



12 Steps to a Successful Mobile Software Project

Introduction:

Companies around the globe are looking for ways to do more with less. Many recognize that their mobile workforce is being managed inefficiently and extending business process automation to mobile field workers is becoming a priority. The following 12 steps identify how you can get started automating and mobilizing these business processes.

Step 1 – Understand the ROI/Scope of the Project and Plan Ahead

What are some of the key challenges with a mobile software development project? Many companies don't put enough thought into what they need, and what the anticipated ROI will be. Others don't assign and schedule testing resources. Some finish the development but have no deployment strategy. Still others buy incompatible handheld PDAs before they start development and find out they don't meet the requirements of the field user. The results of these deficiencies are project scope creep, cost overruns, missed deadlines and dissatisfied end users.

Step 2 – Build a Team and Include the Field User

Make sure the members of your team have the right roles and responsibilities to help the mobility project succeed. Mobile solutions usually tie into other corporate IT assets and business processes, therefore impact other IT departments and business units. In addition, a representative mobile field worker(s) should be included on the project team to provide valuable "real-world" insight.

Step 3 – Select the Right Mobile Solution and Advisers

Performing successful data synchronization from mobile computing devices can be a challenging and complex task. There are many variables that can determine the success of a mobile development project. Make sure you have experienced mobility experts to advise you and select a proven mobile middleware solution as the foundation for your solution.

Step 4 – Know Your Target Users and Their Environment

During the planning and scoping phase of your mobile project, take the time to experience the working environment of your mobile field workers and observe the business processes in action. Focus on how the information is collected and exchanged between the office and the mobile workers. These observations can significantly impact the design, development and deployment of a successful project! Evaluate the physical environment of the work. How do moist, cold and dirty environments impact the mobile devices? How does low light or bright sunlight affect visibility of the screen? Can workers read the small text on the PDA screen, or does the text need to be larger?

Step 5 – Decide Who will Develop the Mobile Solution

Do you have an IT department with software developers that are available for a new development project? Do they have experience developing custom mobile software solutions? Are they knowledgeable with mobile data synchronization issues? Will they be able to dedicate the time to finishing the application in the necessary timeframe? Do you have the risk tolerance for letting an inexperienced internal development team attempt the project, or is the ROI sufficient to justify contracting with mobility experts to develop the custom application?

Step 6 – Do You Start with a Mobile Software Platform or Build from Scratch?

Do you start developing your mobile software project with a blank computer screen, or do you start with a packaged mobile middleware solution that has a development environment included like the PointSync Mobility Platform from MobileDataforce? Again, your success is heavily reliant on your expertise in custom mobile application design and development. If you have experience developing mobile middleware applications and custom mobile software applications, then using a packaged application is less important. If you don't have experience and are working with a limited budget and timeframe, then it is crucial that you select a mobile application development solution to expedite the project.

Step 7 – Understand How to Re-engineer Business Processes for Mobility

Mobile solutions can provide bar code scanning, digital images, GPS, RFID, data synchronization, enterprise database queries, integration with inventory, scheduling, work order, accounting and many other enterprise software applications. How will these capabilities change the way the field user works?

Step 8 – Build in Phases

Most successful projects involve a series of phased implementations. Each phase can be developed, tested and implemented in an orderly manner. Once a phase is deployed and proven, additional phases can be layered on top that include more features and added complexity. Remember, the more data requirements that you add the more data you must synchronize, and the longer each synchronization session will take. Only synchronize data that your remote users require in the field. Be aware that most mobile devices don't have the same CPU power or memory as a PC/laptop, so understand the performance of your application on mobile devices before designing the solution.

Step 9 – Evaluate Your Hardware and Connectivity Needs

The term "mobile devices" can have many different interpretations. Today, laptops, Tablet PC's, UMPCs, PDAs and Smart phones are all identified with this term. When determining the best mobile device for your project you will want to consider screen size, data storage capacity, security, physical working environment, required hardware accessories such as barcode scanners, GPS, digital cameras, RFID, and the ability to upgrade the device with updated hardware and software components.

How do you connect your mobile device to your enterprise database applications? You have many options including cradle, WiFi, satellite, Bluetooth, wireless, dial-up modems and satellite uplinks to

name a few. The method(s) you choose will be affected by how often your mobile workers need to send/receive data. How much data will be transmitted and will they always have connectivity. Study each option, your working environment and consult your mobility partner to make the best selections.

Step 10 – Deploy, Evaluate and Improve

Once you have completed the first phase of your mobile solution and you are ready to deploy in the real world, roll out your solution to a group of trusted and motivated field users. Define a specific period of time to evaluate the solution, document the results and identify any required changes and improvements. The result of this evaluation should be an improved mobile solution that is ready for a wider deployment.

Step 11 – Set and Enforce Hardware and Security Policies

Mobile devices are small computers with the ability to store sensitive corporate data, communicate this data over the Internet and even catch viruses. You must clearly communicate how mobile devices are to be used and for what purpose. Establish and publish guidelines for using mobile devices.

Step 12 – Provide Full Support for Mobile Users

Mobile devices are guaranteed to break. What is your plan for keeping a mobile worker productive and communicating business critical information when their mobile device ceases to function or gets misplaced? These are inevitable issues that are best planned for in advance. Have a plan and a documented back up process.

For more information about mobilizing your business processes, please contact us.

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