

ENHANCING OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING LIBRARY SERVICES WITH MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

The University of South Africa (Unisa) is the largest Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution in Africa with a diverse client profile pertaining to the approximately 300 000 students. It is one of the ten mega universities in the world. In support of the University's definition of ODL, the Unisa Library uses information technology in order to promote learning for remote learners via open learning to ensure accessibility to all. The services provided by the Unisa Library further supports

- flexible learning to promote ease of access to remote learning opportunities. The Library develops relevant services to ensure learning opportunities and methods of learning in accordance with the learner's need;
- non-residential way of learning which ensures that the learner is not bound by space or time;
- independent learning which leads to learning by discovery and navigation of the world of knowledge;
- learner centredness leading to course content, materials and information resources to be designed around learner needs and preferences.

Against this background as well as recent developments pertaining to eLearning Africa, the need for eLearning within the ODL Library environment became evident. This led to the Library's establishment of both electronic request mechanisms and delivery systems. During the last two years, in addition to its online services, the Unisa Library also started to realise the need for providing information on the move and therefore developed its services for m-libraries.

This paper will discuss developments in this regard which benefit the Library's Request services within its Information Resources Distribution Directorate. Remote clients who prefer to access the Library catalogue and request Information searches and Information resources via this service, rather than visiting a Unisa Branch Library in person, can now use the service from the mobile phone. Other m-library services will also be discussed and demonstrated. Requirements pertaining to both the implementation of the Innovative Interface's Airpac and a Zinadoo mobi site application with link between the two will be discussed together with lessons learnt in this regard.