
Leveraging New Mobility Technology in the Field

In the mobile arena, many hardware and software providers have enjoyed periods as market leaders over the years. In the past 12 months alone, new technologies and devices have rapidly gained in popularity and overtaken the #1 spot. With the state of flux unlikely to change anytime soon, building a sustainable mobile CRM strategy in the midst of such uncertainty is a universal challenge facing organizations today. Read about the keys to crafting a viable long-term plan and executing against it.

As recently as 18 months ago, few would have guessed just how quickly the iPad could gain traction in the business environment. What's more, no one predicted then that an operating system (OS) from Google, a company not previously known for its OS or mobile platform, would be the market leader as 2012 approached.

The flood of new devices and mobile offerings is staggering. In just a year, the worldwide market share of smartphones was turned on its head (Figure 1), with the state of flux expected to continue. The same is predicted for the tablet market (Figures 2-3). Despite the dynamics of the environment, some organizations appear eager to embrace the advances almost as fast as they arrive.

In PricewaterhouseCooper's 2011 global CEO survey, 88 percent of CEOs say they expect to make some change or significant change to their business strategies because, in part, of the increasing use of mobile devices. Additionally, 46 percent say their information technology (IT) investments will be made primarily to support growth initiatives and take advantage of emerging innovations, such as mobile technology and devices.¹

Mobile technology advancements in the past 12 to 18 months have underscored the fact that there will not be a single OS or device on which companies can reliably base a mobile CRM strategy. Combine that with the many shapes, sizes and price points of available hardware, and the path isn't straightforward.

Building a Sustainable Mobile CRM Strategy

Building a viable long-term mobile CRM strategy for your field teams in the face of such uncertainty isn't impossible. There are four keys to crafting an approach that is feasible as well as future-proofed.

1. **Cover Your Bases.** Devices can have short life-cycles. Within a year, you may no longer be able to replenish devices that fail or purchase additional hardware for a growing field force. Moreover, you can't predict a winner in the OS/device battle to any greater degree than hardware manufacturers and software providers. No one has a crystal ball. Stay above the fray and rely on applications that run across all major platforms and a variety of devices.
2. **Business Needs First.** It's tempting to be swayed by slick features, but organizations need to focus on the needs of the business. Make sure the features and functionality of your mobile CRM system truly optimize performance in the field. For example, the inability to do one's job when network connectivity is lost or unavailable negatively impacts productivity.
3. **Make it Easy.** Corporate or enterprise software has always been more difficult and less intuitive than consumer software. Change the paradigm by deploying an easy-to-use CRM application that works with existing back-end systems.
4. **Lower the Expense.** Historically, mobility has come at hefty price. Mobile devices have traditionally been more expensive; however the new generation of smartphones and tablets greatly reduces those costs. Additionally, understand the full cost implications of any potential third-party service providers.

Translating Strategy to Features

Matching these strategic imperatives with specific features and functionality in a CRM application can be accomplished by asking several important questions of your CRM vendor.

1. **Is the application device independent?** Choose a CRM application that is the same for smartphones and tablets. In other words, work with a vendor whose software automatically senses and adjusts for the size and resolution of the screen that is being used so that you aren't locked into any one form.
2. **Does your system work across multiple platforms?** The optimal CRM application isn't built upon any one mobile platform. Working across all the major platforms and a variety of hardware enables you to take advantage of competitive device pricing, improvements in capacity and the latest models and features at any time, without the need to fund a different mobile CRM solution.



Figure 1 - Smartphone Market Share

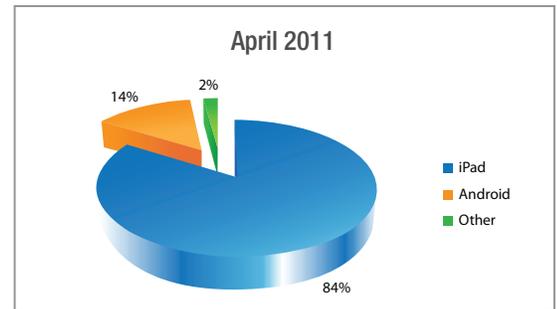


Figure 2 - Recent Tablet Market Share

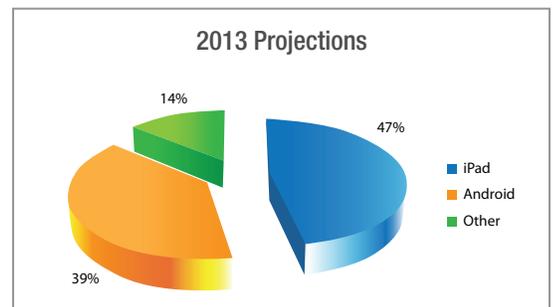


Figure 3 - Projected Tablet Market Share

Source: Gartner

3. **Is your solution zero install?** Applications can be difficult to deploy. Missing components, conflicts with existing systems or other unexpected circumstances cause delays and ultimately require significant IT involvement. Look for a mobile CRM application that is zero-install, meaning the IT or support teams do not need to touch/see the application or the device it's on – ever. Teams can be up and running in minutes when using CRM software that is downloaded from a browser or app store.
4. **Will my teams be able to work online and offline?** Reps in the field inevitably spend a portion of the work day in an environment where network connectivity is limited or absent. A CRM system that has the ability to capture information offline, store it securely and seamlessly upload it when connectivity resumes is a must. This turns down time into productive time by allowing field teams to input, track and store critical aspects of their sales and marketing activities anytime and anywhere.
5. **Is there seamless integration with existing systems?** ERP applications, third-party data suppliers and even legacy CRM systems all need to exchange information securely and seamlessly with a mobile CRM solution.
6. **What is the full cost?** Devices that run on iOS and Android™ instead of laptops and ruggedized hardware will reduce price. But beware of hidden costs as well. CRM solutions can require third-party service providers. Be sure to factor in the time required to manage this network or the added fees of any necessary consultants. You can avoid the complexity and associated expense of third-party service providers by partnering with a single vendor that provides CRM and support services.
7. **What is the user experience?** Users today have high expectations when it comes to smartphones and tablets. Slick, finger-friendly actions are an important component. Nothing will frustrate users more than uneven or jumpy responses.

The Right Technology

HTML5 is an exciting, new web programming language. Native apps are specific to a given platform and device (for example, applications for Apple's iPhone and iPad are different). However, HTML5 applications can be built once and then deployed many times over various platforms and devices, making them platform-agnostic and device-independent.

CRM software vendors developing HTML5 applications spend less time recreating the wheel for different platforms and devices, and can instead focus on what matters most – the features and functionality that improve field force effectiveness.

HTML5 applications are stored on the device. After the first download, HTML5 applications can be developed so that they can run without an Internet connection, allowing work to be completed online and offline.

Applications built using HTML5 are easy, fast and convenient. Upgrades are quickly and easily developed and released automatically to the field.

HTML5 can leverage a device's user interface mechanisms, so users of Androids, iPhones and iPads can have the touch-friendly experience they expect, which ultimately contributes to higher adoption rates.

Conclusion

In the global market for mobile platforms and devices, continual hardware and software innovations make it difficult to crown the "King of the Hill."

Crafting a sustainable mobile CRM strategy in this dynamic environment is a universal challenge. Companies need to counter enthusiasm for a "cool" device or a popular platform with a plan that allows them to capitalize on competitive pricing, newer models and general improvements, without the need to fund an entirely different mobile CRM solution in the future.

Mobile applications in HTML5 represent a solid foundation on which to build. HTML5 is next-generation technology for web-based applications designed for mobile devices.

HTML5 technology allows companies to plan for today and build for the future by working across the major platforms and on many different devices. HTML5 applications are easy to use, and teams can be up and running in minutes with no IT involvement. Because HTML5 can leverage a device's user interface mechanism, users of iPhones, iPads and Androids have the experience they expect.

New mobility technology is changing the way reps can do business in the field. With a few careful considerations, you can leverage the advancements to drive productivity and improve performance in the field.

About StayinFront

StayinFront is a global provider of the world's most innovative customer relationship management solutions. From on-demand and on-premise CRM to mobile CRM access in the field using Androids™, iPhones and iPads, its ground-breaking software offers rich functionality, fast deployment and easy-to-use tools that increase sales force effectiveness. StayinFront has been selected as a strategic partner by many of the world's top life sciences, consumer goods and business-to-business companies, improving efficiencies in over 65 countries and more than 25 languages. Headquartered in Fairfield, NJ, USA, StayinFront has offices in the United Kingdom, Ireland, India, Australia, Singapore and New Zealand. For more information, visit <http://stayinfront.com> or log on to our blog at <http://blogs.stayinfront.com>.

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