Mobile phones as learning devices: opportunity and challenges for digital content for students on the move

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Summary of presentation

• Trends in development
• Opportunities for usage in education
• Prevailing usage in learning
• Challenges
• Survey of applications in African universities
• UNISA library limited implementation
• Conclusion
Trends in growth

- Growth exceeds fixed lines by 60% (ITU 2006)
- Prevalence among young people
- Mobile kiosks
- Contributors to growth
  - By pass of fixed line limitations
  - Deregulation of telecoms
  - Affordability
Opportunity and possibility of usage in higher education

- *Just-in-time communication*
- *Appropriate Content*
- *Social space and educational space*
- *Students are technology able*
- *Reaching remote students*
Prevailing usage of mobile phones in learning

- United States
  - Balas (2006); Lever and Katz (2007)
- United Kingdom
  - Walton et al (2005)
- South Africa
  - Ford and Batchelor (2006); Viljeon et al (2005)
- Nigeria
  - Adomi (2006)
Challenges

• Library Etiquette
• Financial prohibitions
• Network Coverage
• Lack of knowledge
• Size of screen
• Limited memory
Report of African Survey

- Survey objective: extent to which MP are used to support learning
- 40 University libraries surveyed
- 11 responded
  - 7 do not use mobile to deliver service
  - 3 do
  - 1 planning
Advantages of using service

• Ease of access to students
• Efficient way of reaching mobile student
• Flexibility
• Convenient for learners
• Quick reliable communication
• Improved circulation of books
Disadvantage of M-Phones

• Expensive to institution
• Expensive, not affordable by some students
• Unreliable network coverage
Application at Unisa

• The SMS service widely used to communicate with students

• Library service
  – Sms as a second layer communication to email
  – Web based service
    • Purchased software to configure webpage to mobile
      – E-journals
      – OPAC

• Evaluation
  – Implementation in 2008
  – Roll out and evaluation in 2009
Can it be done?

• Technology is available in both proprietary and open sources

• Is it necessary?
  – Access and support of students in distance learning is critical

• Is it affordable?
  – Private - public sector partnerships
  – Creative solutions that support learners
Conclusion

- ODL assists learners wherever they are
- Mechanism of working with what they have should be pursued
- Technology itself a tool not determinant
- Opportunity to deliver digital learning content just in time
- What informs process is philosophy, in our case social mandate
• Thank you for your attention.

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