Design Concept for Burlington English, Inc.

# Setting

Burlington English, Inc. (BE) is a private digital publishing company that produces web-based courses for English as a Second Language (ESL) students with a focus on Workplace Readiness skills and American Civics education. The BE blended learning platform combines in-class instructor-led lessons with student lessons which students complete independently online.

Burlington English prides itself on its unrivaled customer training and support. The feature-rich digital nature of the program and the low technical literacy of many users demand a robust support system. I am currently working as one of Burlington English’s recent Customer Representative hires. During the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020-2021, Burlington English hired many Customer Representatives to support Sales Managers in providing training for teachers. Prior to the pandemic, Sales Managers conducted their training sessions onsite at the customers’ schools. However, most of the BE Customer Representatives have never provided a face-to-face training. During 2020-2021, all training sessions were conducted virtually. When our Customer Representatives begin to visit schools onsite perhaps later next year, they will need mobile learning and support solutions to assist their transition from virtual to in-person sessions.

Customer Representatives need mobile access to information and resources to successfully perform their function as trainers. First, Customer Reps need information about the particular school, class, teacher, and students they are visiting. Reps need to know what the technology at the school is like, the English level of the class, the experience level of the teacher, and demographic information about the students. Currently, this information comes from the regional teams’ combined experience and various documents shared through the OneDrive cloud.

Customer Representatives also require access to training resources, such as PowerPoint presentations, collaborative activities, training agendas, and other supporting materials. Representatives use these materials based on the needs of the learners, the topic of the training, and the learning environment. Some of these resources are currently shared between individuals on the company OneDrive cloud.

Finally, Representatives need guides and troubleshooting for equipment setup in the classroom. The technology available for representatives varies widely across customer institutions. While some schools have advanced computer labs, others may share one old projector between several classrooms. If Customer Representatives run into issues while setting up, they need quick access to solutions.

Burlington English provides all Customer Representatives with an iPhone, a laptop, and a mobile data plan. Between these three technology resources available, there are many opportunities for m-learning solutions.

# Solution 1

## Technology

The First solution would involve the development of a location-based iPhone application. The application would use an existing GPS map service to map out all the Burlington English customer school locations. The app would identify nearby schools and display them for the Customer Representative. When a school is selected, the Representative can view information about the school, classes, and instructors. The information for each school would be user-provided. Customer Representatives enter data about the institutions as they visit each site and gather information about them.

## Learning/Performance Support

Customer Representatives would use the app to log and access information about customer institutions quickly and easily. After each training session or school visit, the Customer Rep would enter information about the school, classes, teachers, and students. In future visits, the Rep would use the data from the app to sufficiently prepare and deliver training customized for the needs and characteristics of the learner, available resources, and environmental factors. For example, the Customer Representative would log past training events with specific teachers. In future visits, the Rep would know which topics were previously covered and expand upon the past training with customized support. The Rep would also know which technology was lacking at the school and prepare specific tools to compensate.

## Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of the location-based app include considerations of convenience, ease-of-use, and enhanced access to important data. When Reps get to the school, they can pull out their phone and click on the school from the nearby institution list. This makes it simple and fast for the Rep to look up school information. The location feature speeds up the process of looking up the school. The ease of accessing the school would also make it easier for teachers to input data directly after or during visits to institutions. The training logs and detailed customer data would ensure that future visits are customized for the learners’ needs. All Customer Representatives would have access to the app on their iPhones. Reps would be able to view data input from all other Reps in the country. The shared data would create a strong cooperative system of tracking customer information.

One major limitation to this solution is the quality of data from Customer Representatives. Because the app relies on user input, the value of the information is only as good as the observations and efforts of users. The data would also need to be updated after changes in the institutions. The Customer Representative must consider the data as only representing past status and not current. The Representative runs the risk of preparing for a visit according to the data only to find that the institution has already changed its technology.

## Feasibility

This app-based m-learning solution is moderately feasible according to the resources available to Burlington English. BE already possesses many web-based applications and tools which could support the app. The development of the app would make use of existing resources like a map application that could be easily customized. However, Burlington English already spends a lot of resources on developing the courseware. Convincing the leadership to shift resources to this solution would require a strong cost-benefit analysis.

# Solution 2

## Technology

When Representatives are visiting a site, they might need to quickly change their training plan based on the individual needs of instructors and students. Representatives need quick access to training materials, like presentations and activities. A simple solution would be a database of standard materials stored on a shared cloud drive. Representatives would have access to the cloud drive via their iPhones. The cloud would update when connected to Wi-Fi and download a copy of all of the documents locally on the device. The documents can be duplicated and customized as needed. Representatives could also upload their own documents to share with other trainers in the company.

## Learning/Performance Support

This cloud-based solution would support Customer Representative training performance by providing on-demand materials for any situation. The materials in the cloud would include presentations with notes that trainers can follow and deliver with little preparation beforehand. The accessibility of the materials on a mobile device would allow Reps to quickly pull up a presentation and cast it to a projector in a classroom. Other documents like activity sheets and guides would support trainers in quickly selecting and performing activities that suit the training need. The materials would be organized by training need, so that Reps can easily locate the files they need based on the present performance issues of the institution’s instructors.

## Strengths and Limitations

This is a strong solution because it provides training materials quickly in case of a conflict in needs and preparations. The ability to access materials and guides with limited access to the internet also provides trainers with the support they need in any environment. It is beneficial to have standard materials for every training event to have consistent messaging and support across customers. The cloud-based solution allows trainers to easily share resources and compare them according to the standard resources.

Limitations to this solution include considerations of preparation expectations and reliance on standards. Trainers using the cloud-based materials may expect all materials to be available for every situation. Expecting materials for every situation, trainers might decrease their own preparations before visiting each location. Some situations may require materials that are not available on the cloud. A reliance on standard materials may demotivate trainers from taking creative approaches to specific training problems. Trainers should be encouraged to add and edit versions of materials provided on the cloud-based folders.

## Feasibility

Considering that the company already hosts many shared documents on a OneDrive shared folder, this solution is extremely practical. The technical requirements for development of this solution are rather low. However, a team must exist to ensure the quality of the materials uploaded to the cloud. Without this oversight, materials may become overwhelming, disorganized, or off message from the company’s vision. The Representatives would also require training to locate materials and to responsibly edit existing materials.

# Solution 3

## Technology

Considering the diverse technological and environmental setups of customer institutions, Customer Representatives require guides for setting up and conducting training sessions. The instructional design team would use a program such as Articulate 360 to develop a mobile web-based application that provides trainers with an interactive guide/checklist for training sessions. The guide could be hosted on a website and accessed via a local app on Customer Rep’s iPhones. Trainers would follow each step of the guide to check off preparation items and steps in the training procedure. Each step of the guide would include optional detailed information and resources for situations like projector setup troubleshooting and follow-up personal application questions.

## Learning/Performance Support

The checklist/guide app solution would especially support Representatives new to onsite training sessions. The guide would ensure that trainers show up with all of the needed materials and technology. Trainers would initialize the app before heading to the site to check their supplies in a Pre-Training Checklist. Then, the trainer would follow the guide on their phone when they arrive onsite to ensure they set up the training sufficiently. If there are any issues with internet connectivity or tech devices, the corresponding step of the guide would provide resources and procedures for troubleshooting or alternative strategies. The guide would adapt its procedure according to the situation and the input of the trainer.

The guide would also assist trainers through the training process with activity suggestions, follow-up questions, and training materials. After the training, the application guides users in closing, evaluating, and setting up future training needs. This app functionality would allow trainers to focus less on the procedure of the training and more on the human connection and personal touches of a successful, engaging visit.

## Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this guiding app solution is that it covers all of the bases and provides step-by-step guidance for trainers. The incremental steps are easy to follow and automatically adjust recommendations according to need. With this guide at the tip of Rep’s fingers, they can feel more confident that they haven’t missed any critical considerations of the training. The guide also provides excellent troubleshooting support in the case of any mishaps or malfunctions.

Limitations of the guide include undue reliance on the app, limits to personal preference, and longevity of use. Using such a strong support structure tool may entice users to rely solely upon its function for training. If a situation ever arose to limit access to the guide, the uninitiated trainer would struggle to meet the needs of the moment. The narrow path of the guide may seem too restrictive to those independent trainers who prefer to go by their own practices. Finally, this guidance may only be useful to trainers for their first month or so of visits. After that, they may develop more independence and forfeit the app, decreasing the app’s longevity usage value.

## Feasibility

This application is moderately feasible. It would require a Subject Matter Expert (i.e., an experienced trainer) to work closely with a designer to ensure adherence to standard visit procedures. Trainer buy-in would be a critical consideration, as some trainers may resist such prescriptive processes. Burlington English certainly possesses the resources for this solution. The company provides each employee with an iPhone and already runs many processes through web-based applications. The company also employs a large software development team and several trainers (including myself) who have instructional design experience.

# Discussion

Burlington English certainly possesses the resources to realize any of the three solutions discussed in this paper. Of the three solutions presented, the cloud-based solution would be most feasible and easiest to develop. The cloud infrastructure already exists in the company. The structure of the shared folders allows trainers to personally customize their training sessions and collaborate on new materials. The OneDrive allows trainers to easily store copies of the cloud files locally on a mobile device. This solution would be the least technically demanding, but also the least interactive and adaptive. Trainers would still need to find and organize needed materials before the visit or pull them up as they work.

The location-based app solution would require much more technical development to produce and support. However, this solution would also offer the best on-demand support for trainers. The location-based app could also potentially solve all three issues addressed in this paper. The app could provide logs and school information, training materials from the cloud, and access to interactive guides. This solution would require convincing the leadership of the need for such an advanced tool. The app would require a lot of resources to development. The location features could be viewed as unnecessary.

The final solution, the guide/checklist application, would be a happy medium between the cloud-based and location-based app solutions. This solution would also provide support and training materials on-demand but with the added benefit of providing a clear procedure. Trainers wouldn’t need to spend any time searching for needed materials. The materials and support would be provided as needed at each step of the process.

The guiding app solution would also solve the performance issue the best. Customer Representatives, unused to the process of conducting onsite visits, would benefit greatly from a well-structured guide that adapts to the situation at hand. The app would function as a performance support tool that would help trainers become accustomed to the process. The app’s mobile accessibility on trainers’ iPhones make it a discreet, portable solution.

Of all of the solutions, my preference would be to develop the guide app using a program like Articulate Storyline 360. I have already used the program to develop several projects for my master’s degree courses. I still need to increase my design and development skills with the Articulate programs. I believe working on a project like this would certainly help me fine-tune my skills not only in design, but all stages of the instructional design process. I could most likely develop the skills and proficiency to successfully create this app in a couple of weeks. I would definitely jump at the opportunity to develop a such a great performance support tool.