Mobile Strategy: Preliminary Research Brief

To gain an understanding of the components for a mobile strategy from the customer perspective, interviews and focus groups of customers are being conducted. To date, over 60 individual interviews and three focus groups have taken place across multiple units of campus. Individuals include a range of staff, faculty, students, and alums across campus and in Austin. Two of the focus groups were comprised wholly of students (16 in one group, 12 in a second) and one was comprised of faculty (13 participants). A majority of participants were under the age of 40. Participants were asked to address five different questions related to mobile including questions detailing their individual use of mobile devices, useful functionalities, unusable/disruptive functionalities, needs and vision for a mobile University, in addition to use of the UT App and the UT Mobile web.

Use of Mobile Device
Nearly one hundred percent of those interviewed responded that the three primary uses of their mobile device included:
--Calendar and schedule (in addition to contacts)
--Email
--Maps

Preliminary results suggest that secondary uses of mobile devices include:
--News
--Facebook/Twitter/Social Media
--Score Updates
--YouTube

Reading a PDF, book, or news, engaging with social media, and playing games were mostly associated with bored and repetitive users.

Useable Mobile Functionalities
Preliminary results suggest that users find functionalities that increase efficiency (calendar, email, maps, Evernote, workout and exercise tracking, banking and utilities, course and personal information) or that provide entertainment (Yelp, UrbanSpoon, movie times, YouTube, ESPN) are the most used with social functions following in third place (Words with Friends, Scramble, Draw, Instagram). MobileMe was a preferred syncing technology.

Users noted that they liked an application experience that offered a visually appealing interface. They also noted that applications that offered multiple functionalities should be as robust as their desktop counterparts—like Evernote or work software packages, where the mobile experience is a true representation of the desktop experience (this note applies mostly to tablet users carrying out full desktop functions on mobile devices).

Disruptive Mobile Functionalities
Preliminary results suggest that the friction point most common for users is access to the network (not specific to the UT network) or slow Internet service. Equally, users were dissatisfied and frustrated when mobile applications did not do what they advertised that they would do—primarily the frustrations involved a feeling of wasting time with these applications and subsequently not being able to achieve and efficiency that the user had hoped to achieve with the application.


**Needs and Vision for a Mobile UT**

Preliminary results suggest that priorities for a mobile campus include:

--- focusing on increasing wireless capacity and access
--- developing a threaded identity so that users are recognized as they access sites across campus
--- creating a common iconography for the entire University
--- increasing cloud access for sharing and storing files—would also like editing capacity
--- using cloud based software that functions the same across devices and that allows for individual and collaborative creation and editing of files
--- provision of a video interface for lectures and campus events
--- provision of training for mobile devices—especially in the classroom

Two notes:

--- while there is a move away from traditional textbooks to electronic course packets, students are still printing course materials
--- students also see a need for computer labs with dummy terminals from which they can print or access a virtual desktop

In addition to those priorities, some visioning items for mobile included:

Research also suggests that users would like to be able to conduct transactions (including tuition payments), along with accessing personal employee and student information via mobile devices.

Several users suggested a mobile dashboard that they could personalize to include the functionalities that they wished to include. The vision for this dashboard includes pre-campus life, campus life, and post campus life with options, services, and applications for inclusion in/with/on the dashboard appearing in each semester or once per year post graduation. The dashboard would include a personalized function that would allow for stored (and editable) user profile and preferences. The dashboard would “grow” with students and faculty and staff as they conducted their lives at/with UT.

The video interface was mentioned in a variety of contexts—in classroom use for lecture and examples, in development efforts, to connect alumni with UT events and special lectures, to promote current events, to support training, and a variety of other uses. Video is the trend for mobile.

Equally, a portal for applications, best practices, and policies that have been vetted and/or created by the University has been requested multiple times, along with a centralized developer training, information and resources.

It was also suggested that mobile include UT specific items as well as UT in the world items. This was a nascent idea among many. Prompted comments that helped illuminate the idea related to identifying UT alums who were looking for reverse mentors or mentees, offering internships, or doing something really cool that could be captured on video and relayed back to the University and communicated broadly, making available short talks and lifetime learning activities as well as sports and events on and off campus, offer insight into “in the world” experiences of younger alumni, students, and researchers—especially with service and filed work—captured and communicated back to campus. A comment relating the idea was “the stuff that builds relationships” and isn’t just a news flow that puts tractions to the research and student/alumni experience.
In addition to the on-campus research, the task force is also investigating the mobile strategies of our peer and other Universities. Trends lean toward a mobile web environment where collaboration and screen adaptability are high priority concerns.

Industry and campus trends echo current findings and point toward the development of data use policies the centralization of mobile resources and training—or at least a centralized portal for mobile resources and training. They also suggest that mobile web is more the trend with apps being developed for limited and specific purposes and that screen adaptation and accessibility are high priority concerns.

**UT App and Mobile Web Specifics**

Specific to the UT App
--the UT app is used primarily “on the go” when users are searching for something specific about their schedule, class or work life
--the UT app is used primarily to access the directory and to access campus maps and to course schedules (the mobile version of Blackboard is only minimally useful)
--more complete and expanded and interactive information was requested for the map function
--it was also suggested that optional push notification for news and course news items be available on the app

Specific to the UT Mobile Web
--only three participants in the survey had actively used the mobile web. Most participants did not know that the mobile web existed.
--of those that had used the mobile web, they used the mobile web primarily for the directory and maps

Participants suggested that for dealing with the University on day-to-day items like accessing schedules and staff/faculty/student information that a mobile web option was anticipated to be more useful. For larger and more specific items (like games and video downloads) and app was expected to be more useful as the download times were expected to be faster.

It was commented that both the mobile web and the application should include an option to connect with the other and with the larger UT website.

It was also noted that for apps and mobile in general that the beta world is over. If an app or mobile site is published, it should be fully tested and de-bugged before launch to a wide audience because it is too easy to lose interest and move away from the application to something else.