

5 Things You Need to Know About Mobile Service Delivery:

Small is the next big thing

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The ubiquity of hand-held communications devices has been described as the revolution no one noticed, and it's time for the U of S to notice.

If you look around our campus you'll see students texting in classes, checking their email in the coffee line or making phone calls while waiting for their bus. Faculty and staff bring iPads to meetings and laptops are everywhere. Continuous connectivity has rapidly become an expectation of the campus community and while we have done well in supporting this expectation (for example, by expanding wireless coverage) there's still more to do. Since the technology is moving incredibly fast we need to get in the game now.

1. What is mobile?

Mobile is a new method of service delivery—anywhere, anytime, to devices that can be carried in your hand. Mobile devices may include smartphones, hand-held computers, iPads and other tablets, and even notebooks and laptops. People use mobile to keep in touch (maintain their social presence), to find information, to optimize schedules and decisions, and to navigate in their physical environment (using maps and other location information).



2. How is mobile different?

Methods for delivery of campus services to our students, faculty and staff have changed dramatically over time, with a profound shift roughly every decade. The emergence of the World Wide Web and browser technology moved us from in-person, face-to-face, 9-to-5 service to online self service around the clock. It was hard work to transform campus services such as registration, fee payment and library access from face-to-face interactions to online service delivery, but well worth the effort. With the unprecedented surge in mobile technology, it is time to revisit our service delivery model once again.

Mobile service delivery is significantly different from online service delivery. For example, people use mobile devices to perform very specific tasks, not to browse. Also, mobile users have little tolerance for delays of even a few seconds, so information must be distilled so that it can be presented quickly and succinctly.

3. Why is this significant?

Many have predicted that the mobile device will soon be the primary means of connection to the Internet for most people and market research regarding sales of mobile phones, particularly smartphones, supports this prediction. Demand for access to online services from mobile devices is increasing rapidly. As an illustration, more than 1,500 people signed up for the new PAWS text messaging service in the first week. The evidence strongly supports investment in mobile service delivery.

The quality of campus technology is an important factor for both students and faculty when choosing where they will work or study. In the increasingly competitive recruitment environment we must constantly think about how we position ourselves in the Canadian post-secondary market. Providing our services to mobile devices presents us as a forward-looking, innovative, dynamic and progressive institution.

4. Where is this going?

Mobile is not just about students, but that's a good place for us to begin since they have fully embraced the technology. As Tapscott and Williams observe¹, "To connect with today's youth, we need to move to a customized and collaborative model of education that embraces 21st century technology and techniques." Our institutional commitment to enhancing the student experience means meeting students in their world—providing our services where they already access other services. The Enrolment Action Plan asserts that our students are "accustomed to active

"The challenge is not to bring technology into the classroom. The millennials, with their Facebook and their cell phones, have done that. The challenge is to capture the power of technology to lower costs and improve learning for all."

David Wiley,
Brigham Young University,
September 2009

and engaged learning, and are completely comfortable in today's highly 'plugged in,' networked, and multi-tasking world." We can leverage the devices and experience they already have and take advantage of their appetite for new services.

My goal is to position the University of Saskatchewan as a leader in delivering institutional services to hand-held devices. Easy access to information and services is already changing the way we interact with each other, the way we teach and learn, and the way we do our

research. Embracing the mobile revolution for service delivery and e-learning will allow the U of S to extend learning beyond the classroom and service delivery beyond the Administration Building.

5. How are we getting there?

iUsask stands as a powerful demonstration of what can be done to deliver services that leverage the special features of mobile devices. ITS is now supporting this as an institutional service on Apple devices (iPhones and iPod Touches). Universities such as MIT, Stanford, Princeton, Harvard and Michigan have launched similar initiatives, so we're in good company. In this continuously evolving market, however, we must not only resource iUsask adequately but also provide iUsask-like capabilities on multiple platforms (such as Blackberry and Android) and support further development.

To both encourage mobile development and facilitate it I will be doing several things over the next few months. A recently created ICT Innovation Fund will stimulate new projects on campus and I have identified mobility as one of the two themes for the first call. I will be striking a cross-campus advisory committee to encourage broad input and broad participation. Since ITS will play a critical role I will be asking them for an action plan. We will look to them to provide the necessary ICT environment (wireless connectivity, authentication services, support across multiple mobile platforms, etc.) and establish design standards for effective delivery.

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