

Crafting an Effective Enterprise Mobility Strategy around ERP

Enterprise mobility is not a new concept - most businesses have been running some sort of mobilized business processes for years now. The most established ones are typically found in warehouses or logistics departments such as shippers and receivers on the docks quickly scanning materials in and out of inventory). Early innovators proved the value of mobile solutions, yielding benefits in cost savings, customer satisfaction, and supply chain flexibility and even revenue generation. But these early adopters also shared some challenges.

Enterprises deploying at the dawn of enterprise mobility had to become experts themselves to get a mobile solution up and running. The scenarios deployed were all custom-built and custom-maintained (think of UPS drivers with their custom mobile tablets). The costs to deploy a solution were high. Today, the mobile space has changed considerably. For some functions, market adoption is so great that mobile capabilities are a competitive *necessity* rather than a competitive edge. This pervasiveness brings opportunities for standard mobility solution offerings, wider reach, and reduced costs of deployment. In other words, it's no longer inevitable that implementing a mobile solution will require in-house expertise or deployment resources that normally accompany a one-off solution. Standard solutions, with minimal customization, can achieve the same goals with lower costs when it comes to deployment and long-term maintenance. This article offers a framework for evaluating your mobile solution needs, and highlights a practical approach to enterprise mobility for ERP customers that helps avoid introducing custom-built or one-off solutions for every mobile demand. Customers can leverage their existing ERP infrastructure, lower integration costs, and still meet very specific mobile technology goals.

Considering the 3 Types of Mobile Solutions

Many companies make the mistake of taking a reactive approach to new mobile requirements as they see a need. For example, the Service Management line of business manager needs to enable all his service engineers with a mobile solution to replace their outdated paper processes and increase the organization's employee utilization, so they choose and deploy one of many mobile enterprise solutions. But if every new mobile scenario requires a custom solution, your enterprise is facing some big infrastructure and maintenance headaches. Without understanding the complete picture, you could implement a mobile solution that cannot easily extend to meet the enterprise mobility needs of your entire organization. This could be a costly mistake if, for example, you were to have multiple middleware servers each supporting their own custom mobile solution.

A more strategic view of mobile solutions looks for common elements across a mobile solution set, which you could leverage for your industry or for employees in a particular user group. With this approach, you would consider the *category* of mobile functionality:

Functional mobile solutions, for tasks shared by a specific group of users: These include solutions for a particular team of users, such as salespeople or service teams out in the field.

Horizontal mobile solutions, for more general uses across a company: These include expense reporting solutions such as Time or Travel Management, or "casual use" scenarios such as key performance indicator reporting, or the ability to approve workflows on the fly.

Industry mobile solutions, for a specific industry: Some industries today require mobility for employees to do their jobs. Manufacturers in the consumer package goods (CPG) industry, for example, might require a mobile direct store delivery solution so that they can deliver products on demand directly to retail stores, priced accordingly and based on actual onsite consumption, in real time.

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Functional scenarios attend to the needs of a particular group of users across industries but with a common function, and they frequently are among the most mission-critical tasks. Here, a single scenario can cover a lot of ground. For example, the typical mobile service scenario encompasses internal and external customer service and plant maintenance, but could support a variety of users, including:

- Sales representatives who have a daily tour schedule visiting customers and need to record sales orders, need real-time information about their customer's order history, order status, average consumption patterns and who also need to record information about orders placed.
- Service representatives who visit customers and need to record complaints about goods or services, and who record service orders at the customer site. These reps can also access master data and maintain records about service activities.
- Internal field engineers who perform plant maintenance tasks from a mobile device at customer sites or within plants while disconnected from the enterprise systems.
- External service professionals who must plan and assign service requests to the appropriate service representative based on workers' availability and competency.

From a functional scenario perspective, enterprises must ask:

Can we deploy a mobile service solution for the field service organization *and* a mobile sales solution for the sales teams, all utilizing the same infrastructure and without having to maintain custom interfaces to my ERP system?

Horizontal mobile scenarios usually serve a common business need that is felt across a wide range of roles and that can apply to almost any enterprise.

An example is Time and Travel Management, which aims to significantly reduce organizations' travel expenditures through implementation of an electronic travel policy. When this solution is used in an industry such as professional services, it can also ensure faster billing cycles, reduced errors, and quicker turnaround of expense claims.

From a horizontal application perspective, organizations must determine if they can easily deploy these processes to a wide array of employees and still manage them effectively. Is integration into ERP available? Is there a common means of managing application deployment and user authentication? And can multiple scenarios run on a user's mobile device, all utilizing the same client and backend infrastructure? For example, if service engineers require both a mobile service solution and a time and travel solution, can they use them both on their mobile devices as one integrated solution?

Industry mobile solutions can be considered "killer" mobile applications within their respective industries.

For example, the pharmaceutical industry sales force has some unique needs: Sales representatives maintain an electronic inventory of the drug samples they provide to medical practices and institutions. Upon delivery, sales representatives must capture a signature. A mobile solution customized for this industry enables all this to occur electronically. Today, such a mobile pharmaceutical sales solution is a requirement in order to remain competitive in the industry.

A specific industry solution, however, does not prohibit an organization from using either functional or horizontal solutions. In most cases, these solutions can also be easily customized for a respective industry.

So now you may ask, "This is all great information, but how can I apply it to *my* business?" You can start by evaluating your ERP mobility requirements based on three key questions:

- Do I need mobile functionality that is purely industry-focused?
- Do I need a mobile solution that is role-focused, and if so, how many user roles might my organization want to deploy?

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- Are there common elements across a horizontal or functional solution that would apply to my industry?

Your answers to these questions should assist you in avoiding unnecessary complexity and duplication in your ERP mobility strategy.

For decades, ERP vendors have been empowering businesses of all sizes with a family of adaptive business solutions, providing best-of-breed functionality built for complete integration, industry-specific functionality, unlimited scalability, and easy collaboration over the Internet.

Standard ERP vendors include solutions that support key functional areas including Financials (compliance and governance), Operations (procurement, manufacturing, operations, sales and service), Human Capital Management (talent recruitment, management and professional services) and Corporate Services.

A mobility strategy centered on your ERP can span the following functional areas:

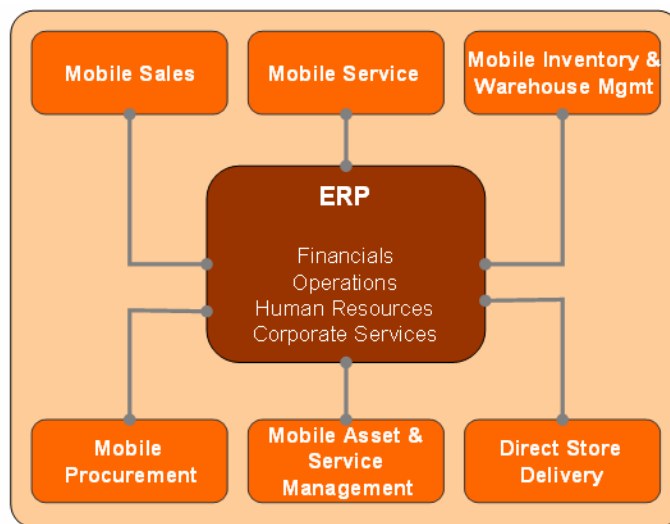


Figure 1: Standard solutions covering the range of enterprise functions are available today

- Mobile Sales -- Provides a solution for salespeople who need to perform their tasks quickly and productively
- Mobile Service -- Enables field service engineers to react quickly to customer needs
- Mobile Inventory & Warehouse Management – Allows inventory managers and warehouse operators to monitor stock levels, record real-time goods transfers and track inventory along the supply chain
- Mobile Procurement -- Enables your mobile workers to manage the entire procurement process, from price comparison to ordering
- Mobile Service & Asset Management -- Allows in-house service engineers to access relevant business processes anywhere, anytime
- Direct Store Delivery -- Empowers delivery personnel with the tools to service customers and manage relationships

Summary

The mobile marketplace has come a long way, and while it can be a challenging space, it can yield great benefits across a wide range of business areas. Armed with the understanding of your opportunities and pitfalls when it comes to custom-built and customized solutions, you can make an informed decision about how and when standard solutions can suit your enterprise mobility needs.

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