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Multisourcing, Industry Certification Alleviate Mobile App Deployment Stress

BY NANCYE BECK

Rapidly evolving PDA and mobile communications technology, maturing data exchange standards like XML, and advanced application development are quickly coalescing to make wireless applications increasingly attractive to the enterprise. Industry forecasts paint a relatively healthy picture of increased use of wireless and mobile devices in the business space. For example, Meta Group, Inc. says in a recent study that wireless and mobile transactions will account for nearly 20 percent of business-to-business transaction volume by 2003.

Wireless applications are already presenting the enterprise with a host of diverse and wide-ranging benefits, including increased productivity, significant cost reductions, greater data accuracy, improved customer service, and increased revenues.

While applications have been developed across a wide range of industries, the development of more sophisticated wireless applications is underway. For the present, wireless applications include onsite insurance claims servicing, sales force access to customer information, mobile dispatch for maintenance personnel and field technicians, and shipment tracking.

In most instances, these wireless applications can be regarded as simple and basic, with little or no concern to the user or application provider. But there are increasingly complex enterprise wireless applications being developed to keep up with growing demands, better technology and increased competition.

Outsource, Or Keep It In-House?

With growing wireless enterprise needs, a large number of



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wireless application service providers (WASPs) and ISVs have emerged. Consequently, enterprise management must ask these questions: "Do we stay in-house and invest millions of dollars in developing and maintaining our wireless applications? Or do we outsource? If we outsource, to whom can we trust our valuable data, how can we be assured that our mission-critical applications will be safe and secure, and what will be our ROI?"

In some cases, managers will take the approach of keeping their application solutions in-house, as they are reluctant to entrust their infrastructure to a third party. Also, many have highly competent IT teams capable of meeting their needs, making it more cost-effective to stay in-house. Others will turn entirely to outsourcing, eliminating the hassle and work of developing an in-house solution. They can quickly find the best solution for their needs, as the top application providers can often offer better solutions than an in-house team, and for less money.

The New Multisourcing Model

But few cases are so clear-cut. As a result, a new model has also emerged. Service providers understand that they cannot approach companies with a single value proposition that forces customers into an all-or-nothing decision of whether to outsource or not. They are now entering new accounts with a higher-value, more flexible value proposition that we call "multisourcing."

Multisourcing offers two primary components. First, it offers customers flexible solutions, not cast-in-stone delivery models. This means a flexible, modular array of services -- including application development and customization, or full outsourcing -- allowing customers to choose which elements they want. Second, it gives customers a choice of delivery models. Once the customer chooses a solution, the customer can also choose between self-management, remote management, hosting, and so forth. Regardless of which the customer chooses, the provider can also offer a seamless, inexpensive migration path to whatever other delivery model makes sense to the customer at that time.

Choosing Industry-Certified Providers

It is important that IT managers choose industry-certified providers to meet their multisourcing needs. This strategy helps eliminate risk and concern, allowing companies to focus on their core businesses.

Industry certification in this space has two major objectives. One is to improve the quality of service (QoS) provided over wired and wireless networks, including Web-based or internal corporate networks. The other is to make it easier for prudent mobile

enterprise management to evaluate outsourced wireless applications and choose which would work best in their enterprise, with their infrastructure.

Wireless application certification should be carefully tailored for ISVs, application developers, and application service creators, who provide applications for Web delivery in an application hosting model. The process of certification must be focused on identifying quality wireless applications that are designed to function reliably and predictably in Web-based applications hosting environments.

Above all, certification must be based on an evaluation of a wireless application's architecture in terms of its availability, scalability, performance, security, and adaptability characteristics. For such a certification program to be effective, industry leaders from a variety of pertinent bodies must come together in what can best be described as an architectural council to define certification requirements and ensure that best practices are exercised.

Conclusion

If mobile enterprise management demands that industry seals of approval are stamped on outsourced wireless applications, they can be sure those software products will operate reliably and efficiently over time. The industry certification alleviates the worries of IT managers, allowing them to turn their full attention to their core competencies, putting greater efforts toward growing revenue, reducing total cost of ownership, and minimizing the need to build and support a costly and complex applications infrastructure.

Certification is also highly beneficial to application providers and ISVs. It acknowledges and approves their investments in reliability, scalability and quality at the application layer by providing a seal of approval for quality Internet services. Moreover, certification simplifies the selection of the best of breed among application offerings in the wireless industry. This enables mobile enterprise management to identify applications by proven best practices. It also enhances customer confidence in the outsourced applications model and builds credibility through best practices, resulting in superior wireless applications delivery.

Nancye Beck is the market development manager for the SunTone certification for applications program at Sun Microsystems, Inc. The SunTone program is a Sun-led industry initiative aimed at improving the quality of services provided over the Internet and making it easier for customers to evaluate product offerings. The SunTone program offers certifications for services, applications,

and integrator service offerings.

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