

In the Classroom 95

11 Ways to Make Your Course Mobile Friendly

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Stan Skrabut: Thanks a lot for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. You can be doing other things, but you're hanging out with me and I really do appreciate it. According to recent studies reported in EDUCAUSE, over 75% of your students are using mobile devices for their coursework. The big question is, is your course content mobile friendly? Do you even know how to make your course content mobile friendly? Have you ever checked to see if your content is mobile friendly?

Students are not looking for instructors to redesign their whole course to increase all the activities that use mobile devices, but they do want to be able to consume the content on a mobile device. When we're talking mobile devices, we're talking about smartphones, we're talking about iPads, we're talking about tablets, those kinds of devices. They want to be able to pull their phone out of their pocket and be able to do things in the moment. That's the idea of really anywhere, any time, any place, type of learning.

When students are using their devices, according to Wiley Education Services, students use their phones to do quick tasks, like check on grades. They can communicate with the class, sending text messages. They check on assignments. They want to know if they're on schedule, but they also consume content. They usually do this when they're doing other tasks. They could be doing their laundry and trying to do schoolwork. They could be sitting on an athletic bus going to a sporting event and trying to do their homework, or at least consume content. They could be on commutes.

There are a lot of adult learners who are out there doing commutes. They could be trying to consume content. If your content is not mobile friendly, you're actually hindering them in their ability to do their coursework. The fixes are actually pretty simple. There's many ways that you can go and make your course content mobile friendly. I'm going to share 11 of those different ways with you.

Number one, get to know your students. Find out what type of devices that they're using, what type of content that they're trying to access, and see if you can redesign your content to cater to how they are doing that. In the past, I talked about universal design for learning and this idea of plus one thing, where you can go in, and if you have text-only content, maybe that you create an audio file, or that you have a video file. Or if you have a video file, how can you get a transcript that students can look at on their phones, but you have to know what your students are doing and how they're doing it, and what type of devices. That's number one.

Number two, review your course through a mobile device. Have you ever looked at your course through your phone or through your iPad? Are you able to get to all the

content easily? Are you able to consume that content? If you haven't done this, I would encourage you to do so. When you do this, see how easy it is to view all your content. Any content that you can't view easily, you need to reformat it to a method that is mobile friendly.

Number three, build your courses in modules. Another way to make content mobile friendly is to chunk your content and logically organize it into modules. Use a lot more white space. That way you're breaking things up. Trying to read content on a mobile device is tough, especially if there's large blocks of texts. That can be really difficult. Break it up, try to use smaller paragraphs. The paragraph may only be a sentence, but break it up so it's easier to consume.

Number four, use file types that are mobile friendly rather than upload proprietary files like Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint, try to use native texts in the learning management system because not everyone has Microsoft Word on their phone, and that they have viewers that they can look at this information. You want to try to use HTML or web code, basically, type it into your LMS, your learning management system.

PDF is certainly another way, but on a phone that can be hard. If you've ever brought up a document and you had to use your fingers to stretch it, and then you move things side to side so you're trying to read it, you understand how difficult it is to read. You want something that will adapt to the different devices, the size of the screen, and make it adapt, and HTML will do that. You can also use web-based platforms like Google apps to natively place your documents. That's another way that you can do that.

Number five, use streaming services to deliver your content. Don't put your videos directly on your learning management system. It takes forever to download them. Instead, put them on a streaming server like YouTube or Vimeo. Those different types of services are dedicated to streaming video and it is a better platform for that type of content. Don't put the videos directly up there. It does not create a better experience.

Number six, include file size information as part of the information that you're sharing. Because of data limits, it is a good practice to identify the size of the file as part of the file name or the description. Students may elect to retrieve that content on another device like a computer rather than eat up precious data. Try to identify if you know how big a file is.

Number seven, use multimedia. Make content easy for students to consume as they're doing other tasks, such as laundry, working out, or commuting. If they're working out and they can listen to you like a podcast, like you're listening to me, or while they're on a commute, you're able to listen to me, try to do that for your students. Create audio or video content as alternatives to textual content. This happens to be a wonderful universal design for learning strategy, as I already mentioned.

Number eight, avoid directional references. What I mean by that is you have to keep in mind that navigational aids are not the same on a phone as on a computer. When you're referring to a specific menu item by location, students are not able to locate it. What I'm saying is, if you tell them that the link is on the menu on the left, they don't have a menu on the left. Instead, hotlink to the content that you want them to go to. Try to make it as easy as possible for them to get to the content you want them to get to. Individuals working on a computer will be able to benefit from this, but the folks from a mobile device will really benefit from this.

Number nine, create mobile-friendly URLs. Rather than have a long web address that's just gobbledygook, create a mobile-friendly link. What I mean by that, if you've got a long link that takes them to your library resources, instead just say library resources and turn that into a hotlink going to that location. This happens to be an accessibility best practice also. Don't use these really long, ugly links when you can use plain texts and clean it up.

Avoid tables; tables for layout. I know you want to make things look nice and pretty, but it doesn't work on a mobile device. It doesn't work well. If you've got a table, it's going to try scrolling back and forth, you are disrupting something good because you're causing a frustration. You're letting technology get in the way of your content. Try to avoid tables. They don't format well on a mobile device.

Number 11, reduce the size of your files. If you're creating a PowerPoint, which certainly you can do, and you're using a lot of images, which I think you should be doing as I noted when I was talking about multimedia learning imagery, a lot of power to using imagery, get rid of the words, use a lot of imagery, but you need to reduce the size of those images. There's tools out there that will help you shrink those images, and you should resize them before using them. Otherwise, you're just going to bloat the size of your PowerPoint deck and make it take forever to download on a mobile device.

Those were 11 strategies to share with you.

1. Know your students.
2. Look at your course through a mobile device.
3. Build your course in modules, and use chunking.
4. Use file types that are mobile friendly.
5. Use streaming services to deliver content.
6. Include file size information.
7. Use multimedia.
8. Avoid directional references.
9. Create mobile-friendly URLs.
10. Avoid tables for layout
11. Reduce the size of your files.

Not hard things to do, and if you do them, your students will be certainly grateful that you have taken them into consideration.



If you want to know more about this, feel free to ask, send me a note, drop me a line. I'd be happy to do that, but like usual before I let you go, here's a quick plug for my book.