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## Going beyond BYOD: Creating custom iOS business apps

BY RYAN ROSENBERG July 10 2012, 4:45 am

COMMENTS 1



**It began with bring-your-own-device (BYOD) and individual employees taking their own iPads and iPhones into the workplace.**

Individuals, business teams and IT, were all intrigued by productivity gains they saw and now many organizations are going further by developing custom business apps for iOS.

In surveying our customers, some of the most common uses for custom apps emerged. These include solving specific tasks like inventory management, invoicing, customer relationship management, field research, inspections and surveys.

This is no surprise: these all require on-the-spot information retrieval and entry.

The high-tech Austin Convention Center eliminated paper-based work orders, getting 200 percent ROI.

Lee Medical achieved a dramatic value proposition for healthcare, resulting in improved quality and lives saved at reduced costs.

At West Paw Design, FileMaker Go for iPad has automated the entire business, from order entry to final delivery, and saved hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

These and other businesses and organizations are eager to move their most vital processes to iOS devices, but most face a critical question—how to quickly, cost-effectively, and easily create and update iOS apps. The traditional choices for app development are:

— Create a native app in Objective C. This provides great flexibility but requires staff with significant programming expertise. And deploying the apps to other platforms (such as Windows or Mac desktops)

requires a separate development effort.

— Develop a web app and point mobile browsers at it. This, too, entails extensive programming work using tools such as JavaScript and CSS. Apps created in this fashion often lack the interactivity expected of native apps and must have a continuous web connection to operate.

Other challenges with these coding-based methods in a business environment are:

- The time and cost of integrating custom apps into existing back-end infrastructure
- The need to acquire or build custom libraries for common business functions such as charting, PDF generation, reporting, or signature capture
- The requirement for tools to manage app distribution and updates

An increasingly attractive alternative is to use a platform designed for creating and managing custom business apps. One popular example is the platform from FileMaker, an Apple subsidiary.

Employees have very high expectations for the iPad and iPhone experience and excellent design is essential to adoption. A good platform should include tools that make it easy to design attractive and easy-to-use iOS apps.

Ultimately, the platform should support native iPad and iPhone clients because they provide the iOS behavior and responsiveness users expect, including support for gestures such as pinch and zoom, and support for native functions such as location.

A good platform goes far beyond the client with the ability to configure direct connections to SQL sources, support for common data exchange APIs such as XML and xDBC, and integration with popular authentication systems such as Active Directory.

Deployment challenges should also be tackled, including the ability to push real-time app updates to devices connected to a server.

The popularity and usefulness of the iPad and iPhone are making them essential for improving business operations. An end-to-end platform that supports the complete lifecycle for iOS business apps is the way to ensure a smooth transition to this new world.

*Ryan Rosenberg is Vice President, Marketing and Services for FileMaker.*

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