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For many organizations, the thought of modernizing legacy systems and rationalizing older data-driven applications can seem like a daunting, all-or-nothing endeavor. IT decision-makers tend to view these types of projects as extremely costly and time-consuming. Based on previous experience and popular perception, one could hardly blame them for having this view.

Luckily for them, this is no longer the case. Advances in open-source programming methods and API-based communications have eliminated most of the technical challenges previously associated with creating mobile and web-based applications attached to mainframes, IBM System i (aka AS/400) and other legacy data sources. Instead of spending resources designing complex middleware schemes or “re-platforming” the infrastructure, companies can concentrate on developing mobile applications that truly add value for the business as a whole.

The key question then becomes “where can we make the most immediate impact?” Depending on the company, its industry and technology, the possibilities are nearly limitless. That said, there are a few areas that apply to all organizations.

In this brief white paper, we will highlight 5 legacy mobilization projects to consider in 2015. Rather than simply describing actual projects, the white paper focuses on the benefit that such projects could yield. Let’s get started...

01. Increase agent productivity

Call centers field a variety of customer requests throughout the day. However, many call center agents are forced to painstakingly navigate the same rigid set of green screens to access information, regardless of how the conversation started or how deep in the system the information is located. Clearly, this creates tremendous inefficiencies in a department where speed counts (and speed always counts).

Companies can break this cycle by simply revamping how legacy data is accessed and presented through new web-based, front-end workflows. For example, they can present a wider-range of customer information in a single screen with links that let agents quickly drill into details. Adding shortcuts and workflow-specific interfaces for frequently performed tasks allows agents to quickly process even the most complex customer requests.

Solutions that enhance agent productivity will have an immediate impact. From a customer perspective, shorter wait times and faster service will reduce churn and boost loyalty. From a financial perspective, shorter call times reduce average cost per call as well as staffing requirements.

For companies with disparate, siloed information systems, agent-focused mobilization projects offers a unique opportunity to unite data and processes from multiple systems to provide a complete 360-degree view of the customer. This will eliminate the need to switch between systems to answer complex questions.

02. Speed mobile transactions

When it comes to web or mobile apps, today's users have very little patience for any delay. In fact, Kissmetrics recently released data that showed that 47% of consumers expect a webpage to load in 2 seconds or less and 4 out of 5 will abandon a site if it takes more than 3 seconds to load. They also found that a 1 second delay in page response can result in a 7% reduction in conversions.

Unfortunately, most of the existing online applications developed to interface with legacy systems no longer meet current performance and usability expectations. Those that used complex middleware or third-party integration schemes have extremely slow backend response rates. Worse, current browsers do not support the HTML web emulation techniques used in the past, which means that those applications will not run on the mobile devices in use today.

Refactoring outdated applications using open source methodologies is a fast, no-risk option for enhancing performance and accessibility. Java-based applications that use APIs to communicate directly with a mainframe have millisecond response rates – a significant improvement over legacy methods. Furthermore, they will run on any smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop device. Because the functionality has already been defined, the typical timeline for these projects (coding, integrating and deploying) is just 2-5 days. Even those groups that choose to enhance UI and refresh design can usually deploy in under 10 days.

Mobilizing poorly performing applications will have an immediate impact on any business. Projects that transform internally-focused applications (HR, logistics) will boost productivity quickly – especially as workforces becomes more mobile. When the performance and usability of key service apps (account inquiry, order tracking) are enhanced, customer satisfaction rates will improve as well. Making applications that attract customers (online ordering, quoting) accessible via a greater number of preferred devices will quickly lead to higher sales. Moreover, their compatibility with current browser technology ensures that they will be included in leading site aggregators and third-party comparison services.

03. “Nurture” the sales process

Very few organizations effectively communicate with prospects/customers throughout their lifetime. In many cases, this is due to a disconnect between marketing information systems, sales management tools and order management applications. However, the benefits to programmatically nurturing these individuals are evident. According to The Annuitas Group, nurtured leads make 47% larger purchases than non-nurtured leads and Gartner reported that B2B companies with automated lead management solutions see a 10% or greater increase in revenue in 6-9 months.

Companies can leverage mobilization work to easily inject automation into the sales processes without having to extensively modify existing MIS/CRM solutions. Instead, they can create apps or integrate with marketing automation solutions such as HubSpot or Marketo that send targeted information to prospects, alert the designated salesperson if it triggers a response and schedule reminders for following up after a set period of time. As companies become more adept at these processes, they can create extremely targeted offers based on a wide range of factors (point in the sales process, interests, organizational function, etc.)

Additionally, this approach allows companies to easily unite information from multiple sources to gain a complete view of the customer’s interests, activities and purchasing history – intelligence that will help companies strengthen relationships over the long run.

04. Empower BYOD

More and more, companies are embracing the “Bring Your Own Device” movement – allowing employees to use their own personal smartphones, tablets and other devices to perform key work-related tasks. While this trend may have started organically – with early purchasers of smart technology using their devices to access work email – it has evolved into a worldwide phenomenon that has been embraced at the corporate level for its perceived productivity gains and financial savings. Today more than 60% of companies officially allow the use of personal devices to access enterprise data. Email access is still the number one reason why companies introduce a BYOD policy; however, allowing access to documents, custom mobile applications and cloud services is on the rise.

There is no turning back from BYOD. Instead, companies should consider leveraging legacy mobilization efforts to further empower workers in 2015 and beyond.

Every department has critical practices and daily functions that must be performed to keep an organization up and running. Finance teams need to prepare and send invoices; HR has to process payroll; support teams need to log, review and resolve trouble tickets; product managers need to check product specs from a manufacturing floor. Making these applications

accessible via mobile devices will significantly increase productivity across the organization as a whole. Companies can even speed embedded approval processes by providing mobile apps that update team members on project changes and/or present information to supervisors for on-the-fly approval – even if that person is out of the office. More importantly, it allows IT groups to incorporate additional security features to reduce vulnerability to both internal and external threats.

Clearly, there are a wide range of projects that fall under this particular legacy mobilization initiative. By prioritizing those applications whose workflows are significantly outdated – and may even be hampering user productivity – companies can accelerate modernization where it can add the most value and reduce risk exposure if/when those systems have be replaced.

05. Enable transparency and accountability

Understanding how a business is performing at a deep level is critical to smart decision-making across the organization. Unfortunately, most organizations are saddled with complex, disjoint and/or manual processes for reporting KPIs on a department by department basis. Worse, departmental analytics are rarely aggregated to reveal key trends that could be exploited or systemic problems that are impeding growth.

Advances in legacy mobilization allow companies to break the cycle. IT groups can now create sophisticated, multidimensional analytical solutions that automatically extract and integrate critical data and KPIs from any and every deployed application and information system – be it old or new. More importantly, the results can be delivered in real-time via mobile dashboards that allow users to drill into details and/or trend key points. Instead of spending an extensive amount of time gathering and reporting information, users can focus instead on understanding its implications. And, sharing the information from department to department can improve collaboration and accountability across the organization as a whole.

This approach quickly proves its value, especially when compared to the costs associated with manually assembling reports for key board, sales and management meetings.

2015 is shaping up to be the year of Legacy Mobilization. Now that it's about apps and not infrastructure, there is very little risk or investment needed to begin any one of these projects. Using auto-discovery tools that query legacy systems to quickly generate APIs, these projects no longer require extensive time commitments. In practice, most tend to be fully deployed in two weeks or less. By taking the traditional technology barriers out of the equation, companies can focus on creating solutions that drive customer satisfaction, revenue generation and employee productivity to new heights – it's just a matter of deciding where to start.

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