Mobilizing Business Desktop Software

Knowing where and how to invest in IT to keep up with customers is what keeps software developers awake at night. Some companies are aggressively pursuing new trends and technologies to capture “first market advantage” in search of a big payoff; while others must take a more conservative approach and wait for the market to develop before they can invest resources and precious investment dollars. With both approaches, software providers must carefully gauge their market audiences and adapt to key trends. Going wireless is an example of a recent trend software developers are considering now.

The Case for Pursing Mobile

Gartner Group estimates that by 2015 over 294 million tablets and over 1 billion smartphones will be in use - making mobile devices one of the hottest platforms for software developers to migrate to. What’s more, In-Stat estimates that SMBs plan to increase their spending on wireless data services by 42 percent from 2010 to 2015 and that productivity applications are expected to generate 59 percent of all smartphone application revenue . Companies of all sizes are considering incorporating mobile technology to enhance workforce productivity. Therefore, the mobile market will offer a tremendous opportunity for those who read the market well and provide value to mobile workers.

Mobile Market Opportunities and How IT Providers Can Get Ahead

1. Users Need a Common User Experience
One of the interesting characteristics of this market is that for most mobile users, their mobile device will be one of many computing devices they access regularly. Most will continue to use a desktop system to take advantage of large screen size, powerful computing resources (CPU, memory, and disk), full keyboard, and mouse. And when on the go, mobile workers will want to move seamlessly from their desktop system to a smaller tablet and/or smartphone.

When mobile users make the transition from desktop to mobile, they don’t want to

change applications or use “watered down” versions of their desktop systems. They want to continue to use the same features and functions with a common user experience. However, with a smaller screen, less computing power, and lack of a physical keyboard and mouse, IT providers will be challenged to provide the same user experience. How software companies deal with these issues will determine the value they provide to mobile workers and their ultimate success in this market.

2. Mobile Centric Additions
While great for information consumption (i.e. reading), many users continue to struggle to create information (i.e. writing) with mobile devices when using the virtual keyboard without a mouse. The challenge to mobile software developers will be providing innovations that address this problem, allowing mobile workers to easily input data. We have already seen the positive effects of innovations such as using finger gestures to zoom in and out and to turn pages, and perhaps utilizing pen technology and converting pen input from picture to text will be a more productive input mechanism than virtual keyboards. The key here is that there’s an obvious opportunity for IT solutions providers to take advantage of.

3. Platform Independence
For most market segments, desktop application developers have had the luxury of developing on a single platform to address the needs of their target market due to Microsoft Windows dominate market share with business desktop users. Although some market segments have a significant MacOS or UNIX/Linux presence, desktop business software developers don’t have large porting requirements. For the mobile market, this luck does not continue. The same Gartner Group report forecasts the iOS, Android, QNX, Microsoft, and Research In Motion operating systems will each have at least 10% market share for the tablet and/or smartphone markets. The catch is that supporting desktop applications on mobile devices is a little more expensive, but smart application developers will develop software that is highly platform independent to reduce development expenses while improving time to market.

4. Lightweight Architecture
Desktop application developers have had it easy recently with the power of today’s desktop and laptop systems, which have continually provided powerful CPUs, lots of memory, very large disk sizes, and large screen sizes. Today, many laptops sell with 17-inch screens and loads of computing resources. The abundance of these resources has made the need for lightweight architectures less important. Mobile devices don’t yet provide these luxuries – their requirement for light, thin, and easy to handle form factors change the way software developers must think. Now with the rise of mobile computing, the importance of lightweight architectures is paramount. Successful software developers will innovate here – those that don’t will be stuck with poorly performing applications, stripped down in features and functions to fit on to smaller resources. These stripped down applications will disrupt the common user experience mobile workers demand and require, and will result in incompatibilities between the desktop version and the mobile version of their applications – resulting in frustrated users.

5. Plug-In Capabilities

Desktop applications “plug-in” architectures have provided users with great value over the years. Plug-ins allow companies to purchase integrated add-on products to their favorite applications or build their own plug-ins to support unique workflows. Mobile workers provide great opportunities for innovative plug-in modules to improve mobile centric user experiences. Third party developers, internal IT development teams, and mobile workers should evaluate plug-in opportunities when evaluating mobile application platforms.

The desktop application market for the mobile workforce presents major revenue opportunities, challenges, and areas to innovate for software companies. Mobile users of today and the future will be careful to evaluate their software purchases, not only for desktop system compatibility but for mobile compatibility as well, to ensure that all their needs are meet on both platforms. And ultimately, it will be up to IT providers to make sure both are ready and up to par to fulfill those needs.

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[1] Source: Gartner Group April 2011

[1] Source: http://business-technology-roundtable.blogspot.com/2011/07/smb-demand-for-productivity-oriented.html [1]

[1] Source: http://www.asterisk-digium.com/entertainment-apps-dominate-download-volume-but-productivity-apps-is-where-the-money-is-at-in-stat-says.html [2]

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