Africa's future is mobile

By Ayanda Dlamini   11 Mar 2013

Africa is an increasingly mobile continent, making smart mobile application development one of the continent's next big industries.

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The mobile application space is set to boom across Africa, as enterprises and developers lead the world in bringing to market unique mobile applications suited to a developing market.

There are several reasons for this - crucially, Africa is a mobile continent. Mobile devices are becoming smarter, faster and more affordable; smartphone adoption is growing by around 15% year on year across the continent, and mobile bandwidth has become better and more affordable.

In addition, mobile applications are particularly relevant in a South African and pan-African context, where a young, increasingly tech-savvy and often geographically dispersed population is fast seeing the advantages of self-service and mobile business.

Advanced, user-friendly mobile apps will be the next customer service excellence differentiator. To maintain a competitive advantage, enterprises will increasingly roll out mobile consumer apps to maintain their competitive lead, and to deliver services. We foresee that many operators will see this as a new way of doing business.

Why? For one thing, mobile apps enhance the customer experience. The old USSD0-based self-service options are not particularly user-friendly, especially for less tech-savvy consumers. Dialing *123#456# may have sufficed when there was no other alternative, but now consumers can simply press an icon or a menu button on a smartphone to interact with enterprises.

Getting it right

To be effective, mobile apps need to begin with meeting customer needs, and they must be simple and easy to use. They also need to address enterprise pain points - for example, the most common contact centre queries can be migrated to a self-service smartphone app, so improving customer experience and easing the contact centre workload.

They also need to deliver concise, personalised and easy to navigate information to the end-user, supplying all the relevant information at a glance, with the ability to drill down, slice or dice if needed. In the enterprise application space, we see that once mobile workers have access to effective ERP mobile apps, they seldom revert to their laptops to access ERP systems.

Achieving this requires a great deal of preparatory work, to identify what end users need, what the business goals are for the app, and what the current enterprise pain points are, which could be addressed with a customised mobile app.

Leading the world

Africa is traditionally innovative, and because mobile apps are so relevant to the African context, with a low barrier to entry for app developers, we envisage massive growth in the app development space across the continent.

An innovative youngster with little more than internet access and aptitude can learn to develop apps, and bring to market new solutions tailored to meet African needs. It requires a niche skill set, but mobile application development will become the order of the day as demand increases. There is scope for app development across numerous areas - for example, banking, healthcare and education. And apps developed for the African context may also be relevant to other developing regions of the world, meaning there is huge potential for growth in this sector.

While we have seen growth in this space in recent years, the continent's potential is still relatively untapped; which is why we are now seeing a rush of foreign investors into the continent. LGR Telecommunications is very excited about the potential for growth in this area, and we are focusing our attention on meeting this growing need for appropriate mobile apps to grow enterprises, enhance quality of service and customer experience.

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