

Surpassing Mobile App Challenges

New research shows that companies struggle with mobile user experience and closing the gaps on mobile security.



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With smartphones and tablets continuing to outsell PCs, it's hard for companies to ignore the mobile app explosion. Mobile-driven services that are breaking new ground appear all the time. Apps like Uber and Taxi Magic that use GPS data to make it easy to find a driver and pay for the ride through a few taps on your phone. Another one is Quri, a mobile "retail intelligence" service that uses GPS data and mobile cameras to gather real-time, in-store intelligence for consumer brands. In every vertical there are now business apps that help sales reps, field techs and warehouse employees work smarter and with customer needs in mind. Customers as well like to shop from their devices; a majority of consumers surveyed by Vizibility (67%) say they are more likely to buy from a business with a mobile-friendly site.

Yet many companies are struggling to keep pace with demands for new mobile apps from sales and marketing teams and also operations, according to the August 2013 Quick Poll, "Next Steps to Mobility," by IDG Research. Readying applications for mobile deployment, managing security, ensuring a consistent user experience,

and application integration and testing are among the top challenges uncovered in the poll.

IT organizations aren't necessarily equipped for the mobile business age. They might not have anyone on staff who can discern the opportunities of new technologies or the impact of supporting different devices. The prevalence of a do-it-yourself culture is also problematic. When it comes to customer-facing apps, the marketing department may decide to create an app without working through the IT department and, in doing so, could overlook critical steps such as thorough user testing. Focus is another consideration that can slow plans and success. With so many requests coming from across the business for new apps or features within existing apps, a company must be able to filter those requests and prioritize them according to an overall mobile strategy.

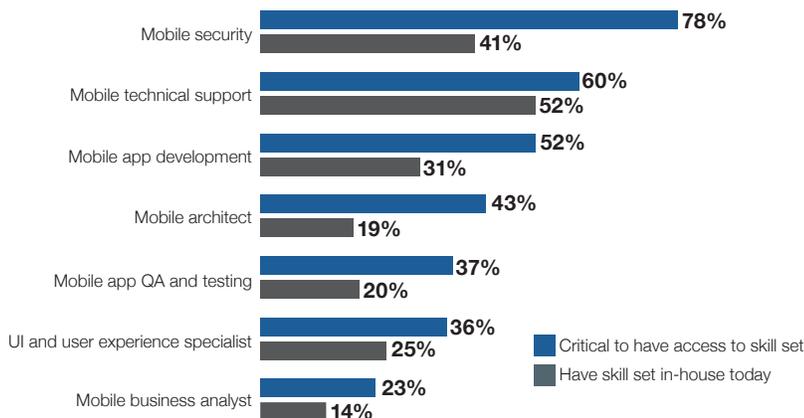
Creating a mobile-ready operation

Getting off to the right start means the IT department and business leads should work together to design an application that will have the most impact on employees or customers. The role of "mobile business integration analyst" is critical here to bridge the gap—whether developed internally, hired or outsourced, says Jill Klein, IT consultant with Sirius Computer Solutions. "Mobile apps are often borne out of process inefficiencies," she says. By addressing those inefficiencies through a useful app, a company can quickly differentiate itself from competitors. When airlines introduced 24-hour advanced online check-in and electronic boarding pass retrieval, they hit a slam-dunk. No one wants to wait in line at the airport.

After business alignment, there are several technical steps necessary to create winning apps, according to Klein:

Release management: When launching a mobile app project, be careful about "scope creep." Release management practices enable

IT Skill Sets that are Critical for Organizations to have access to in order to meet their mobility objectives



SOURCE: IDG Research Services, August 2013

control mechanisms that govern which features are released and when; shorter release cycles are common in mobile app development.

Speed: In this instant-gratification society of ours, 8 seconds is the maximum time most users will wait for an app to load. After that, the user might quickly delete your app. If your app takes too long to load or to process tasks, review the required functionality to meet the user needs, and then review the user interface for potential items that may slow the app down such as images or graphics that may not be necessary.

User interface: The mobile UI allows for new user integration points such as location and context-aware computing, along with computing interfaces such as a camera or scanner. Determining when and how to use this functionality is key to an effective user application. Mobile apps requiring heavy data transfers are sure to frustrate. Ensure that your mobile team can properly translate the workflow to a mobile app and, in turn, provide a useful app to your customer.

Platform disparity: IT departments today typically support users on multiple versions of the iOS, Android and Windows operating systems across multiple device platforms of smartphones, tablets, and everything in between. The application should function as intended across all of these platforms. In order to streamline your testing process, invest in tools that automate test scripts and simulate the various device platforms and operating systems.

Networks: If possible, determine the most common network environment for your users: Will they be using the app inside an office building with fast, secure Wi-Fi, from a cellular network, or from an insecure home or public Wi-Fi connection? Or will they be in remote areas where they will need offline access? Perform testing in these different environments to understand and address performance issues that may arise.

Mobile security: the moving target

Not surprisingly, mobile security is the top challenge for organizations embarking on mobile

deployments, according to the IDG poll.

Mobile security skills are in demand: 70% of organizations surveyed are lacking needed security skills and report that finding them is a top priority. Klein says that a key individual to have on your team is a mobile architect who can incorporate development needs, security needs and business requirements to lead the strategy.

Yet mobile security technologies also play a critical role. ABI Research estimates the current mobile security management (MSM) market will total \$560 million by the end of 2013 globally, and \$1 billion by 2015. MDM features to look for include device configuration and management, data configuration management, authentication and policy management, blacklisting and whitelisting apps, geo fencing, remote wipe of data and configuration information in the case of a stolen or lost device, jailbreak detection, and version monitoring.

Another technology is containerization, which separates personal applications from corporate applications. When a user clicks on a corporate app on his or her device, it launches in a secure virtual connection to prevent sensitive data from being hacked, shared or downloaded onto the device.

The role of outsourcing

Enterprise mobile deployments are complex and multifaceted; as a result, many organizations are realizing that outsourcing part of the strategy to get a jump-start can fill the gaps quickly. According to the IDG poll, companies are typically outsourcing technical areas such as application and device security, release management and testing. As mentioned above, mobile architects with experience in translating business requirements into successful mobile projects are highly coveted. Seek out such individuals on a consulting basis, and then bring those skills inside the company when the time is right to lead your maturing mobile deployment operation. ■

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