A 'mobile-first' ethos: the catalyst for business transformation

By Lionel Moyal

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Organisations in every sector and every country are currently grappling with the concepts of 'digitalisation' and 'digital transformation'. While these terms have slightly different connotations for different people, the catalyst for transforming the enterprise should always be the same. That catalyst, simply put, is 'mobile'.

Embracing a truly mobile-first ethos involves taking a concept that began in developer circles, and applying the mobile-first principles to every aspect of the organisation's architecture, processes, strategies and vision. It's about simplifying interfaces and customer engagement channels as far as possible - ruthlessly stripping away anything unnecessary, focusing on intuitiveness, personalisation, and flexibility.

Creating a mobile-first world
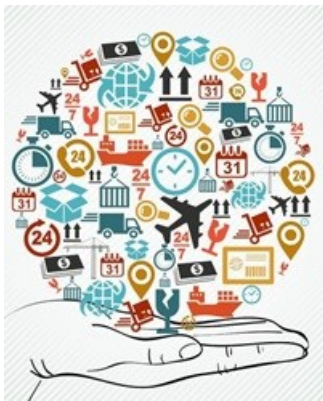
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But practically speaking, how can company leaders go about doing this? At Intervate, we believe the starting point is to analyse every process, every transaction, every product and service, and every customer touchpoint. Start thinking of users (employees, partners, etc.) as a kind of 'internal customer': how can you make every aspect of their working lives as mobile and as simple as the best consumer apps out there?

Start applying these mobile-first principles to the inner-workings of the organisation, as well as every touchpoint you have with outsiders. Think about suppliers and partners, customers and potential customers and other key stakeholders. Not only will employee productivity and engagement improve, but this new way of thinking will lead to ideas for new products or services, new markets to enter, and better ways to delight customers. Larger and more complex organisations, and particularly those with longer histories, often have a great deal of legacy infrastructure. In a mobile-first world, these services need to be exposed to users - both internal and external - in new ways.

Innovation in using mobile apps

Mobile apps have risen to the fore as the ideal way to consume content. The Johannesburg Roads Agency, for example, has shown the benefits of exposing parts of its core operations to the general public - via a handy mobile app called Find and Fix. Citizens can use the app to report the nature and location of road faults - which is then automatically fed into the JRA's workflow systems, where maintenance crews are scheduled and dispatched.

By wrapping this service into an app, the JRA has fundamentally changed the way faults are logged - as it now leverages the network of millions of citizens travelling around the city's road networks. It is able to be far more approachable and engaging than was previously possible. But the principle of 'mobile-first' can do more than just improve processes, productivity and customer engagement.

In the case of Cool Touch (a local start-up in the facilities maintenance company), they were able to pivot their entire business model. Cool Touch moved from being a simple cleaning and maintenance business to developing Snap!, an app that allows employees and facilities managers to instantly report any issues. The faults are geo-tagged, augmented with photos and descriptions and then managed centrally by Snap! - who converts this information into actionable and tracked service requests. Cool Touch has moved from a basic service model to being the lynchpin of an information exchange.

A natural fit for new business models

So with very little investment, Cool Touch has created a rapidly scalable new digital business model. With mobile as the starting point, organisations start to see the natural fit with other aspects of modern enterprise technology - notably the likes of Cloud-hosted applications, service-oriented architecture, security and rights management, and 'bring your own device'. In the future, we will continue to see users applying positive pressure on enterprises. As the gap widens between the mobile experiences of our personal lives, versus those of the workplaces, organisations will be forced to transform.

In fact, sometimes the best way to spur innovation is for users to experience frustration with their technology interactions in the workplace. Users today are becoming less forgiving of inflexible systems, poor interfaces, and endless policies and rules. Fortunately, with South Africa's rising smartphone penetration and falling mobile data costs, the landscape is primed for mobile-first services. Against this backdrop, it's clear that the organisations that listen to their users, and that think 'mobile-first', will have the advantage in the future.

ABOUT LIONEL MOYAL

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