

## TDS Recon



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MobileSales



## Learning on the Fly

**Getting your sales force up to speed with mobile training tools: M-learning takes sales education to the front lines.**

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M-learning. Oh great, another buzzword to add to your already bursting memory bank of business jargon. Well, if your organization is like others facing a dragging economy with quarterly sales numbers to match, this is one buzzword you might want to add to your solutions toolkit.

Given the aforementioned economic and revenue challenges so many sales teams are facing, your management problem is exacerbated when two of the first line items that your executives slash during tough times are 1) travel and 2) corporate training. And these are two things no productive sales force can succeed without.

So you now have a mobile sales team whose travel expenditures are put under a microscope and less funding for programs to ensure that reps are up to snuff on the latest product launches, new features and channel initiatives. What kind of sales force is that? One with both arms tied behind its back and still trying to make its numbers!

Of course, most traditional training initiatives—whether they are in-house sessions, conferences, seminars or trade shows—tend to have high price tags attached and require travel expenses to boot. Add to that the mobile nature of a sales force, which needs to devote as many hours to customer face time as possible, and taking away their selling time for mandatory training meetings can cut into the bottom line rather than enhance it. Sales managers and corporate training directors constantly need to contend with the delicate balance between learning, productivity and economics, and they're increasingly turning to technology to help ease the burden.

In the Beginning, There Was "e"

As technology has matured, trainers and companies alike have sought ways to leverage computers, CD-ROMs and the Internet to aid training initiatives that can supplement—and in some situations, replace—face-to-face, instructor-led education. Dubbed "e-learning," many of these tools could provide an interactive experience along with assessments to ensure that the training was effective for the learner.

The most popular commercial examples of e-learning are the online university degree programs offered by institutions such as the ubiquitous University of Phoenix, which provides busy people a chance to obtain a college degree over the Web at their convenience.

According to Mitch Grossberg, senior manager for Lotus' e-Learning Products division, the move toward m-learning "is part of a larger effort to integrate learning into larger everyday workflow activities."

M-learning is not just a new technology and a new way of learning but also an extension of the venues from which you can learn, such as in a classroom or through Web-based training. It's part of a blended approach—the devices are there, and they free-up users to take training in a true,

just-in-time fashion.

## Expanding Brains On the Run

With the assimilation of mobile devices throughout the enterprise, companies are exploring opportunities to enhance their existing educational programs by providing training and educational tools on handheld devices using wireless connections. Training and development studies have shown that blended learning experiences—lessons consisting of multiple delivery methods and exposures to educational content—impart the most knowledge to the adult learner. The use of mobile devices as part of the overall learning experience can provide an anywhere, anytime opportunity for a sales rep to further educate herself.

The future of mobility in sales training falls into two categories: learning and performance support. In a typical sales organization, it is mission-critical for all reps to be up to speed on the latest product enhancements or launches, especially in companies where product-refresh cycles are frequent. Reps must also perfect their soft skills, such as time management and negotiation techniques.

Mobile training can extend traditional learning programs, such as pre-training content and comprehension assessments, to ensure that everyone on your team possesses the same level of knowledge before they enter the classroom. Training sales reps and ensuring that they're equally prepared is an involved, important and generally time-consuming process, and m-learning can significantly reduce that time investment. For example, proponents of m-learning claim a laptop-based, learn-as-you-go application can replace an intensive one-week classroom experience, getting well-trained reps into the field—and meeting clients—faster than ever.

One of the thought leaders in the emerging field of m-learning is Harvey Singh, founder and CEO of Navowave, a company with a mission to synchronize learning with business objectives and processes. Singh, who is palpably passionate about the potential for using mobile devices to facilitate education as an integrated part of daily workflow, elaborates on the benefits m-learning offers to a sales force: “The sales professional is the first true mobile professional,” says Singh. “They need to leverage pockets of time by replacing dead downtime spent commuting or waiting to meet customers with small chunks of content that align with day-to-day workflow processes. Rather than chewing up weekends and evenings as with traditional e-learning, companies can now push content providing product knowledge like pricing, competition and new features and benefits that are constantly changing and evolving. Finally, you can build a better bridge between marketing and sales in real time, versus putting it on a server where you know they won't get it when they need it in the field.”

Performance support provides reps with the ability to access critical information while performing the job to maximize their effectiveness in real time. Additionally, mobile training tools can teach the reps to properly enter data into your CRM system, access product presentation aids or take a quiz using scenario planning to overcome potential objections.

## M-Learning Take Home

So what can a sales executive do to ensure that her mobile sales force is up to speed with both the hard- and soft-skills training needed to ensure maximum productivity and revenue generation? Here are a few ground rules to help guide the way—

particularly if your training and travel budgets are under serious scrutiny:

1. According to Lotus' Grossberg, start by defining your team's biggest pain points: What do they need to learn to be successful in the next fiscal year? Take those topics and determine whether converting them from traditional learning to a mobile solution makes sense. Remember, not all topics work in a mobile form factor, so aim for those that fall into the learning or performance support categories.
2. Build your core team of partners and champions. In order to make any kind of mobile learning or performance support tool work within the enterprise, the combined buy-in and expertise of your training director and IT management must be on board from the very beginning.
3. Design the courseware to be used with mobile form factors—keep it simple and steer clear of any content requiring long downloads or bandwidth-devouring graphics or streaming audio/video.
4. Lessons given in maximum segments of 20 to 30 minutes tend to be easiest for learners to manage, ingest and retain—especially for self-paced learning modules. Try to design and deploy your training

content so it doesn't require more time than your busy reps can spare.

5. Go for that low-hanging fruit ROI: Metrics are critical to assessing the viability of any mobile learning strategy (your CFO is bound to push back on these soft projects), so keep an eye on these hard numbers: How many hours are your sales reps spending on traditional (e.g. classroom or seminar) training programs? What are the costs involved in delivering those programs (don't forget to include registration or instructor fees and travel to a seminar site)? In some instances, mobile content delivery can save up to 50 percent on time and travel investments alone—allowing your reps more quality hours on customer calls and generating revenue.

And finally, says Navowave's Singh, "Look creatively at the idea of using mobile technology to train your sales team by asking yourself: 'Can I use this tool to solve my business problem?' Mobile form factors are less costly and may already be in the hands of your reps. Pushing support content and providing constant learning whenever they need it can make your team more productive and your reps more effective at closing sales."•

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