Designing for a moving target

Designing an effective learning experience on a PDA in a wireless environment has forced a reexamination of the instructional design principles normally associated with the content development process, a team of instructional designers in Canada has concluded. The typical project management model that has been applied to face-to-face and elearning projects can’t be relied on for the emerging mlearning environment. Instructional design strategies have to be modified for a mobile learning environment that seems to be changing monthly.

Several significant issues are affecting the instructional designers responsibilities in the new mlearning world. Constantly changing PDA devices means that the potential of the technology platform is largely unknown and enormously difficult to design for. Uncertainties surrounding the type(s) of content that may or may not work on the market-ready PDAs impact on the choices available to the subject matter experts. While many of the learner and faculty support issues are similar, the complexities of these resources are increasing. And, of course, for many pilot exercises, the costs for mlearning production activities seem to be larger than for their elearning counterparts.

At the end of the day, how can the instructional design principles developed over the past few years be applied to a moving target? Moreover, how can student and faculty expectations for a satisfying and, ultimately, successful learning experience be met? These questions—along with the increasing importance of the development project team that involves content providers, SMEs and instructional designers—will be explored against the backdrop of a pioneering mlearning educational experience at two leading Canadian colleges.