WiNG

Mobile First, But What's Next?

MAY 22, 2015 PETER WAGNER ESSAYS

This is the original essay from which our blog post (http://techcrunch.com/2015/05/17/mobile-first-but-whats-next/) on TechCrunch and Peter's blog was derived.

Authenticity matters in everything from collecting fine art to identifying zoological species. It is about to become vitally important in the realm of mobile business applications too. There is no shortage of mobile products targeted at corporate users, but even those that tout themselves as "mobile first" often fail miserably to make the most of this revolutionary platform. We see an exciting opportunity to create business applications that are *authentically mobile*—a term we use in our work at Wing to describe services that enable value creation in ways that would be very difficult, or simply impossible, to achieve without taking advantage of the unique properties of mobile devices. Looking ahead, such services are likely to account for the lion's share of what could well become a $100 billion market for mobile enterprise applications.

The ascendance of mobile devices, cloud computing and data is having a profound impact on the ways in which companies do business. This should have triggered an outpouring of innovative business applications. Yet many available today are the result of an approach that might best be characterized as "paving the goat paths"—taking applications already in use in a desktop environment and merely creating mobile versions of them that mimic the functionality of their desktop brethren.

There is certainly benefit in freeing workers to do anywhere what they could previously only do at their desks. But such basic—and often poorly implemented—place-shifting fails to leverage fully the unique properties of mobile devices. These include the ability to gather data via sensors and lightweight user inputs; always-on availability; frequent, in-the-moment, "bite size" usage; synchronization on the move; and hyper-personalization of content and operation.

Moving beyond the goat paths

Unlike pave-the-goat-path applications, mobile-first ones treat mobile use cases as the priority rather than the afterthought. Their user interfaces are more elegant and intuitive, and they take greater advantage of some of the properties outlined above. In a few categories there may be enough market pull around the mobile platform itself that a simple, mobile-first strategy is enough to create a new leader. But mobile-first applications for business still focus on optimizing existing workflows tor the new platform in town rather than pushing hard to create new-to-the-world functionality.

In our view, mobile first is an intermediate evolutionary state on the road towards authentically-mobile apps, which are true game-changers. The following table summarizes what makes them so powerful.

	Pave-the-goat-paths mobile	Mobile first	Authentically mobile
Acid Test	Desktop inspired	Mobile optimized	Inconceivable without mobile
Target business process	Already addressed by desktop	Already addressed by desktop	Difficult to touch without mobile
Role of data	Emphasis on presentation	Emphasis on presentation	Emphasis on collection and analysis
Functional innovation	Functionality already exists on desktop	Functionality already exists on desktop	New-to-world functionality
Usage pattern	Periodic and typically scheduled	In-the-moment and continuous	In-the-moment and continuous
Design focus	Process centric	Human centric	Human centric

Crucially, authentically-mobile applications map workflows which have proven frustratingly elusive in the absence of mobile devices, taking us into new territory that that we couldn't touch when confined to the desktop. Unlike mobile-first ones, they also place much greater emphasis on the collection and analysis of data, which fuel the innovative experiences they deliver. Conceiving them will require far more than just a "mobile for _____" startup-incubator whiteboard exercise, because the business process and data being tapped were simply out of bounds in the pre-mobile world. In the purest and most revolutionary cases, there will be no obvious precedent.

Authentically-mobile applications are already to be found in the consumer markets. SMS may well

have been the first to exploit the “in-the-moment” property of mobile. More recently, transportation apps such as Uber and Lyft have taken advantage of this too, whilst also leveraging GPS to track people’s location. It would be ridiculous to think of developing an app like Uber for the desktop—an acid test that we can usefully pose when testing whether a service is authentically mobile.

Some consumer apps with at least a partial claim to mobile authenticity have already made the transition into business markets. An example is Dropbox, whose appeal is grounded in the mobile must-have property of synchronization. Dropbox is pretty useful on the desktop and so would fail our strict acid test. But its value soars when it touches mobile devices—something that is obvious to its millions of users. Other consumer apps migrating into the business world will be an increasingly important source of authentic mobility in the workplace.

But what about products that have been built specifically for the corporate market with authenticity at their core? Examples of this kind are much harder to find, but there is plenty of potential.

Mobile applications have been employed for quite some time in “linoleum floor” use cases, such as in warehouses, factories and hospitals. These offerings have tended to focus on painstakingly-defined business processes and structured data capture, finding ways to automate them using the attributes of mobile platforms. Indeed, the linoleum floor domain can be considered the birthplace of enterprise mobile thanks to the work of companies such as Telxon and Symbol. But historically it has been hard for startups to build great businesses here for reasons having more to do with buying patterns, willingness to pay and market size than with product attributes and innovation. That said, there will be breakouts, as even the most conservative customers are coming to recognize that authentically-mobile applications harnessing a cloud back-end and offering clever ways to process and present data can dramatically enhance productivity and accelerate decision-making.

From linoleum to carpets

We see a much bigger opportunity to build significant businesses by creating products for knowledge workers. Such “carpeted floor” applications can target much larger markets and should have greater pricing power than their linoleum floor counterparts. It is still early days here, but the runaway success of Slack, a workforce-collaboration application that bills itself as “mobile native”, is the latest reminder of the potential to create multi-billion dollar businesses in the arena. Is Slack authentically mobile? If we turn back to our acid test, the answer is “yes and no” (not unlike our

view of Dropbox). Slack is a powerful tool in the desktop paradigm, as evidenced by the legions of developers who keep it open continuously on their laptops. Meanwhile some of its core properties, such as its “all-in-one-place” hyper-integration with varied data sources and systems of record, have particular value in the mobile environment. So it is a multi-platform crossover application, with an increasingly strong claim to authentic mobility.

Business communications is a natural place to look for other crossover applications because the fundamental value of such products is enhanced by the number and variety of endpoints they can effectively connect. This crossover phenomenon occurred decades ago with email, the original killer mobile application of the carpeted floor. It was email that drove the first wave of enterprise mobility, giving rise to the Blackberry juggernaut of the 1990s and the BYOD tsunami behind MobileIron (a Wing portfolio company), Airwatch and Zenprise. A similar pattern is playing out again today in business video communications. Firms such as Blue Jeans Network (another Wing portfolio company) already offer applications that make it possible for employees to conduct multipoint, cross-platform videoconferences and collaborative screen shares from their mobile devices. Looking ahead, vendors may develop authentically-mobile applications that make it simple for workers to, say, transfer a video session easily from a phone screen to a conference room or a desktop.

Customer-relationship management is also ripe for greater mobile authenticity. Clari can send alerts to sales executives via mobile phones to ensure they have the most recent information related to a customer or a prospect before meetings. It can also prompt them to update the status of their deals on the go so that the data is captured and shared promptly. Base CRM includes geolocation functionality that maps users’ leads and contacts, and offers one-touch driving directions to get to them. Looking beyond these very early examples, we expect the entire universe of Customer Experience Management, spanning both pre- and post-sales interactions, to be incredibly fertile ground for authentically-mobile applications, which can create vibrant, real-time tethers to customers as well as to professionals in the field.

The personnel touch

Another cluster of authentically-mobile services is likely to appear in human resources. HR is being transformed from the disconnected, anecdotal adjunct of countless Dilbert cartoons to a data-driven discipline that is tightly integrated with critical business processes. This plays straight into the

wheelhouse of the authentically-mobile opportunity. Use cases will include everything from persistently hard-to-reach, discrete processes such as training and coaching to the pursuit of ongoing goals such as employee-performance improvement.

The fledgling field of “people analytics”, which seeks to measure things such as employee engagement, looks especially promising. Yoi, for instance, sets out to improve success rates in employee onboarding by providing new hires with information they need when on the move as well as at their desks. Importantly, the app also captures and quantifies data from employees in real time, feeding it back to managers who can step in swiftly to address any pain points or speed up a learning process. Yoi is an interesting example of how authentic mobility can be combined with the power of data and the cloud to penetrate a previously opaque problem space. We are quite eager to see others.

Other domains that are ripe for authentically-mobile applications range from payments to travel management and cybersecurity. As noted earlier, some consumer apps will migrate into the business arena to address companies’ needs. But there is a huge opportunity for entrepreneurs to create new offerings designed from the ground up for business markets. Plenty of shelf space is waiting to be filled in the emerging, authentically-mobile application store.

---

http://wing.vc/perspectives/essays/mobile-first.-but-whats-next
© 1990 — 2018 Wing, Menlo Park, CA