can easily gain access to and complete mobile courses, and have their completion automatically uploaded to the myLearning LMS. The integration also helps to ensure accurate compliance reporting.

You should also consider branding because you are likely to be in the forefront of mobile development at your company. Connecting with your internal marketing or communications group is critical to help guarantee that standards and guidelines are developed for extending company branding into the mobile world. Doing so early on will prevent rework in design later in the development process. It also helps to ensure that your end users have an integrated experience.

Connecting with the right mobile platforms. A major decision in developing your mobile strategy is determining which mobile platforms you will connect with, since this will have a tremendous effect on your development and testing process, timelines, and cost. For example, you should decide which mobile environment to support (for example, BlackBerry, Windows Mobile, Palm, or iPhone), which operating systems for each device to support, and how to deal with unique form factors for the different devices.

As part of the platform decision, it is also critical to determine early on whether you will support download, live play, or both. Since our prototype end users reported that one of the advantages of the mobile device was the fact that it allowed them to take the training when they were not connected, we decided to create a download model. And as the world becomes increasingly connected, we will revisit this strategy.

Finally, remember as you work through the various issues that not everyone will have a supported

device, nor will everyone want to use their mobile device for training. You will have to provide critical training through multiple channels, which, of course, has implications for upfront development costs, content maintenance, LMS integration, and other areas.

Realizing the vision of training anytime and anywhere has not been without its challenges, but Accenture is providing an important training experience for professionals where they are and when they want it. The journey will continue as the company expands the mobile learning course catalog, and broadens training capability to leverage additional mobile features and include more mobile platforms. Accenture is also anxious to accumulate solid feedback from hundreds and thousands of users to improve the solution.

Accenture believes that myLearning Mobile will become an increasingly important part of the overall training strategy—responding to the powerful need and demand to provide training and knowledge that rests directly at the fingertips of Accenture professionals. **T+D**

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Mike Phelan, Principal, Deloitte Consulting



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