The Mobility Landscape: Goals and Challenges

A new research report reveals how organizations are adapting to employees’ increasing need for mobile access, including mission-critical applications.

WAS IT ONLY A DECADE AGO that enterprise mobility solutions were the latest “new” thing, driven by advances in smartphones and tablets and the proliferation of Wi-Fi and other networks? Today, mobile-based solutions that access mission-critical applications have become the norm rather than the exception across businesses of all sizes and in all industry sectors.

Even though mobile operations have gone mainstream, companies still have outstanding needs—and see untapped opportunities—associated with this technology. That’s why nearly half (46%) of the IT and business decision-makers who responded to the 2017 CIO Technology Priorities poll said they planned to increase spending on mobile devices this year. An equal percentage looked to do the same for mobile enterprise apps.

Now, a new Quick Pulse poll by IDG Enterprise Research of more than 50 IT and business decision-makers provides more detailed insights into the state of mobility in North American companies. The findings include data about both the opportunities and challenges these executives and managers anticipate as they pursue mobility-powered solutions.

The North American Mobility Landscape

To say that mobility has gone mainstream would be an understatement. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of the IDG Quick Pulse respondents are already using smartphones and/or tablets to access mission-critical mobile applications beyond just email, calendar, and collaboration tools.

Along with mobility itself, the bring-your-own-device (BYOD) model has been adopted broadly. More than 62% of those surveyed support BYOD either exclusively (23%) or, more commonly, in a hybrid model that also includes company-issued phones (38%).

Although BYOD offers benefits such as greater flexibility and employee satisfaction, this approach likewise increases development, operational, and security complexities.

So which employees are the heaviest mobility users? IT services and support workers lead the pack among the survey population, with 68% of these workers using mobility today and another 18% planning to do so. Operations personnel follow (55% using, 23% planning), with three customer-facing departments—customer service and support, sales, and marketing—not far behind.

Mobility Goals and Challenges

Giving employees the ability to work while traveling, visiting customers, or telecommuting from remote offices delivers a wide range of benefits, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Companies cite boosting employee productivity as the top goal in deploying mobility initiatives. Nearly 40% mentioned three other critical objectives: improving customer/client satisfaction, increasing decision-making speed, and streamlining business processes.

Not surprisingly, opinions about top mobility goals vary somewhat based on the respondents’ positions in their companies. As illustrated in Figure 1, there are some interesting splits between those with the titles of vice president or above and their manager-level colleagues. For example, 28% of VPs+ respondents

![Figure 1. Top Goals of Mobility Initiatives](source: IDG Research, using MicroStrategy visualization tool (August 2017))
say that improving employee satisfaction is a top goal, compared to 14% of the other respondents.

Clearly, the respondents in top corporate positions tend to focus on strategic goals more than other workers do, with the latter group being more attuned to tactical issues such as budget constraints.

Although the survey respondents see a variety of potential benefits in their mobility initiatives, they aren’t blind to the hurdles they must clear to achieve their goals. Indeed, virtually all of the respondents (97%) find meeting the demand for mobile projects and applications in a timely fashion a challenge. More than half (55%) say it is either extremely or very challenging to do so, whereas VP+ respondents—who are somewhat removed from the day-to-day hurdles—are more likely to place less emphasis on the challenges (see Figure 2 above).

As has always been the case when it comes to linking mobile devices and workers to enterprise applications, security concerns lead the list of perceived challenges by a wide margin. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents cite this concern. As shown in Figure 3, budget constraints are mentioned by half of the respondents, followed closely by a lack of the right in-house skills and resources for building and managing mobility solutions. Again, as illustrated, there were some notable differences in the challenges that VP+ respondents and their manager-level colleagues see.

**Minimizing Challenges to Maximize Mobility’s Benefits**

Looking at the impressive adoption rate of mobile solutions in North America, it’s hard to believe that there were heated debates about the wisdom of mobile workforces only a few years ago. Plus, it’s important to understand that the IDG Research Quick Pulse survey has found that nearly three-quarters of the respondents are letting mobile employees access mission-critical enterprise mobile apps. Modern mobility solutions go well beyond first-generation email and collaboration apps.

The mission-critical nature of today’s mobility applications drives both their benefits and their challenges; mobility is now a core part of business operations, not just some superficial hanger-on. On balance, though, the benefits of enterprise mobile solutions clearly outweigh their challenges, as evidenced by mobility’s broad embrace and increasing investments.

Still, with this mainstream adoption has come a proliferation of device types and mobile operating systems, with BYOD programs adding yet another complicating factor from a development and management perspective. The result of this complexity: Companies often lack the in-house resources to exploit the full potential of mobility, especially if they’re trying to develop mobile apps and solutions from scratch.

Fortunately, companies can turn to sophisticated mobility development tools and platforms to lower the hurdles they face. In particular, code-free development platforms such as that offered by MicroStrategy can significantly reduce development complexity and time-to-market of enterprise-grade native mobile apps that mobilize business workflows. The MicroStrategy Mobile platform also builds in security and other critical mobile functionality, including bidirectional connections to existing enterprise systems, advanced analytics, embedded multimedia, and collaboration.

Discover why the [MicroStrategy Mobile](#) platform has it all.