



## Engaging Higher Education Students with Media-rich Mobile Learning

A Chalk White Paper

## Introduction

The higher education marketplace is full of challenges; budgets are dropping, accountability is rising, and student demographics are diverse. As a result, it is important to attract, engage, and retain students and faculty – by enriching the academic experience and keeping everyone informed and involved. One of the most progressive ways to do this is through mobile learning (mLearning).

Until recently, wireless email was most people's idea of cutting edge mobile communication. However, with the amount of bandwidth on wireless networks having increased substantially in recent years, so that high rates of data transmission are now routine, new possibilities are opening up.

Another significant conduit for on-the-go learning is the smartphone. Immensely sophisticated, the smartphones now on the market are nothing less than palm-sized wireless computers with built-in phones. With considerable screen sizes, they are easy to use and have outstanding multimedia capabilities.

The adoption rates of progressive wireless devices have soared in the past decade. Per Gartner, as the overall mobile phone market shrunk 9.4 percent annually in 2008, smartphone sales jumped 12.7 percent. The BlackBerry® solution alone has over 28 million users world wide and are increasingly popular choices for both faculty and students. Ubiquitous communication is no longer a luxury; mobile connectivity truly has become a way of life.

Per the eLearning Guild's 360' report on mobile learning, compared to other verticals the higher education space has one of the highest mLearning implementation rates. Further to that, over the next 12 months universities and colleges plan to do more mLearning than any other industry. Why? Consider the campus environment... students are constantly on the move, interested new technology, and continually in need of convenient reference materials and 'just-in-time' information.





## The Wireless Wave

According to the 2009 Mobile Youth Report, by 2011 1.3 billion youth (teens, 12-17; students, 18-22; and young adults, 23-27) will own a mobile phone. This is more than the population (of all ages) on the internet.

Mobility is so important to youths today that they spend \$270 billion a year on it. This includes the handsets themselves and the plans. Intriguingly, spending is higher on data than it is on voice. Students aren't just calling one another; they are accessing the internet and downloading files. More and more, smartphones are starting to replace PCs for internet use.

For students today it's all about having the option of studying where and when they want. Mobile access isn't so much a replacement for course work on a desktop, but rather an enhancement to the blended learning experience.

Blended learning, which is essentially just a blending of different learning methods and techniques, enables students to select the best activities to suit their own pace, learning style and level, as well as time and place. With the right technology, learners can have a socially supported, exploratory and constructive learning experience – literally at their fingertips.

Not only does mobile learning engage students, and speak to them in a way that fits their lifestyle, it also prepares them to enter the modern workforce. Smartphones and mLearning are increasingly being adopted by leading organizations - to improve employee productivity and performance, and lower training costs. Students who gain experience with these real-world communication and learning tools will have an advantage in the workforce.

## mLearning Benefits

Mobile learning is all about flexibility and productivity.

Higher education institutions are implementing mLearning solutions for a multitude of reasons – the key one being to improve the learning experience and ultimately boost grades.

With mobile learning, students can choose to work when and where it's convenient. Studies have shown that the typical (median) BlackBerry smartphone user converts 60 minutes of downtime into productive time per day, which equates to roughly 250 hours per year in recovered downtime. If students were studying for an extra hour more a day it would have a dramatic impact on their results.

Where mLearning material is pushed out to the device (and not streaming) the productivity benefits are especially powerful. This means that content will always be available, even when a network connection isn't; for example, while on the subway or a flight.

What's more, mLearning has been shown to improve knowledge retention. Students can effectively engage in 'snack learning' - by digesting small amounts of information while on the go. Research has shown that when people are fully engaged with material they are studying its content is far more likely to resonate with them and be retained. The instructional effectiveness of material is therefore considerably enhanced if media-rich elements – graphics, audio and video – are incorporated in addition to text.

Communicating via the mobile medium can also dramatically affect student engagement - not only because appealing, multimedia-rich content can be pushed out, but also because students intrinsically like to use their mobile devices.

mLearning also enables interactive and trackable wireless communication between classes. Beyond refresher information, professors can send updates, tips, and refreshers in real-time - and can also make use of mobile surveys or quizzes.

- Facilitate anytime, anywhere learning & studying
- Improve knowledge retention
- Improve student engagement
- Send updates, tips and refreshers between classes
- Gather feedback wirelessly

## Common Higher Ed mLearning Applications

- Course slides with audio voiceover
- Videos (or audio podcasts) of professors or subject matter experts
- Productivity-enhancing information (ex. study tips, reminders, best practices)
- Mobile quizzes & feedback surveys
- Faculty updates

One of the most popular applications for mLearning in universities and colleges is to push Microsoft® PowerPoint® slides with explanatory voiceover - for anytime, anywhere reference and studying.

Videos, or audio podcasts, of professors or subject matter experts can also be pushed out; again, for review in idle or down time (in transit or between classes).

Institutions can also send things like study tips and assignment reminders - to enhance the productivity of their students.

Mobile quizzes and feedback surveys are an excellent way to get a sense for how students are doing, and what areas they may need more work on.

mLearning can also be extended beyond the student population and used with faculty. Regular communiqués - with videos and/or surveys - can be deployed, as well as business critical updates that need to be delivered straight away and tracked.



## Deciding if it's Right

Prior to rolling out an mLearning program, the following factors should be considered:

- What are your objectives and budget?
- Who is the target audience, and will you start with a pilot to prove the concept?
- Will you be creating content from scratch, or utilizing existing content?
- Are there existing content libraries you can draw from?
- Will you need to integrate tracking and reporting with any existing systems?
- Who will provide support to your end users?
- How will you market your mLearning initiative?
- What will your success criteria be?

## Choosing an mLearning Platform

A robust platform to create, securely push, manage and track your mLearning content is critical. The following are mLearning platform 'must have's':

- Offers a user-friendly content authoring environment
- Supports rich media
- Enables tests and surveys
- Sends device-appropriate content
- Provides tracking and reporting capabilities
- Facilitates offline-available content

## Creating Effective Mobile Content

Reviewing content on a smartphone screen is very different than reviewing it on a computer monitor. When designing mLearning content, the following is recommended:

- **Consider the environment** - bear in mind issues like volume, lighting and privacy
- **Incorporate media-rich content** - including video, audio and graphics
- **Design for the screen size** - keep text concise and content precisely designed
- **Keep to short snippets of information** - five minute modules are recommended





## About Chalk Media

Chalk Media's award-winning platform, Mobile chalkboard™, facilitates media-rich training and communications on BlackBerry smartphones - with impact, interactivity, and tracking. It provides a communication channel dedicated to "pushcasts", which are created using an intuitive wizard and can consist of video, audio voice-over, surveys and tests.

Leading organizations are using Mobile chalkboard to distribute required training, sales enablement tools, productivity enhancing resources, and more. As a result, Chalk's clients drive efficiencies, cut costs and enhance employee productivity.

Chalk was founded in 1997, and became a Subsidiary of Research In Motion (RIM) in January of 2009.

The homepage for Chalk is [www.chalk.com](http://www.chalk.com)

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