

SumTotal Authoring Best Practices for Mobile Learning Content Development

As mobile connectivity continues its broad global reach, corporations like SumTotal are actively investigating how to deploy learning to mobile professionals. At SumTotal, we have released an update to our content authoring product, ToolBook, that enables the production of mobile learning for the Apple iPhone; with support for additional mobile devices to follow. While SumTotal obviously hopes the majority of corporations use ToolBook to create mobile learning, our intention is to provide helpful information to our industry, as a whole, on how to create effective learning for mobile devices.

When developing content for mobile learning, SumTotal suggests following these six guidelines:

Limit Graphical Content

With the tight mobile device screen being roughly a twelfth (or smaller) of a desktop screen, large-screen graphics not only increase load times, but also take up valuable space that is needed to display text, hyperlinks, and other important information.

Text Considerations

Text should be limited – briefer is better. Layout should be structured to avoid the need for scrolling. Thus, this involves breaking up text into smaller pieces/sections and linking to those smaller pieces, instead of putting a lot of text on one screen. Smaller fonts are also recommended. For example, Microsoft Windows Mobile standard is Tahoma with a point size of eight, which is an appropriate size for text viewed in the Apple iPhone's Safari Web Browser.

Limit the use of Data Entry

Since the keyboard is a limited size, input fields should be kept to a minimum to reduce the amount of typing. Where possible, provide possible text or phrases to avoid needing the user having to type. These text items should have a hyper-link associated with them to serve as an easy way for users to select them, rather than their having to type them on the keyboard.

Utilize Empty Space

Another design guideline is to utilize screen space. Avoid excessive horizontal and vertical spacing between screen elements. Unlike designing a print ad or brochure, you don't need a lot of "white space" on mobile device's screen.

Place Non-Essential Links at the Bottom of the Screen

Hypertext links that are not relevant to the information being displayed should be placed at the bottom of the page to preserve space. This places critical information in the user's view upon entry to the screen or page. For example, a navigation menu that would normally be on the left or top of the screen of a desktop computer should be placed at the bottom of the screen for a mobile device.

Media Consideration

Another matter of importance is the types of media – audio and video – delivered. Generally, this is specific to the mobile device. For example, Windows Mobile devices typically support MPEG and MP3 files, whereas the iPhone currently only supports QuickTime.

To summarize, a developer should consider the overall goal of delivery of information via a mobile device. Not all types of information, media, and training materials lend themselves to this form of delivery. With careful planning, developers should be able to craft and deploy a wide variety of content to help those learners who are on the go.

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