THE **RISE** OF THE
EMPLOYEE APP STORE

Qualcomm's Internal App Store has proven an effective way to embrace diversity and reach new learners – as we discovered on meeting Geoff Stead, the company's Head of Mobile Learning.

For many top learning organisations Mobile Learning has evolved rapidly, moving from a novelty to an integral part of the learning ecosystem. According to *Brandon Hall's mobile learning review*, 100% of the top performing companies are already undertaking mobile learning, and the higher up their performance ranking you look, the more m-learning you will find.

You might even be one of these companies; but how do you move from a single, inspired use of mobile into a broader strategy, and a more diverse range of employees? *Take a step back and allow the complexity and diversity of your business and employees to help.*

Employees already 'self-serve' to find out what they need to know at work: they use Google, ask colleagues, download apps from the public store for use on their personal phones to improve productivity. Sometimes this is officially endorsed, but more often than not it's 'guerrilla learning'. Grabbing what they need, when they need it!

These are some of the future skills we expect of 21st century employees, but this guerrilla learning often happens without any support, knowledge, or guidance. L&D departments are not always seen as the go-to place for these learners, who rely instead on their own resources, and networks to solve problems. They are mobile, connected, and proactively seeking solutions.

By setting up an employee-powered catalogue of useful mobile apps and resources it is possible to channel their energy, and desire for better support into one common, managed space.
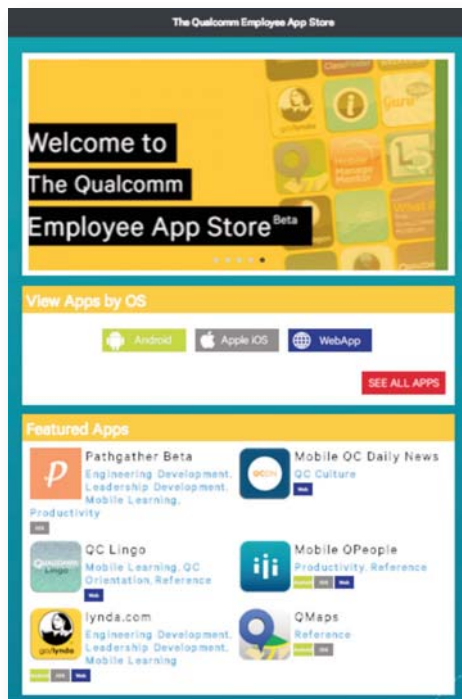
A GATEWAY FOR MOBILE RESOURCES

Qualcomm is a world leader in 3G, 4G and next-generation wireless technologies. The learning team supports all 30,000 employees around the world with a mix of face-to-face training, online courses, and a wide range of resources that include e-books, videos, podcasts and more. Eighteen months ago, employees looking to access these resources via mobile found they were limited to publicly available apps and content. Most of the internal content was locked away, and unavailable to mobile.

June 2013 saw the launch of the internal Employee App Store, a one-stop shop for ALL things mobile in the company – it has been a huge success says Geoff Stead, Head of Mobile Learning at Qualcomm. "There is now one central place to direct mobile employees, which has become the focal point for a range of mobile initiatives across the company.

"We have thousands of visitors a month, accessing a diverse range of apps. We don't limit our apps to 'learning', instead, we welcome any apps that helps to make work, and life, easier. Job aids. Useful reference guides. Employees recommend apps, and we've even discovered some super-stars who are writing apps for their colleagues."

The great thing about this approach is that local teams can find ways to solve their own problems, and then share them with the wider business. Some of the most popular apps started off with a simple question, like "How can I find out where Geoff Stead sits, from my phone?"

Along the way, the learning team has

broadened its impact, offering better support to guerrilla learners and showing them ways to help colleagues and share useful apps.

A NEW INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

The information architecture of public app stores is surprisingly unstructured. There are well over 1m apps on both Apple's AppStore, and Google Play, and despite their slick home pages, there is very little scaffolding underneath to guide you to the app you want. If you are looking for a note-taking app, there are thousands to pick from. You need to rely on user rankings, and recommendations to help you decide. In fact, you can even download apps that help you find other apps!

The way mobile users impose their own structure on this 'chaos' is interesting. In much the same way that 'Search' and 'Social' has come to dominate the way we navigate the web, we define our own, unique sense to apps by selecting only those that we want to use, and ordering them on our phones in a way that supports our needs. This is hard work but is valued, as it is a truly personal, customised collection of support tools (apps).

Contrast this to the traditional learning platform, with carefully curated, and structured content, and courses. Ironically, it should be easier to find information here, but if guerrilla learners are stuck with a problem, the LMS is likely to be the last place they look to find a solution.

"To connect successfully with the consumer-centric view your staff already have of their phones and apps, you need to consider a more open, self-serve informational model," says Stead. Enterprise App Stores offer a hybrid of these two ways of cataloguing content. Apps only get added if they are approved, but the aim is to offer many smaller apps for employees to choose from, rather than fewer, larger ones. This encourages user engagement and diversity while allowing some form of oversight, and broader understanding of what employees are doing on mobile.

MOBILE SECURITY? LEARNING CAN HELP LEAD THE WAY!

There are a growing number of suppliers who sell

Enterprise App Stores, but almost all have a strong focus on mobile security: how to control what employees have on their phone, and how to remote-wipe it if it is lost or stolen.

Security is certainly an issue with mobile, and accessing corporate data from mobile devices does add some risk. If you mention mobile and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies to your IT team, they are probably already working on managing the delicate balance of information security, and openness of access.

However, the great thing about learning content is that in almost all cases, the content itself does not need to be treated as highly secure. A course on better management is a much lower risk than, say, clients' financial data. This makes learning content easier to share to mobile, without needing a heavyweight security solution to protect it. If your phone is secure enough to pay bills, why not to access learning?

"We made an early decision to limit the content in our Employee App Store to low secure apps and content," says Stead. "Any employee can access the store and apps using only their normal login details. No extra security is required. This helps both ourselves and our IT team, as we could all get on with reaching out to as many employees (and their mobile devices) as possible, rather than imposing too many security restrictions. In parallel our IT team is exploring high-security app stores for