

Business Value Unwired — The Key to Mobile Success

Create Customized Apps to Support Your Business Strategy

by Oliver Betz, SAP



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The consumerization of IT has led some companies to believe that the process of going mobile is easy. After all, when you can download a consumer app on your iPhone in 30 seconds, get GPS directions to a hotel on your Android, or watch a toddler using a tablet device, there is a tendency to think “Mobility is simple. We can do that.”

Don’t be fooled. On the front end, mobility might appear simple, but behind the scenes, developing and maintaining a comprehensive enterprise mobility strategy and solution set is anything but simple. It requires mobile-specific resources and technical expertise that most IT organizations do not currently have in house. In addition, unlike the apps on personal mobile devices, enterprise mobility apps are not standalone, single-function widgets. Rather, enterprise apps function as streamlined interfaces to connect mobile users to complex back-end systems already in place. Choosing or designing the right set of mobile solutions with the correct fields, based on the right architecture to seamlessly integrate with the back-end systems, is not a minor undertaking.

Of course, the payoff to a successful enterprise mobility strategy and solution set is well worth the effort. The right mobile solutions can strip away layers of complexity between the front end and the back end and bring functionality to an entirely new universe of IT users, dramatically increasing the value of your overall IT investment. When it’s done right, mobility can open new doors.

Business Value Comes First

For most companies, there is no shortage of ideas about how mobility can be applied to their business. End users across a variety of organizations are pitching IT on a “killer app” to mobilize a unique

business process and help their organization be more productive. But just because a process *can* be mobilized doesn’t mean it *should* be. That decision must be made based on the business value gained by mobilizing the process and deploying an app. Some questions to help your organization determine a mobile solution’s value include:

- Will it provide a new business channel for generating revenue and improving the bottom line?
- Will it help improve customer service?
- Will it simplify employees’ jobs, enabling them to focus on more value-add tasks?
- Will it reduce costs from day one?

For example, imagine that a company must employ temporary staff to routinely input data collected from paper forms into the central system — receipts, for instance, an employee collected while traveling. A well-designed mobile app could allow end users to input the data directly on a device that connects to the back-end system. Deploying that app would allow the information to get into the system sooner while also reducing costs by eliminating the need for temporary staff.

This is a clear business case for mobilization, whether it is achieved with a standard app or a customized one. But not all business cases will be quite so clear, and more companies with limited mobilization experience are seeking additional expertise in making these evaluations.

The Co-Innovation Advantage

To help customers navigate the waters of enterprise mobility, SAP employs a co-innovation approach, working closely with customers to plan their mobility strategies based on their long-term

business priorities, rather than on what technology is available today. The first step is to help customers determine what the mobile goals and requirements are within their enterprise and then zero in on what processes are best suited for mobilization.

For most SAP customers, the path to enterprise mobility will require a combination of standard, out-of-the-box apps and custom-built apps. Companies often implement a standard app first to “test the waters” of mobility. However, these apps can only take them so far. To meet the unique needs of their business and increase business value, companies often turn to customized applications. But what’s the best way to develop these solutions efficiently, securely, and cost-effectively?

A new approach is in order, one that involves careful consideration of user needs and leverages the knowledge of mobile experts. That’s where the SAP Custom Development organization can help. From evaluating which processes to mobilize, to recommending when an out-of-the-box SAP solution would suffice, to helping you decide whether to build the app on your own or engage with the SAP experts, the SAP Custom Development team is poised to aid in the planning, execution, and support cycles of your custom development project.

SAP Custom Development also provides an amazing amount of support. When developing mobile apps, the end user is at the center of the development process. SAP Custom Development starts by defining the user experience and then mobilizing the business process to be compatible with the device. SAP initiates this process by engaging directly with the customer’s end users to assess their needs. They quickly create mock-ups and validate them with the end users. Then, they build and deploy a prototype so end users can test it in their own field environment. Based on feedback, SAP then builds a production-ready solution that connects to back-end applications.

This approach allows SAP to create mobile solutions that enable customers to speed the availability of their unique processes to a variety of mobile devices. Working with SAP to develop custom mobile apps provides a number of advantages. For example, it:

- Increases the alignment of your mobile technology with your business strategy
- Provides access to the deep expertise of industry, business process, and design experts

Case Study: SAP Creates a Customized Mobile App for Mobile Device Manufacturer

Recently, a mobile device manufacturer approached SAP to help mobilize its own internal shopping cart approval process. The company’s employees conducted many of their usual business processes on mobile devices, but when it came time for managers to approve employees’ orders through SAP Supplier Relationship Management (SAP SRM), they had to log on to a desktop computer.

At the time, SAP had nothing on its roadmap that would address this company’s requirements, so it met with the company’s developers at their mobility lab in Montreal, where they have a staff of mobile experts working on custom projects. SAP worked with these developers for a week, showing them how they could build the exact application they wanted using Sybase Unwired Platform.

The resulting mobile application has been quite a success. Currently, more than 1,000 employees are using the app to order supplies and approve orders. The app was so successful, in fact, that the company is now working with SAP on human capital management-focused mobile apps as well.

- Speeds your time to market with an agile development approach, end-user validation, and rapid prototyping
- Ensures quality and lowers risk by leveraging proven mobility standards and synchronizing with SAP’s future release strategy
- Protects your investment with maintenance options that are consistent with the overall SAP standard support offering

Can You Afford Not to Move on Your Mobile Strategy?

Mobility is a differentiator for early movers, but that advantage won’t last forever. A recent report from Gartner¹ points out: “During the past 18 months, this market has dramatically accelerated, both in terms of user requirements and the prominence of these mobile application projects among IT staff and the business units they service... Enterprises and software developers are under increased pressure to deliver more applications across a wider set of platforms. They have several key decisions to make about architecture and about how they will construct those applications.”

Companies know they need a mobility strategy. But they are beginning to discover that the roadmap and execution of such a strategy can be a challenge. Those that can successfully mobilize key business processes and broaden the user base will gain business advantage over their competitors. ■

¹ Gartner Magic Quadrant for Mobile Enterprise Management Platforms (April 20, 2011).