

Mobility delivers real business benefits

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You can't go far these days without hearing about mobility and how important it has become for both consumers and businesses. However, when looking beyond the hype, it can sometimes be difficult for business leaders to understand exactly how mobile technology can make an impact on their organisations.

The problem is that the world is more focused on the consumer side of mobility that automatically comes with high-profile products, like Apple's iPhone and iPad, and Samsung's Galaxy smartphones and tablets. The real business tools are out there, but they are not as exciting.

The reality is that mobility is a game-changing technology for business, from small businesses and entrepreneurs, through to the enterprise level firms. The productivity and operational benefits offered by mobile technology are not normally found in applications that are generally available, but in those apps designed specifically to streamline and improve business processes.

A practical solution

When correctly planned and implemented mobile technology is a practical solution that delivers measurable results. Any company can find business processes that can be improved with mobile technology, but businesses with many field workers are in a prime position to exploit the advantages inherent to this post-PC world.

As an example, a client that printed job cards for its field workers every day, handed them out in the morning and collected them later after the operatives had filled each with handwritten reports. The reports were then captured, photographs from digital cameras attached and the results eventually made available to the respective departmental managers.

By digitising the job-card process and empowering employees to receive and report back via mobile devices, this company not only streamlined its working processes, but also saved the business money.

Another benefit was being able to assign human resources to more important work than simply capturing data from the field workers' handwritten reports. Most important to the executives at the company was the quick availability of information from the field. Before selecting the mobile option, they had to wait for a week or two before they could analyse information collected from their customer-facing employees. With the mobile solution in place, the information is available almost immediately, allowing them to make real-time decisions to best serve their customers.

There are other examples of mobility significantly changing the way that businesses work. These include reducing the

opportunity for fraud as well as keeping tabs on employees and assets. Even in rough terrain, new ruggedised devices are shock- and waterproof resistant to ensure they can be used effectively right at the coalface.

The cost of the hardware

Naturally, one of the concerns about mobility is the cost of the hardware as well as the development of applications. When it comes to hardware, companies think carefully whether they want to provide the hardware to their employees, or whether they want to adopt the BYOD (bring your own device) approach, which creates more questions around security and privacy.

In terms of software, having custom apps designed and developed for every business process would be very expensive, especially for the small business and entrepreneur. Companies should opt for a cheaper, yet very effective, alternative in the form of an enterprise mobility platform.

Companies can define their processes on the platform, making it available to users via the cloud and in offline environments. This changes the cost factor to a pay-per-user, per-month option, which can be scaled up or down as required, allowing the company only to pay for the services it uses.

Most importantly, mobility will only deliver returns if it is planned correctly and implemented effectively. Downloading the latest app may work well for the average consumer, but an entrepreneur or business leader needs to define a mobile strategy and what the business process requirements are carefully, as well as how mobile technologies can optimise it and the associated costs before taking the plunge.

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