

Mobile Business Communication: A Monumental Shift in the Way People Are Communicating by Bovée & Thill

As another disruptive technology transforms business communication, authors Bovée & Thill again lead the field with exclusive, groundbreaking coverage of mobile business communication in the newest editions of their textbooks. This infographic is a preview of just some of the topics they cover.

How Mobile Technology Is Changing the Practice of Business Communication

Mobile plays an important role in efforts to reduce operating costs through telecommuting and other nontraditional work models.¹

Mobile form factors present challenges for creating and consuming content, whether it's typing an email message or watching a video. Email messages on mobile devices need to be written and formatted differently to make them easier.

Mobile users are often multitasking—roughly half of mobile phone usage happens while people are walking, for instance—so they can't give full attention to the information on their screens.²

Mobile communication, particularly text messaging, has put pressure on traditional standards of grammar, punctuation, and writing in general.

Mobile devices can serve as sensory and cognitive extensions.³ They can help people experience more of their environment (such as augmented reality apps that superimpose information on a live camera view). The addition of *location-aware content*, such as facility maps and property information, enhances the mobile experience.

Mobile devices create a host of security and privacy concerns.⁴ Companies are wrestling with the “bring your own device” or “BYOD” phenomenon, in which employees want to be able to access company networks and files with their personal smartphones and tablets, both in the office and away from it.

Mobile tools can enhance productivity and collaboration by making it easier for employees to stay connected and giving them access to information and work tasks during forced gaps in the workday or while traveling.⁵

Mobile apps can assist in a wide variety of business tasks, from research to presentations.⁶

Mobile connectivity can accelerate decision making and problem solving. People in a meeting can do research on the spot.⁷ It’s also easier to quickly tap into pockets of expertise within a company.⁸ Customer service can be improved by making sure technicians have the information they need always at hand.⁹

With interactivity designed to take advantage of the capabilities of mobile devices (including cameras, accelerometers, compasses, and GPS), companies can create more engaging experiences for customers and other users.¹⁰

Proper Business Etiquette Using Mobile Devices

Selecting obnoxious ring tones, talking loudly in open offices or public places, invading someone's privacy by using your phone's camera without permission, texting during a meal or while someone is talking to you—these are all disrespectful choices that will reflect negatively on you.¹¹

Tweeting key points from a convention speech or using your phone or tablet to jot down essential ideas and follow-up questions can be productive and respectful ways to use a device during a meeting. Checking Facebook or working on unrelated tasks are not.¹²

Virtual assistants, such as the Siri voice recognition system in Apple iPhones, raise etiquette dilemmas. From doing simple web searches to dictating entire memos, these systems may be convenient for users, but they can create distractions and annoyances for other people.¹³

Unique Challenges of Communication on Mobile Devices

Screen size and resolution. Many messages are significantly larger than the screens they will be viewed on. Readers can zoom in to make text readable and visuals understandable, but particularly on phone screens, the inability to see an entire document page or visual at once can limit a reader's ability to grasp its full meaning.

Input technologies. Even for accomplished texters, typing on mobile keyboards can be a challenge. Voice recognition is one way around the keyboard limitation. Even with a

stylus, selecting items on a touchscreen can be more difficult than doing so on a PC screen using a mouse.

Bandwidth, speed, and connectivity limitations. The speed and quality of mobile connectivity varies widely by device, carrier, service plan, and geographic location. Mobile users can lose connectivity while traveling, passing through network “dead spots,” or during peak-demand hours or events (such as trade shows and conventions).

Data usage and operational costs. As the amount of video traffic increases (video requires much higher bandwidth than text or audio), data consumption is becoming a key concern. Some carriers offer unlimited data plans, but even those can come with restrictions such as bandwidth throttling that reduces the speed of a user’s connection.¹⁴

Writing for Mobile Devices

Use a linear organization. With small mobile device screens, a complicated organization requires readers to zoom in and out and pan around to see all these elements at readable text sizes. This makes reading slower and raises the odds that readers will get disoriented and lose the thread of the message because they can’t see the big picture.

Prioritize information. Small screens make it difficult for readers to scan the page to find the information they want most. Prioritize the information based on what you know about their needs and put that information first.¹⁵ Use the *inverted pyramid* style in which

you reveal the most important information briefly at first and then provide successive layers of detail that readers can consume if they want.

Write shorter and more-focused messages and documents. Mobile users often lack the patience or opportunity to read lengthy messages or documents, so keep it short.¹⁶ In some cases, this could require you to write two documents, a shorter *executive summary* for mobile use and a longer supporting document that readers can access with their PCs if they want more details.

Use shorter subject lines and headings. Mobile devices, particularly phones, can't display as many characters in a single line of text as the typical computer screen can. A good rule of thumb is to keep subject lines and headlines to around 25 characters.¹⁷ This doesn't give you much text to work with, so make every word count.¹⁸

Use shorter paragraphs. Paragraphs have a visual role in written communication as well. Shorter paragraphs are less intimidating and let readers take frequent "micro rests" as they move through a document. Because far less text is displayed at once on a mobile screen, keep paragraphs as short as possible so readers don't have to swipe through screen after screen before getting to paragraph breaks.

Designing for Mobile Devices

Think in small chunks. Remember that mobile users consume information one screen at a time, so try to divide your message into independent, easy-to-consume bites. If readers have to

scroll through a dozen screens to piece together your message, they might miss your point or just give up entirely.

Make generous use of white space. White space is always helpful, but it's critical on small screens because they are trying to get the point of every message as quickly as possible. Keep your paragraphs short (4–6 lines) and separate them with blank lines so the reader's eyes can easily jump from one point to the next.¹⁹

Format simply. Avoid anything that is likely to get in the way of fast, easy reading, including busy typefaces, complex graphics, and complicated layouts.

Consider horizontal and vertical layouts. Most phones and tablets can automatically rotate their screen content from horizontal to vertical as the user rotates the device. A layout that doesn't work well with the narrow vertical perspective might be acceptable at the wider horizontal perspective.

Optimizing Content for Mobile Devices

Location-based services. *Location-based social networking* links the virtual world of online social networking with the physical world of retail stores and other locations.

As mobile web use continues to grow, location-based networking promises to become an important business communication medium because mobile consumers are a significant economic force—through the purchases they make directly and through their ability to influence other consumers.²⁰

Gamification. The addition of game-playing aspects to apps and web services, known as *gamification*, can increase audience engagement and encourage repeat use. Examples include Foursquare’s “check-in” competitions and Bunchball’s Nitro competitions for sales teams.²¹

Augmented reality. Superimposing data on live camera images can help mobile consumers learn about companies and services in the immediate vicinity. Other potential business uses include on-the-job training, in which training content is provided as workers are learning or performing various tasks.

Wearable technology. From virtual-reality goggles to smartwatches to body-movement sensors, wearable technology pushes the radical connectivity of mobile to the next level. Some of these work as auxiliary screens and controls for other mobile devices, but others are meant for independent use. One of the key promises of wearable technology is simplifying and enhancing everyday tasks for consumers and employees alike (Footnote)

Mobile blogging. Smartphones and tablets are idea for mobile blogs, sometimes referred to as *moblogs*. The mobile capability is great for workers whose jobs keep them on the move, and for special-event coverage such as live-blogging trade shows and industry conventions.

Mobile podcasting. Similarly, smartphone-based podcasting tools make it easy to record audio on the go and post finished podcasts to your blog or website.

Cloud-based services. Mobile communication is ideal for cloud-based services, digital services that rely on resources stored in the cloud.

Do Research on the Go with Mobile Devices

Mobile surveys. Tablets with interactive software can replace the clipboards long used by researchers for “mall intercept” surveys and other efforts to collect data from shoppers.

Collecting and sharing. Collaborative apps such as Pearltrees make it easy to collect online information and organize it across multiple devices, then connect with relevant information collected by other users.

Note-taking. Evernote, OneNote, and other note-taking apps simplify the process of compiling notes, webpages, photos, and other pieces of research.

Sketching. Sometimes a simple picture is more powerful than words or photos. With touchscreen apps on phones and tablets, researchers can quickly sketch maps, process diagrams, and other visuals on the spot.

Audio, photo, and video recording. Whether it's snapping images of street scenes for a report on potential store locations or recording test subjects using a new product prototype, the audiovisual capabilities of today's mobile devices give researchers a host of new tools.

Document scanning. Scanning apps let researchers record and organize images of documents that can't be removed from their storage locations.

Real-time thoughts and impressions. Asking survey subjects to record information on their mobile devices while they are observing store displays or making purchase decisions enhances classic research methods. With their mobile phones in hand, shoppers can describe their impressions and decisions on the spot, and even take photos of displays that caught their eye.

Job Search Strategies: Maximize Your Mobile

The mobile business communication revolution is changing the way employers recruit new talent and the way job candidates look for opportunities. Many companies have optimized their careers websites for mobile access, and some have even developed mobile apps that offer everything from background information on what it's like to work there to application forms that you can fill out right on your phone.

Integrating a mobile device into your job search strategy can help with networking and staying

on top of your active job applications. For instance, some companies don't wait long after extending an offer; if they don't hear from the top candidate in a short amount of time, they'll move on their next choice. By staying plugged in via your mobile device, you won't let any opportunities pass you by.

Think of ways to use your mobile device to enhance your personal brand and your online portfolio. Many of the tools you can use to build your personal brand are available as mobile apps, including blogging platforms, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Dozens of apps are available to help with various aspects of your job search. Résumé-creation apps let you quickly modify your résumé if you come across a good opportunity. Business-card scanning apps make it easy to keep digital copies of business cards, so you'll never lose important contact information. Note-taking apps are a great way to plan for interviews and record your post-interview notes.

Use your phone's scheduling capability to make sure you never miss an interviewing or a filing deadline. Polish your interviewing skills with your phone's audio and video recording features or a practice-interview app. If an employer wants to interview you via Cisco Webex or another online meeting system, those apps are available for your phone or tablet as well.

Instructions to Designer: Create art for each of these items:

By 2017, mobile subscriptions are expected to top 10 billion. That works out to 1.4 devices for every person expected to be on Earth at that time (7.6 billion).²²

By 2014, mobile Internet usage will overtake desktop Internet usage.²³

By 2014, 91% of adults who have a mobile phone will have it within arm's reach.²⁴

By 2015, it's predicted that mobile shopping by way of smartphones will account for \$163 billion in sales worldwide.²⁵

By 2019, half of today's smartphone users will be using their smartphone mobile wallet as their preferred method of payment.²⁶

"Are you going to adopt a modern textbook with extensive integration of mobile business communication in every chapter, or are you going to saddle your students with one of the commonly adopted business communication texts that are stuck in the last decade?"

Only Bovee & Thill cover mobile business communication, and they do it in every chapter.

Available January 2015

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Instructions to Designer: Put these sources in as small type as possible, but readable.

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