
Bridging the mobile skills gap for library staff

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OVERVIEW



One of the aims of the University of Glasgow Library's mobile strategy is to support the skills development of users in their increasing use of mobile devices. A key component in this support is library staff, but many of them indicated a lack of confidence about operating in the mobile environment. As a direct response, a staff training programme was developed and is currently being rolled out to all library staff.

STRATEGY

At Glasgow, we have a well-established mobile strategy, with a number of high-level aims across a range of activities: information gathering, device testing, mobile-friendly services, library infrastructure, communications and digital skills. Development across all these areas is coordinated by the library's Mobile Technologies Group through a series of annual work plans. The original focus of the digital skills strand was on library users and was based on an assumption that library staff would be able to support them. However, at a series of drop-in events designed to engage library staff with the mobile strategy and to introduce them to a wide range of mobile devices bought by the library, it became apparent that familiarity and knowledge of the technology was not widespread. At this point, our focus changed and a Digital Media Skills subgroup was

established with the specific remit of addressing the mobile skills gap among library staff.

TRAINING MODEL

The group comprised six members from different areas of library service, with differing levels of experience of both mobile technology and developing training. A variety of different training models was considered, but the 23 Things blog concept developed by the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County sparked the idea of concentrating on 23 discrete aspects of mobile technology. We felt that we might need more functionality than is usual with other 23 Things models, in how the content was delivered. As a result, what emerged was a hybrid model. Course content was written for and hosted in our VLE, Moodle. A dedicated blog, using WordPress, was established to support online interaction visible only to participants. In addition to the online elements of the training, we wanted participants to have an opportunity to come together for what we called the Live Lab session. This was a concept that had been established early in the mobile strategy. As well as a dedicated space with good wifi, it includes a range of library-purchased mobile devices across a range of operating systems which library staff can borrow to test resources (e.g. mobile databases), take to conferences or just to take home and try out. As part of 23 Things Mobile, the Live Lab would allow participants to come together in small groups to try out a range of activities with the devices, which would reinforce the online elements of the course. We retained the original 23 Things model of offering incentives in the form of small prizes for completing activities throughout the course.

COURSE CONTENT

A decision was taken that the programme would focus on mobile technology in general and not solely on its application to libraries, although where appropriate, the library's own mobile initiatives would be highlighted. The aim was to develop skills generally in order to increase confidence and familiarity with all aspects of the mobile environment. It was hoped that this would allow individuals to transfer this knowledge into the workplace and give them the confidence to support the ever-increasing number of mobile users.

The course content was created in-house and is grouped together around a number of themes: devices and operating systems, the mobile

infrastructure, apps, communications and online content (e-books, music, video, games, etc). It is delivered as a mixture of text, images, video, audio, presentations and quizzes. We tried to ensure that we were accommodating different learning styles and that the content was visually appealing. Content in the Moodle was created to be accessible from both a desktop PC and mobile devices. The choice of WordPress for the blog was specifically because of its free mobile app, which was not available with Moodle. Much of the content was written by group members but we also incorporated content from a wide range of external sources. We used existing content from the university website as well as from the websites of commercial mobile suppliers such as Apple, Android & Windows, and comparison websites such as uswitch.com. We used video clips from commercial suppliers and from YouTube, and illustrated many of the 'things' by linking to twitter feeds, blogs and other social media sites.



Fig. 1

PILOT

As this type of self-directed online training had never been attempted by the library before, we tested the content and style of delivery in a small pilot. The 23 pilot participants came from a range of library departments and grades and with varying levels of mobile experience. The pilot started with a short briefing session by group members and ran for ten weeks between July and September 2012, with the hands-on Live Lab session taking place in week 7. Engagement was monitored from data available from the VLE and the blog. Feedback was gathered using a variety of methods at the end of the course: via an online survey, through a number of interviews with individual participants and at a group prize-giving event.

Reassuringly, 100% of participants said that they would recommend the course to a colleague and in response to questions about course content, 90% indicated that it was pitched 'just right'. The most popular element of the course was the Live Lab session in week 7: *'I like the idea of getting mixed groups of people together and letting them have the space to play around.'* Several respondents asked for more of this type of activity during the course, while others recommended that more support should be available during the Live Lab session.

The most common complaint was difficulty in finding time to do the course alongside other work requirements. This was particularly true of the final weeks of the pilot course in September 2012, as it coincided with the start of the new academic session.

Following on from the pilot, the course was approved by library senior management and has now become a mandatory training requirement for all library staff. It is currently being rolled out in a number of tranches, with 40 staff per tranche, to all daytime staff in the first instance. How we deliver the programme to our evening and weekend staff will be the next challenge and may involve a revision of the content delivery.

COURSE ROLL-OUT

Based on pilot group feedback, a number of changes to course content and delivery have been made. The course structure has changed to incorporate an additional group session in week 0, taking the form of a presentation from 23 Things Mobile programme co-ordinators and covering the first 2 things: 'Meet the geek' overview of the course and an introduction to blogging. This gives participants an opportunity to meet with each other and the programme co-ordinators. The overall course length has been reduced by one week and the Live Lab session comes slightly earlier in week 5. Content has also been updated to reflect changes in technology since the pilot; for example, the wider availability of 4G and the rise of the phablet! To encourage better interaction, content is being released on a week-by-week basis. In the pilot, the whole course was available to everyone, which meant that some participants raced ahead and did several blocks of the course in one go while others systematically worked through week by week. In practice, this meant that participants were working on different things at different times and this had a big impact on the effectiveness of the blog as a tool to encourage interaction and engagement. The other major change was that participants were given the assurance that where required, one hour per week could be specifically timetabled for this training activity, and that this would have the full support of their line managers. This change was a direct response to the negative feedback highlighted by some participants during the pilot about not having enough time to complete each week's content due to pressure of work.

The content is now broadly grouped as:

- **Devices** phones, tablets
- **Networks** wifi, 3G/4G, the cloud
- **Applications** mobile web, apps, QR codes
- **Communicating** blogs, text / instant messaging, email, Facebook, Twitter
- **Library stuff** ebooks, ejournals, mobile databases
- **Fun stuff** Live Lab, music, photos / videos, gaming
- **Other** mobile futures, 23 Things quiz

The screenshot displays the course content organized into four weekly sections:

- Week one - devices**
 - thing 3: smartphones - smarter than your average phone
 - thing 4: tablets & phablets - not a bitter pill to swallow
 - thing 5: mobile web - find out why the mobile web is different
- Week two - networks, the infrastructure that mobile tech relies on**
 - thing 6: wifi - connecting without wires
 - thing 7: 3G/4G - connecting without wifi
 - thing 8: the cloud - what's that fluffy thing?
- Week three - apps & QR codes**
 - thing 9: apps - is there really an app for everything?
 - thing 10: QR codes - what are those funny big barcodes?
- Week four - communicating**
 - thing 11: texting and instant messaging - let's talk
 - thing 12: email - let's talk for longer
 - thing 13: twitter - let's keep it short
 - thing 14: facebook - how many friends do you have?

Course outline

The Moodle content and blog remain open to all previous participants. This allows them to refresh their knowledge as content changes and keep updated with the library's mobile initiatives.

ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT

Following the pilot, three members of Digital Media Skills Group continued their involvement with the roll-out as programme co-ordinators. Responsibilities include:

- updating the content as required
- delivery of the week 0 introductory sessions (3 sessions per tranche)
- enrolment of participants to the blog and the Moodle
- providing day-to-day support in person and via the blog
- organisation and support for Live Lab sessions (5 sessions per tranche)

The amount of time and commitment required to deliver a staff training programme of this size and complexity in a large academic library is considerable. The expectation is that, in the future, colleagues who have been through the 23 Things Mobile course will be able to contribute to its ongoing administration and provide support for current participants. Some have already taken

the opportunity to become 'geek buddies' and are actively engaged in the 23 Things Blog and are also providing invaluable support during the Live Lab sessions. We hope that as the pool of staff completing the course increases, more 'geek buddies' will emerge and will not only contribute to the administration of and support for 23 Things Mobile, but will also become involved with updating content.

EARLY INDICATIONS

The first tranche of 40 staff, post-pilot, are coming to the end of the course. It has been completed by 100% of the participants and there have been high levels of interaction in the blog about the course and other aspects of mobile technology. Commentary from participants has ranged from device advice, giving tips about useful apps, environmental concerns about phone production and recycling, ideas about library services for mobile, and many pictures of cats! We ran five very successful and enjoyable Live Lab sessions (eight participants per group). Participants had the chance to use different types of devices and to try out a range of activities such as a QR code quiz, experiencing some interactive e-books and a photo-sharing competition that was uploaded to the blog. There were also opportunities to try out some apps that had been highlighted during the course and to explore the wonderful world of mobile gaming!



thing 15 : Live Lab

By now, you will have signed up for a Live Lab session! The Live Lab is your opportunity to play around with some of the devices that the Library has and to experience some of the 'things' that you've discovered so far. If you have your own device, feel free to bring that along.

This session is meant to be **fun** - no pressure whatsoever! Just relax and enjoy the time away from your desk.



At your session start time, come to the MacKenna Room (Level 7 of the Library). A member of the 23 Things Group will welcome you. There will be 'Geek buddies' on hand to offer support. We'll be suggesting some different activities to try out (and there will be prizes!), but you can also follow through on anything else that you've been wondering about, or wanting to try out, or happen to stumble upon during the session.

There will be a maximum of 8 people in the group, with different levels of experience. Share what you discover with the other participants. Help each other explore mobile. Who knows what you might find out!

And then - **important point** - tell everyone else about your experience on the [23 Things blog](#)



Fig. 3 Live Lab session

CONCLUSION

The early signs are that the course is helping to create a workforce that can contribute to the development of our mobile services and provide support for our mobile users. In a period when mobile devices are beginning to define the everyday experiences of our users, a skilled workforce that is confident and engaged with mobile technologies will be vital to the future success of the library service.

NOTE

- 1 <http://plcmclearning.blogspot.co.uk/>
[accessed 26.5.13]