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Case Study: User-Centric Design

CONTEXT

More than 90% of all companies are planning to develop mobile applications for their employees and/or customers. A market that had grown modestly and steadily for many years has reached take-off stage, as the stars have finally aligned: great devices, faster mobile networks, a more open, accessible, and lower cost application development framework, and a business model that enables multiple parties to participate in the ecosystem. At the center of this is the consumerisation of IT. The rapid growth of iOS and Android was initially a consumer-centric phenomenon. The user-friendly interface, with apps that can be easily downloaded, and, yes, enjoyed, for both personal and professional use, has had a significant influence on what employees want for work. The most progressive organizations have embraced a user-centric design philosophy. The results have been remarkable.

In this case study, we will discuss the journey of one such organization.

BACKGROUND

A large pharmaceutical company based in the United States has purchased 8,000 iPhones for its employees. Like many Fortune 500 organizations, the company uses SAP for a significant component of its supply chain and requisitioning process. One of the most common uses is for pharmaceutical sales reps to enter the results of meetings with physicians while on the road. Traditionally, the reps would have to fill out the transaction when back at the office or by VPNing in from a laptop. This cumbersome and time-consuming process resulted in more than 25% of calls being logged more than a week late or not at all.

The introduction of the iPhone and App Store, combined with Apple's increased focus on the enterprise, allowed IT to more seriously consider developing a mobile version of this SAP application for the iPhone that employees could easily access throughout the day and during downtime between meetings.

PROCESS

The initial "1.0" deployment of SAP on iPhones in 2008 was not successful. Similar to the attempts of IT departments at other companies over the years to mobilize corporate applications, this firm employed a "shrink to fit" approach -- meaning traditional web design processes were used to "put SAP on the phone".

The results were disappointing: take-up was modest, satisfaction was low, and extensive employee training was required.

Realizing they needed to find a better solution, the IT team went back to the drawing board. They considered how employees were enjoying iPhone apps for a broad range of purposes, from entertainment to business productivity. They then decided to take a very different approach: design an SAP application as if it were a consumer-facing application. They hired an expert in user-centric design, interviewed and consulted with employees extensively, did mockups and developed prototypes, tested, deployed in small groups, and iterated. A guiding principle was that employees would be able to download the app and use it intuitively without any training. Fifty percent of the time put into developing the app was on design rather than coding. Nine months after the initial SAP deployment, version 2.0 was launched and available for their employees.

mobile ecosystem

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RESULTS

The results with SAP Version 2.0 were very different than the first time around. The new application looked and felt like a traditional consumer mobile application for the iPhone, but it contained the necessary connection to the enterprise back-end system while meeting security and compliance requirements. The improvements led to a 56% reduction in the time needed to complete a transaction, compared to the earlier version of the application. Nearly 100% of sales calls are now being logged, with a vast majority of them on the same day. In fact, reps sitting in front of their PC with access to the same application now prefer to use their phone.

One key element of success is the effectiveness with which the company "marketed" the app. Colorful flyers, emails, and other collateral were developed – as if the company were promoting a game or a new movie. One IT executive said: "We made it sugary".

The success of Version 2.0 has led to significant expansion of the use of mobile at this pharmaceutical firm. More than 8,000 of the firm's employees now have a corporate- liable iPhone, including nearly all of the 1,500+ domestic pharmaceutical sales reps. There are now more than 30 custom applications available on the company's own iPhone "app store". Some of these apps are significant and mission-critical, while others, such as a conference room reservation app for the company's campus headquarters, were developed as a side project over a couple of weeks.

LESSONS LEARNED

The take-aways from this case study reflect how the mass market for mobility is impacting the enterprise. The employee is the consumer, and is at the center of the design process. They must be involved in all phases of application development, from ideation to design to testing, deployment, iteration, and measurement. These are the "customers" who are seeing leading-edge design work in the applications they are using every day, from personal entertainment to business productivity.

A significant shift is taking place in enterprise IT organizations as a result of the consumerisation of mobile devices. Budgets for mobile development are increasing, but, more importantly, user-design talent is becoming an imperative, whether brought in-house or when selecting a firm for application development.