

Mobility changing the face of African enterprise

Mobility is changing the way business is run across Africa, and the IT department needs to step up to enable it.



By Ayanda Dlamini 16 May 2013

Mobility is an unstoppable wave, and anyone who tries to block it will simply get washed away. Across Africa we are seeing mobile and internet penetration growing at an alarming rate.

This remarkable growth has happened in the space of just over a decade. As recently as in 2000, there were around 360 million internet users across the world, and only just over 4 million in Africa. Now there are over 2.4 billion global internet users, with around 167 million in Africa. Recent surveys indicate that around 50% of these access the internet on a mobile device, in Africa. Many global markets may already have achieved full penetration, but Africa is fast catching up.

Thanks to the lower cost and improved processing power of access devices and improved mobile broadband, Africa has leapfrogged the landline/modem era and moved straight to mobile broadband. And this mobile internet wave is taking business with it. We only have to look at the exponential growth in mobile app stores to see the relevance of useful content delivered to mobile devices - and enterprise applications will be no exception.

Clearly, IT has become consumerised, and consumer technologies, applications and devices are driving change in the way business is being run. Cloud applications, mobility and social media are among the big disruptive trends affecting enterprise, and they will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

With consumer technologies and applications now overlapping with enterprise applications and networks, the IT department faces a complex landscape characterised by myriad devices, operating systems and applications, where personal and corporate data are merged, and where the mobile enterprise must be enabled without risk to the enterprise.

IT no longer a gatekeeper

IT, seeing itself as the gatekeeper, worries about controls and compliance. But the business benefits of mobility outweigh IT's concerns.

Enabling mobility is indeed a challenge and a problem for IT. But they must accept that there is no turning back the tide of mobility - particularly because it is being driven to a large extent by executives themselves. IT needs a change of mindset; not only to fall in line with the trends, but to actually become a catalyst and enabler of enterprise mobility.

In line with the growth of mobility, mobile BI is set to grow within the African context. Not only is mobility adding functionality to BI, but mobility is also driving a need for BI in terms of managing this complex landscape.

If you can deliver the right BI content to C-level executives and enable them to interrogate their facts and figures on the move, they will have competitive leverage. If your operations employees are able to tap into issues in the office, accessing ticketing systems and workflow tools via mobile, they will be more efficient.

Different users, different needs

We see among our customers across Africa that mobile BI is key for their strategy - in fact, enterprises are more likely to want mobile access to their BI tools than PC-based access. When accessing their BI tools on mobile, executives are more likely to use large screen devices such as tablets, they want all the information they need, when they need it, and they want to be able to drill down into the data to find answers. Operational staff are more likely to use smaller, more portable devices such as smart phones, and want to receive or trigger into key alerts.

As these different usage patterns emerge, depending on the devices in use and the people using them, IT is able to profile users, setting access controls and permissions, and can then deliver well-managed, secure services in the way end users prefer.

In preparing a mobile enterprise management strategy, IT may ask: What are my pain points? What is my core business? What are my communication lines? Then, look at users and ask what they want from their mobile applications, how they will use them, and on what devices.

In managing this new environment and delivering on the potential of mobile enterprise, agility is going to be key. But IT needs to adapt. It needs to roll out new services and focus on user needs, because the early adopters of mobility will reap the most benefits in the long term.

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