

Mobile Learning Video “Nuggets” support Learning at Vodafone Ireland

When communications giant Vodafone wanted to improve staff communication skills in Ireland, they turned to their mobiles for a helping hand.

The resulting programme was commended in the 2007 e-learning award for ‘*The Most Innovative Application of Technology to Learning*’ category, with the judges noting how the programme had made appropriate use of Mobile Learning overcoming many difficult technical challenges to deploy easy to use e-learning. The judges went on to say that “*The programme demonstrated through independent evaluation the specific contribution made by technology in achieving the desired results. By understanding the audience and paying careful attention to scripting, learning of high relevance was provided to users through a medium rarely used for training*”

Vodafone Ireland commissioned Channel Content to create mobile learning video “nuggets” or clips to support training and knowledge retention for staff. A series of 25 video clips were delivered to learners’ mobile phones via the 3G network on completion of an instructor-led communication skills programme. These clips, primarily based on NLP techniques, delivered high quality video with audio and graphics to reinforce effective communication techniques in work based scenarios, thus providing a complimentary and convenient source of learning support to the classroom based workshops. From a subject matter perspective content was to be focussed on interpersonal communication skills including preparing for a meeting, planning a sales call and dealing with others, whether customers, colleagues or partners.

However, they also wanted to demonstrate that mobile phones could be used effectively to add an extra, PC-independent learning delivery model as part of their evolving e-learning strategy. Given the mobility of Vodafone Ireland employees, with their access to 3G compatible mobile phones and a 3G network, there was a clear opportunity to trial the mobile learning video nuggets concept.

The rationale for this initiative was that PC-based e-learning offered time and place independence, was very scalable and offered cost-effective learning delivery. And though Vodafone Ireland worked hard to successfully achieve high e-learning usage (>70%) at the desktop, they also wanted to demonstrate that mobile phones could be used effectively to add an extra, PC-independent learning delivery model as part of their evolving e-learning strategy.

The vision was to extend what was learnt in the workshops out into the real world. A familiar problem is that learners often complete a workshop with great enthusiasm and optimism, but then seem unable to put a lot of what they’ve learnt into practice, thus delivering real value. Consequently these video clips haven’t simply been developed as an afterthought, but as a part of a blended learning model to increase retention and the value of learning.

The whole idea is for users to review content when needed, thereby providing a 'performance support' capability. Specific examples have been users reviewing a video clip prior to making a sales call. Another reviewed content prior to an internal meeting, while another used a particular clip to help prepare for a difficult one-on-one meeting.

The creation of a flexible "anytime anywhere" Restless Learning Portal was part of the strategy to support maximum learning take-up and to enable employees to easily access the clips from 3G compatible mobile phones. However there had been no previous attempt or experience using mobile phones to access and deliver mobile learning within the organisation, so it was key that the developed solution would be embraced and fully utilised by the target audience.

This was the first mobile video and learning delivery project for Vodafone Ireland, as well as the first time that a blended approach of adding mobile learning to an instructor-led training programme had been tried. The team had to develop clips that would be optimised for mobile 3G delivery and could prove the value of mobile learning in a corporate training context. The approach has extending the reach, relevance and application of the learning and increased retention.

By providing a highly engaging flexible reinforcement opportunity of key skills including introduction, illustration of concepts and demonstration of their practical application, this initiative allowed Vodafone to extend the reach of e-learning for all employees from their desktop and laptop PCs, to mobile phones.

So what were the factors that really drove this project?

- There was a clear need to improve learning retention from time and location limited instructor led training.
- There was a desire to prove mobile learning effectiveness.
- There was an objective to deliver learning outside of normal class-room and e-learning contexts at a time and place where application of the specific skills was needed.

Once commissioned Channel Content scripted, storyboarded and shot the video 'nuggets' using actors and realistic workplace scenarios. Post-production included creation of voiceovers and addition of titles, backing track and graphics. Clips were delivered in .3gp format for mobiles and in other file formats and configurations for use on PCs, CD, DVD etc if required, thus broadening the flexibility of the project deliverables.

On completion of the instructor-led component of the training the target employees were given access to the clips via the mobile training portal. All videos were available for stream or download. Notification was by service message rather than text to highlight the URL automatically. The project was designed and delivered in an aggressive 6 week period.

Ken Maher, Learning Technologies Manager at Vodafone Ireland commented that:
"Focus group results confirmed that the important thing to bear in mind is that employees were able to do their job better as a direct consequence of viewing and

learning from these nuggets. By fully understanding our requirements and our time constraints, the project was well managed and delivered on time and on budget. The absence of any edits to the produced content is testament to the quality of the work undertaken”

User feedback has been very positive. The “headlines” report that:

- 87% of staff access the videos without any difficulty
- 77% felt that they were very useful for learning and retention
- Learner uptake rates exceeded desktop e-learning uptake
- Staff applied the learned techniques in their working lives.

This learning support delivery model was also very positively endorsed for other training needs with learners wanting more clips, more frequently and delivered on a learner subscription basis. Subsequently Vodafone Ireland adopted a similar video – based blended learning approach to support sales and customer service training.

What has been particularly pleasing to all those involved is that it’s opened the eyes to numerous possibilities. An intriguing factor to consider is that historically video production was often considered an expensive luxury, but the production cost model has been turned on its head with everyone potentially having the ability to create video content. However it should be emphasised that success depends on a clear understanding and analysis of the need, technology and audience, scripting, project management and a good client relationship.

This mobile learning initiative is an excellent example of seamlessly integrating traditional classroom based training with the use of technology to increase learning retention. It has provided flexible choices for employees at a time and place that suits them. In addition, it is connecting employees with the support, expertise and resources they need with immediate access to knowledge and information.