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They all have them – why not use them? Introducing mobile learning at the University of Huddersfield Library



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INTRODUCTION

Practically all our students seem to have mobile phones, constantly switched on, continually on their person – whatever warning signs we put up in our libraries! Thanks to the CILIP UC&R (University, College and Research Libraries) Group innovation award 2009, I've been investigating ways of using these near-ubiquitous devices to deliver information skills materials direct to our students.

LIBRARY TIPS BY TEXT MESSAGE

This autumn term (2009/10) we're using library inductions, e-mails to all students and various other promotional routes to encourage our first-year students to sign up to a series of library tips delivered by SMS (short message service, or 'text message') directly to their phones. This will reinforce the messages we give in our face-to-face inductions as well as on our online induction web pages, 'The Basics' (<http://www.hud.ac.uk/cls/thebasics>). Many of the messages link to online materials, including pages on 'The Basics' site as well as specially produced mobile-friendly video.

They'll be able to register for this service by sending a text message to an online SMS portal. We'll then send out a welcome message, followed by a series of ten text messages lasting through the

term. A final message will ask for feedback on the service. If you'd like to see what our new students are getting, you can register yourself and I'll send you all of them in one go! Just text HUDUNI LIB SCONUL FOCUS to 81025 and I'll reply with the full content straight away. The text messages are free to receive and will cost the subscriber just their normal network rate for a text message for the initial message to us. For the full series of ten messages, an introductory welcome message and a message asking for feedback at the end, it will cost us as a library service roughly 51 pence per subscriber.

The text messages will include a range of advice on subjects including renewing books; using printers and photocopiers; accessing their work from home; and getting onto metalib (our gateway to electronic resources). We've aimed to make sure that these are delivered at the time they are most needed, so the message on renewing books comes in week three, when typically most new students will need to renew their books for the first time, whereas accessing electronic resources is one of the final text messages.

A typical message would look like the example below and contains advice and a link to a web page or other online resource, all within 160 characters:

'Are your books due back and you still want to keep them? Try renewing them over the catalogue (<http://webcat.hud.ac.uk>) or on the self-service machines.'

OTHER MOBILE-FRIENDLY MATERIAL

While the text messages are ephemeral, as part of the project we are creating mobile-friendly materials to sit within our online induction website, 'The Basics'. These will be optimised for viewing or listening to on mobile devices, but will also be suitable for viewing from any internet-enabled device such as your desktop computer. The first materials to be produced are videos in a range of mobile-friendly formats and are already hosted on MoleTV (<http://www.moletv.org.uk/>) at the time of going to press and can be found by searching for the keyword 'Huddersfield'. However, all the materials we produce will be linked to, or hosted on, 'The Basics' web pages (<http://www.hud.ac.uk/cls/thebasics>) by September 2009.

EVALUATION

Though most of our students seem inseparable from their mobile phones, we aren't sure how

useful they'll find either the text messages or the other mobile-friendly materials. Though teaching via SMS messages has been tried elsewhere, such as for teaching Italian vocabulary,¹ and library services are increasingly introducing 'text a librarian' services,² such as the recently launched My InfoQuest service (<http://www.myinfoquest.info/>), I'm not aware of any other library services pushing teaching materials via SMS directly to their users.

We're making sure, therefore, to evaluate carefully the success of the text tips service and other associated materials and we intend to publish the full results late in 2010. We'll invite everyone who subscribed to the text tips service to send feedback, but we'll also select a sample of subscribers and invite them to give us more detailed feedback, on both the text tips service and the range of mobile-friendly materials we've produced. We'll also keep track of the usage of these mobile-friendly materials amongst the more general materials on our web pages, to investigate which materials are being accessed and which are relatively neglected.

We're also keen on finding out if anyone else has been introducing mobile-friendly teaching materials in their libraries (other than the now widespread podcasts!), so please get in touch if you are doing so.

REFERENCES

- 1 M. Levy and C. Kennedy, 'Learning Italian via mobile SMS', in A. Kukulska-Hulme and J. Traxler, eds., *Mobile learning: a handbook for educators and trainers*, London; Routledge Education, 2005
- 2 S. Herman, 'SMS reference: keeping up with your clients', *The electronic library*, 25 (4), 2007, pp 401-8