

The Enterprise App Catalog: Open for Business?


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It's time for corporate IT leaders to support every type of smartphone or mobile device, provided it can be managed and secured to enterprise standards. The point isn't to bet on Android phones over iPhones, or vice versa. It's to use consumer technology to better support employee productivity.

The time has come for every enterprise to have its own app catalog for employees. In other words, there should be enterprise app catalogs that recreate the consumer experience, providing applications—as well as the underlying security and management—for today's top mobile devices.

Why now? Because every employee today already has, or will soon have, a smartphone that connects to a public app catalog. Already, according to a recent survey¹, more than 75 percent of business professionals primarily use their smartphone—not a regular cell phone—for getting work done. Anecdotaly, the CEOs at some of Accenture's largest clients report their delight at now leaving a laptop behind when they travel, armed only with a smartphone or tablet. Pity the CIO who stands in his or her way.

But how do IT departments design, let alone develop a company-wide app catalog? The platform variety, user experience and potential traffic pose significant challenges. Just look at what Accenture alone is dealing with internally: 20,000 users—and growing—of Apple iOS devices, the increasing incursion of Android, entire groups devoted to Windows Mobile, and a sizeable Symbian user base. Seemingly every other consultant or business executive today is also carrying not just a smartphone but also an iPad.

The response to that challenge is starting to take shape. Given the underlying requirements—heterogeneous platforms, rapid rollout, easy support and development, and the ability to add new devices and platforms—it is becoming clear that enterprise app catalogs should run as a service just like an Android Marketplace or Apple App Store. Running app catalogs as a service is an effective way to deal with the increasing numbers—and heterogeneity—of mobile devices and apps. And it's elegant, because it presents business users inside each smartphone ecosystem with a single location to access both internally developed and externally sourced business apps.

Creating this type of user experience, however, may require managing mobile devices, enforcing security controls, as well as meeting employee expectations—set by the likes of Apple and Google, no less—for what constitutes an excellent user experience. In addition, this approach requires substantial development resources to deliver and maintain infrastructure and applications for multiple platforms. With every smartphone operating system revision, in-house developers must quickly create and test an update for every related app in the enterprise app catalog.

Given these business challenges, as well as the volatility in today's mobile technology sector, CIOs tell Accenture that they're seeking an established managed services provider to take responsibility for creating a cohesive, full-featured approach that continually integrates the latest mobile ecosystem capabilities. Accordingly, Accenture has been creating a managed service for delivering an enterprise application catalog—like an "Apple App Store" but private and without the e-commerce component—to an organization's employees.

State of the smartphone

One virtue of the enterprise app catalog model is that it does away with pretending to dictate which devices employees are "allowed" to use. In an ideal world, businesses could pick one smartphone and issue it to all employees. But these days, consumer technologies prevail—and employees are very much consumers.

Let's be clear: the "consumerization" of the enterprise has upended the traditional, top-down approach to IT. According to Aberdeen Group², 74 percent of top-performing companies already support more than one mobile platform.

Already, Apple³ says that 85 percent of *Fortune* 100 companies are deploying or testing the iPhone, and about two thirds of the Fortune 100 are testing and evaluating the iPad in the enterprise. While BlackBerry is still the number-one smartphone platform in the United States, both Apple iPhone and Google Android continue to grab market share.

Embrace smartphones' enterprise infiltration

Today, everyone from junior staff to the most senior executives are bringing the latest gadgets into the enterprise, connecting them to mission-critical systems and walking around with business-critical information on uncontrolled devices. Fears of increased data breaches are not unfounded. According to a recent study from iPass⁴, 18 percent of mobile-using employees have suffered a mobile-related security incident, while 36 percent of employees under the age of 35 have had seen their mobile devices lost, stolen, hacked or infected by a virus.

On the other hand, consider the upsides of smartphone revolution, which include just-in-time access to relevant business data and arguably, greater productivity. According to a study⁵ conducted by LinkedIn for *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, for example, 22 percent of workers say the most effective tool they have for helping them do their job is their smartphone.

Furthermore, smartphone makers continue to get smarter about business concerns. Early on, BlackBerry offered business-grade security and encryption. But Apple—best known for making consumer-focused devices—has been listening to its enterprise users and playing catch up. By iOS4, Apple began offering enterprise application security and management capabilities, including wireless app distribution without having to use the App Store, full-fledged support for Microsoft Exchange servers, as well as mobile device management capabilities.

Play to multiple platforms

Does the answer to enterprise smartphone success start with forgetting the Apple App Store, Android Marketplace, BlackBerry AppWorld and Windows Marketplace? Not at all. They still serve a valuable purpose, principally as market-driven, innovative sources of new applications primarily aimed at consumers, but also available for businesses to adopt and modify.

But smartphones' success comes at a business price, in that going forward, organizations must support a greater number of platforms and types of devices based on those platforms. By 2014, predicts IDC⁶, total smartphone shipments worldwide will reach 480 million units. Isn't it time for enterprises to opt out of as much of the "managing mobile devices" equation as they can?

Discretion is a virtue

First, businesses need something more private than a public app catalog. Few, if any, organizations want their CRM application for Android, BlackBerry or iOS to live on a public app catalog, go through related approval processes, or be subject to public ratings. Security is a concern, as is seeing internal apps listed next to apps of unknown quality or subject matter.

Simply put, internal business applications don't belong on a public app catalog. Accordingly, an enterprise app catalog differs from a public app catalog by providing a single location for each approved type of mobile device to access approved—or perhaps even just recommended—mobile applications. Pilots are already underway.

Accenture, for example, is working with third-party providers, combining off-the-shelf technology (mobile device management, smartphone security, application catalogs) with developers skilled at creating and adapting cutting-edge smartphone applications for business use. Accenture is considering a rollout of Accenture's app catalog – as a managed service – to Accenture's more than 20,000 iOS users, followed by separate app catalogs for users of Android, BlackBerry and Windows.

What's required to make an enterprise app catalog work? From an employee standpoint, what's required is simply to install the enterprise catalog app on his or her device and register it with the app catalog for the first time. The smartphone-based app catalog software bundles device management and security controls, including remote-wipe capabilities, so that IT administrators can manage all enterprise-connected mobile devices.

Enterprise app catalogs in the cloud

To make this happen from a business standpoint, think "subscription," since the enterprise app catalog will be a managed—that is to say, turnkey—service. A vendor, provider or consulting firm handles the required hardware, software and hosting, offering enterprise app catalogs from the cloud.

The benefits of this model are numerous: enforcing a common security infrastructure, plus trustworthy mobile devices and better data security. Enterprises can manage all of their employees' business-connected mobile devices, so if the CEO's iPhone goes missing, IT can remotely delete the data and start over. In terms of support, an enterprise can realistically—and affordably—cater to any major mobile device, because they're subscribing to the app catalog as a service. Meaning that the provider handles the back-end detail work, including hardware and infrastructure. Finally, this approach gives enterprises a way to distribute approved applications to any employee or restrict them to designated employees.

Mobile app silo problem

How would an enterprise app catalog differ from what's currently available? Today's consumer app catalogs offer a mind-boggling quantity of applications. For example, the Apple App Store offers over 300,000 apps (and more than six billion apps have been downloaded to date). By contrast, enterprise app catalogs would necessarily emphasize quality or business need over quantity.

Enterprise app catalogs also serve to consolidate and expose the custom-developed mobile applications—time and expense management, front-line sales and service tools, information retrieval and more—already in use inside many organizations. Creating a consolidated catalog of these applications is a crucial next step, so a top-notch mobile application developed by the UK division can also be used by the US group. Organizations can even outsource the maintenance and development of those applications to lower the associated costs.

Mobile application one-stop shop

As CIOs prepare to make significant investments in building and supporting mobile capabilities for employees, they need an approach that is rapid, cost-effective, easy to scale and future-proof. Ideally, they tell Accenture, they don't want to worry about hardware, software or application development, or to have to choose just one platform to support. Furthermore, they fear the expense of having to adjust the IT upgrade cycle—months or years between updates—for end users accustomed to the frequency of smartphone app upgrades.

The answer is to create a private app catalog. Because employees demand nothing less than a consumer-grade experience. Accordingly, enterprise smartphone applications must be frequently updated, with those updates automatically pushed over the air—just like a public app catalog. CIOs, meanwhile, need a better way to cater to Android, Apple, BlackBerry or any other smartphone device of their employees' choosing. They want to promote productivity while staying secure, and to offer users an approved list of applications, with tie-ins to corporate systems, and wireless updates.

The solution to both requirements is the same: create a one-stop-shop for all of the enterprise's mobile apps, regardless of who develops or maintains them. Because maximizing the innovative potential offered by smartphones requires consolidating an enterprise's mobile apps, providing easy access—as well as access control, and smoothly distributing and managing those apps.

It's time to open the enterprise app catalog for business.

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Notes

¹ *PC World*, August 2010.

² Report from May 2010.

³ Statistics from October 2010.

⁴ <http://www3.ipass.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Mobile-Workforce-Report-November-2010.pdf>.

⁵ http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/apr2010/tc2010049_121424.htm.

⁶ Report from June 2010.

About Accenture

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with approximately 211,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions, and extensive research on the world's most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. The company generated net revenues of US\$21.6 billion for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31, 2010. Its home page is www.accenture.com.



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