

# Mobilize Your Learning With Employee App Stores

BY GEOFF STEAD

Setting up an internal app store can reposition L&D at the center of your mobile ecosystem.

## CHECKLIST

### Technical Considerations

- Use an internal web-based app store for:
  - many types of mobile devices
  - mix of personal and corporate devices
  - many different apps and mobile websites
  - low- to medium-secure content
  - mix of supplier and internal content.
- Use an internal app-based store for:
  - high-secure content (normally not learning content)
  - tighter control of employee devices (allows for remote install and wipe).
- Use a public app store for:
  - single platform (Android or Apple iOS)
  - public supplier content only
  - no tracking or analytics.

Mobile learning has evolved rapidly, moving from novelty to an integral part of the learning ecosystem for many top learning organizations. According to the Brandon Hall Group's 2013 Mobile Learning Survey, 100 percent of top-performing companies are already using mobile learning.

So, how do you move from single, inspired use of mobile learning into a broader strategy? The answer might be easier than you think. By setting up an employee app store, you can support a much wider range of apps, gain new insight into employee needs, and increase employee engagement.

### What it is

Employee app stores allow companies to have their own, curated lists of recommended apps for all mobile operating systems. The apps themselves might be a mix of public and private/internal; free and for a fee.

### Why it works

Right now, employees already “self-serve” to find answers at work. They use Google, ask colleagues, and download apps from public app stores and use them on their personal phones to improve productivity. Sometimes this is officially endorsed, but more often than not it is “guerilla learning”—grabbing what they need when they need it, without the organization even knowing.

By setting up an employee app store of useful mobile apps and resources, you can quickly channel employees' energy and desire for better support into one common, managed space, which creates a gateway for mobile resources that your employees will help you curate and evaluate.

### Guidelines

Here are six steps to set up your own enterprise mobile app store.

**Start small: Develop a catalog of external apps, securely hosted.** Avoid the temptation to start developing apps. Rather, start by looking for useful, public apps to recommend to your employees. Set up an online catalog of recommended apps using whichever corporate tool you have access to (for example, Sharepoint or Drupal), and promote it to all relevant employees. At Qualcomm, we started with apps such as TED, Harvard Manage Mentor, Lynda, and FT.

The main technical consideration at this stage is about secure hosting. Your site needs to be mobile ready and accessible from outside your company without VPN, but ideally with your enterprise login. There often is a dedicated place in an enterprise network for this type of site, called a DMZ (demilitarized zone). This is where we host ours.

**Add your own content: Compile web apps.** Create mobile web content, upload it, and add it to your catalog. These can be simple html pages, or links to mobile-friendly media files, such as video, audio, PDFs, and e-books.

Working with a diverse range of internal stakeholders will create a wider variety of content and generate local champions who can help to promote the app store. We use a mix of internally created content and supplier-commissioned content. **Prepare for scale: Configure single sign-on for external suppliers.** App stores are about scalability. If you want to support 10, 100, or 1,000 employees, it is important to minimize the administration of managing external licenses. Your learners should be able to log in to any supplier app with their same enterprise login details. And if they leave the company, that login should gracefully expire.

This is called “single sign-on,” and any supplier that is serious about selling to the enterprise should be able to offer this. It will connect their app to your enterprise login service, and dramatically reduce your admin task.

**Monitor usage: Add analytics and support sharing.** To make strategic decisions about which apps to invest in, you will need some objective statistics about who is using what, on which type of device, and what they think of it. Analytics tools will help you track activity in your app store and understand what works and what needs improving.

Talk to IT to see what tools they already use. We used a combination of tools, including NetInsight, Google Analytics, QlikView, and Count.ly. Some of these are free. Note that Google Analytics only works for publicly visible apps.

**Streamline the process: Add enterprise features.** By this stage you have a fully functional app store. The next step is to streamline the process of making new content and managing workflow.

If you use a content management system for your store—for example, Drupal or Wordpress—you already will

have this. If not, you should start adding better authoring/search/content workflow and other similar features that streamline the process of creating and maintaining apps.

**Add richer app features: Build and deploy native apps.** Native apps offer a richer set of features than web apps, but are more costly to develop. If you need native apps you will need to sign a developer agreement with the appropriate company (Apple, Google, or Microsoft). If you use suppliers to build your apps, you may still need the developer agreement so it can “secure sign” the app with your ID.

## Results

The Qualcomm Employee App Store started with a focus on learning apps, but has rapidly grown to be the first port of call for all Qualcomm’s enterprise apps across all regions. This has been great for our L&D function because we have been able to reposition ourselves as the go-to team for all aspects of mobile enterprise productivity and support, not just traditional training.

Our employee app store is nearly one year old. More than 90 percent of our senior executives use it. Employees have been enthusiastic adopters of mobile, and increasingly use our social tools to share with colleagues links from it. We are gaining a new generation of learners who look for support and information in new ways and at any time of the day.

Einstein once said, “The world we have created is a product of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.” The time is right for new thinking, and enterprise mobile app stores are a powerful way for L&D to connect with current and future employees.

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## RESOURCES

ASTD. 2013. *Going Mobile: Creating Practices That Transform Learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASTD.

Qualcomm Employee App Store Video, [www.worklearnmobile.org/mobile-experts-category/app-stores](http://www.worklearnmobile.org/mobile-experts-category/app-stores).

Wentworth, D. 2013. *Mobile Learning 2013: Gaining Momentum*. Delray Beach, FL: Brandon Hall Group. <http://bit.ly/brandonhall13>.

WorkLearnMobile, [www.worklearnmobile.org](http://www.worklearnmobile.org); @WorkLearnMobile.

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