

Selecting an enterprise mobility strategy that empowers the workforce

By [Marc Fletcher](#)

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As smartphone adoption in South Africa continues to accelerate beyond all expectation, enterprises are increasingly focussing on how to capitalise on a 'mobile enabled' workforce.



Marc Fletcher

The fact that so many employees now have smartphones is a massive boon for companies - enabling them to surface core enterprise services and extend them into the hands of employees. This improves efficiency, productivity and makes the working environment far more flexible.

While simple in theory, the complexity comes in when one considers the myriad standards. Firstly, there are four broad types of architecture: mobile apps, responsive websites, web apps, and hybrid apps. Secondly, there are a number of mobile operating systems in use, most notably iOS, Android, Blackberry, Windows Phone, Symbian, and S40.

Albeit that Nokia has ceased production of phones using Symbian and S40 earlier this year and also ceased developing the Symbian and S40 OS in favour of using Windows Phone. And, finally, there are literally hundreds of handset types - from tablets, to the rarely liked 'phablets', to high-end smartphones, and all the way down to the low-cost smartphones that sit just one step up from feature phones. All have their own screen dimensions, sizes, and resolutions.

Mobile enterprise strategy

Developing a mobile enterprise strategy is indeed an intimidating thought. And for those who do overcome the initial inertia, there's the risk that embracing mobility in the wrong way will just end up adding more complexity and confusion, and add to IT support costs. If there isn't a critical mass of users interacting via mobile devices, then exposing enterprise services to mobile handsets isn't adding any value.

However, with a mobile strategy that is tightly linked to the organisation's broader business goals, and appropriate to the users and their devices, then the possibilities are limitless. Companies can extend the edges of their organisations, enter new markets and customer segments, develop competitive advantages, and radically increase the speed of doing business.

Think, for example, of the bank that can empower staff to open new customer accounts in rural areas remotely. The camera function can capture images of ID books, perform optical character recognition (OCR) to extract data from the images, customers can sign with digital pens, and forms can be completed on the spot. What would previously have required a trip of tens, or even hundreds of kilometres to the nearest bank branch, can now be done from anywhere with basic connectivity.

Sales reps can place orders directly from client's premises while doing their regular visits - instantly firing off a chain reaction within their company and enabling the ultimate delivery of goods in faster time. Mobile solutions that empower staff in this way illustrate the concept that we refer to as 'zero distance' - closing the gap between businesses and their customers.

As an organisation's customers, partner companies, those in the supply chain, and employees benefit from automation and mobility, the distance between these entities collapses to virtually nothing. But how does one go about charting the course for enterprise mobility? We recommend discovery workshops that seek to unearth the biggest opportunities that mobile could present, as well as the most pressing challenges it could solve. Depending on the nature of the organisation and the legacy infrastructure it uses, some systems are easier and more applicable to 'mobilising' than others.

In terms of delivery channels, we generally find that well-designed, responsive websites are the best choice for 'free flow' content, such as intranet portals for example. For key processes and complex systems interfaces, one of the three 'apps' variations are often the optimal format - as they provide a better experience when inputting and interacting with data.

One also has to consider the extent to which the enterprise service in question will be drawing on the native capabilities of the device, as well as the extent to which the information needs to be made available in an offline state. Again, native and hybrid apps tend to be the weapon of choice if these requirements are relevant. Hybrid apps can often act as a happy medium between the three, enabling native device functions whilst developing in ubiquitous HTML5 and JavaScript, which helps to minimise the costs associated with developing across three or four different mobile operating systems.

The future may be uncertain, but one thing we can be clear on is that 'mobile everything' will become a dominant theme. Those companies that invest in their mobile enterprise strategy will attract the best staff and empower them with the most useful functionality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marc Fletcher is Director of Intervate

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