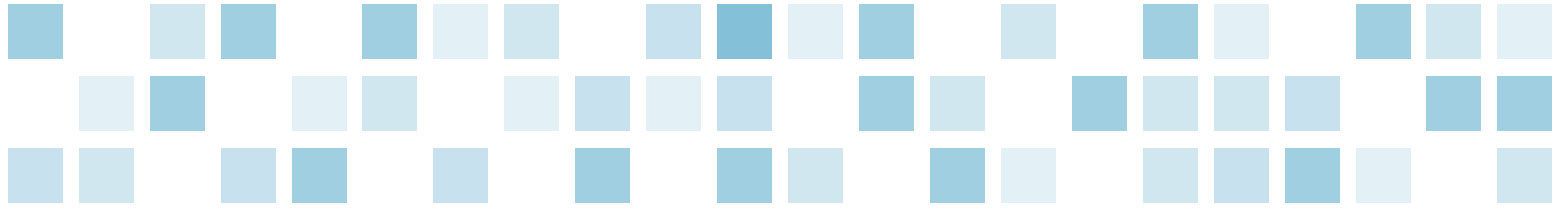# Enabling mobility within your organization: Aligning mobile apps to your business strategy

Prepared by:

Soren Burkhart, *Principal,* McGladrey LLP

703.336.6400, soren.burkhart@mcgladrey.com

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Utilizing mobile apps within your business processes can be extremely beneficial for your company, but, to be successful, you must decide what you want from your applications. The challenge for many companies is without a clear strategy, applications do not truly enable the business to alleviate pain points such as time and expense. Many of these common difficulties can now be automated, making your company perform more efficiently.

For example, in a paper-based environment, it can frequently take over a week to generate a quote for a client. Often, these processes do not truly take a week of work; however, slotting it with other work, circulating it to necessary parties and collecting signatures take valuable time. With today's technology, a mobile app can create a template, allowing employees to meet with a client, determine their needs and deliver a solution the following day, if not instantly. The time from proposal to closing is expedited, leading to a better success rate.

The importance of integrating apps within your organization is two-fold. First, they introduce more efficiency for your employees, partners and customers; secondly, they allow you to gain more visibility and a better feel of data and business processes instantly, rather than attempting to stay up to date through a paper trail. An effective mobile application strategy helps to refine and streamline processes for employees at all levels within the organization, as well as customers.

A wide variety of mobile apps are currently available for all platforms, both general and industry specific. As technology and capabilities evolve, the depth of potential solutions grows. However, even with explosive growth in the app market, situations still arise when an existing platform is not the optimal solution for your business. Instead of adjusting your processes to fit a general application, the best course of action is to develop an app that is geared to your specific needs.

A popular strategy for developing and implementing an application is following the mobile app development life cycle:

Plan – Utilize consultants and business analysts to determine the vision of your application and potential features, discussing any potential issues or concerns.

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Build and connect – Develop your app with client and server input, using enterprise developers to create your application and connect it in a test environment.

Test – Functional and performance testers evaluate your app and determine whether it is meeting your projected needs.

Release – Once testing has concluded and related adjustments are made, the app is released to your audience, with security managers in place to monitor any potential vulnerabilities.

Analyze – After your app has been in use for a determined amount of time, executives and designated app owners evaluate analytics and consider next steps, including adding new functionality.

Aligning to your business and prioritizing features

After you have decided to develop your own mobile app, you must fully understand what you want your program to accomplish and what information you want it to include. Identify your inefficient processes and discuss how mobility can help overcome those issues.

When considering your app, it is best to start small and think big. Every company wants an app to assist in all processes; however, at first, look at the entire business to cash cycle and identify weak points where mobility can help. List your specific difficulties and their priority within the organization, planning to integrate processes individually to gauge their success. Whether it is delivering a proposal or a customer signing an invoice, you can utilize mobility to bridge those gaps.

Developing a prototype

Before engaging in development, it is important to mock up what you want in your app to get a clear vision of its look and feel. This process helps to fully understand what is possible, how it can be implemented and if it will truly satisfy your needs. Programs are available to develop a mock app, including the potential features and functionality you desire.

Programs such as Keynotopia demonstrate the concepts and design of your potential app, including desired visual elements, its flow and replicating actions. The program designs a prototype to determine whether your vision is possible, if the interface makes sense and if it is user friendly.

Developing a working model

After approving the features, design and functionality of a prototype, your organization can move forward with the development of a fully functional app. When creating an application, you must decide whether to hire a consultant or utilize existing staff; in actuality, a combination of the two strategies is often an ideal fit. A consultant can help your organization craft the vision of the app, ensuring that it accomplishes established goals, while current IT staff can create the platform using HTML and Java script.

Open source technologies such as PhoneGap and Appcelerator Titanium allow companies to utilize existing IT resources to develop applications that are compatible with all mobile platforms. After you are satisfied with the application's development, it must be sufficiently tested, as described in the mobile app development life cycle. Once you are comfortable with the performance of the platform, it can be released to the general public.
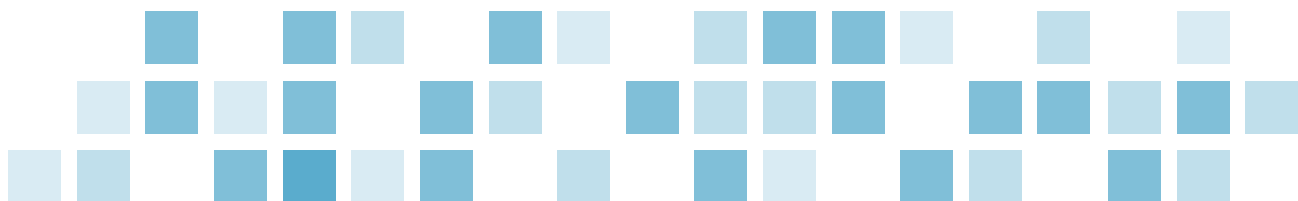
However, after the app is released, the project is not complete. In fact, app development is never truly finished. Security must be constantly monitored to ensure that your data and more importantly, your users are not at risk. Usage metrics and data should be regularly analyzed to see what functions are being used most frequently and what can be improved upon. Discuss new features and functionality that can be added to make your app more engaging to your employees and customers.

Many companies view mobility as a magic wand that will cure all business ills. It is a tool that can significantly benefit your efficiency and increase customer interaction, but you must have a clear plan to determine how it will be integrated into your business. If the wrong steps are taken, and your strategy is ineffective or poses security risks for users, it will swiftly have a negative effect on your brand.

800.274.3978
www.mcgladrey.com