Facilitating with mobile apps can help you deliver stronger, more interactive training.

Tech Tools for Training

BY MICHELLE BAKER

Gone are the days when a trainer could list "Turn cellphones off" as one of the house rules in a training session. According to the Pew Internet Project, as of January 2014, 90 percent of American adults have a cellphone, 58 percent have a smartphone, and 42 percent own a tablet. Mobile devices have become so ubiquitous that it's difficult to remember what life was like before their existence.

The way we communicate has changed. The way we do business has changed. And, yes, the way we facilitate training has had to change as well. To stay relevant, we must learn how to use mobile technology to enable learning, rather than distract from it. It is possible to balance the connection to the device with the connection to the classroom.

DEVICES ALLOWED

Don't chuck the house rules

It is still a good idea to have a set of house rules that lay a foundation of respect among your participants. Rather than making a blanket no-devices rule, explain that devices are fine, so long as they do not distract participants from the training session.

Many people use their devices, particularly tablets, to take notes. Encourage participants to do this if they choose. Also, if you are planning to use devices during the session, let your participants know upfront. The more communicative you are in the beginning, the more likely your participants will be cooperative and engaged throughout your session.

Tools to get you started

You can use mobile technology to design and deliver more interactive training sessions. Below are my go-to tools.

Remind101. This is a free, one-way text-messaging service that can facilitate pre- and post-training communication. Create brief text messages to ask questions, share facts, or communicate logistics to your participants, and have them conveniently sent to their phones. Participants must opt in to receive messages, but you do not see their phone numbers, nor do they see yours.

Google Drive. This is a fantastic tool for uploading, creating, and sharing files. It's particularly useful for geographically distanced participants or virtual classroom environments because participants can use Google Drive to work on group projects remotely.

Recently, I was planning a conference workshop with a colleague who lives in another state. Since we were unable to meet in person to prepare for our session, we created a Google Doc to develop and edit our outline,

session agenda, and activity details. Since it was a living document, we were both able to access and make changes to it at any time.

Jing. Although it's not a mobile app, this free screencasting tool can facilitate learning by allowing you to capture what's on your computer screen and instantly share it as an image or video file. You can use it to create simple how-to video tutorials. It also can be used by learners to create a video to teach back what they learned in a training session and share it with others, or to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they acquired. This tool is consistently ranked highly among training professionals for its ease of use.

> FIND A TRAINING TOOL OR METHOD THAT WILL EASE THE LEARNING PROCESS, NOT COMPLICATE IT.

Evernote. For general note taking and resource gathering, Evernote is a powerhouse application. Participants can use it in the classroom to take notes, brainstorm ideas with small groups, and add photos or attachments to reference later. Evernote can be accessed from virtually any mobile device, making it a flexible tool for keeping learners and facilitators organized.

My Evernote account houses everything from ideas and notes when I brainstorm, workshop outlines and agendas, and notes from meetings and sessions I attend. Even my blog posts are drafted there. It is my favorite tool for creating new content and keeping it accessible.

PollEverywhere. This resource is quickly becoming a perennial favorite among facilitators. Create a customized poll to survey your audience on training-related topics during a session, and encourage participants to text in their votes. Poll results are displayed in real time through the PollEverywhere website (or an easy PowerPoint integration), so participants can see (anonymously) what others in the session are saying. You can create multiple-choice or free-form text polls. PollEverywhere is free for up to 40 responses. It is a highly interactive tool that is simple to use.

Wunderlist. This intuitive task management tool allows you to create tasks and assign them to customized to-do lists, which are accessible across most devices. You also can share your to-do lists or assign tasks to others on your team, and set up email or push notification reminders to keep everyone on track. My team relies on this tool to stay organized as we juggle training projects and other priorities.

Twitter. If you are active on Twitter and attend a conference, you may notice other attendees tweeting insights using the event's designated hashtag. A hashtag (the # symbol with a keyword or phrase following it) is used to categorize tweets by keyword. Consider using your own hashtag to allow your training participants to engage with one another on Twitter.

LinkedIn and Facebook. Establish a private group on these platforms to enable participants to connect with one another and continue the conversation before, during, and after a training event. These platforms can be a great outlet for asking and answering questions, collaborating, idea- and resource-sharing, or simply for building relationships.

DEVICES ALLOWED

When technology backfires

Although technology can significantly enhance training, it also can detract from it if used inappropriately. Maintaining focus on your audience is critical when introducing technology into the session. Consider these questions when you conduct your needs assessment:

- What are the roles, skill levels, and education levels of the participants? How do they use technology in their jobs?
- What do they need to gain from the session? Identify specific, measurable objectives when you answer this question.
- How will the technology enhance the learning experience and meet the participants' needs? Again, be specific when you answer this question. You also can phrase it as: How will the participants be disadvantaged by not using the technology?

Don't force the use of tech tools. Facilitating with a cool app just for the sake of it won't necessarily benefit learners. It's important to find a training tool or method that will ease the learning process, not complicate it. If you have to take more than a few minutes away from teaching the course content to teach your participants how to use a certain technology, it probably isn't worth it.

Also, the use of technology for an exercise should be optional for your participants. Always have a nontechnical alternative available to engage your participants who are uncomfortable with a tool, or simply do not have the means of using it.

The tech-challenged trainer

The tools discussed here, and many others like them, are more accessible and intuitive than you may think. New applications are launched every day, many of which could easily be integrated into your facilitation repertoire. What's the key? Baby steps. Play around with some of these tools, and find what works for you and your own facilitation style.

As your comfort level increases, reach out to learn what your colleagues are using. LinkedIn groups, Twitter, and your local ASTD chapter are great resources for connecting with other like-minded professionals.

With a little practice, your competence in facilitating with technology will increase, resulting in a more engaging, interactive experience for your learners.

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