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TOP 10 MOBILE DEPLOYMENT TIPS FOR 2020

For many years, the hardest part of launching a new mobile technology program or function was the first part; configuring and distributing devices, and then getting users started with the new devices and software. The complexity and risk of mobile projects have put many of them on perpetual pause. Many others have had their hopeful start turn into budget-draining disasters because of forgotten or under-scoped parts of the project have become crises or cycles of rework. We continue to collect these sad stories, as well as many positive ones, and have provided below our most recent set of cautionary notes that we suggest you consider before you get too far with your project.

This list includes lots of good news to address your fears, though. So much has changed over the past few years as devices, operating systems, software, and even the financing models for enterprise mobility programs have matured to make mobile devices a more manageable part of the IT environment- so much so that some departments or lines of business forgo IT and deploy mobile solutions on their own.

1 Take the 3-Step Approach to launching your enterprise mobility program:

As much as we would love to sell you a massive deployment project, it is very important to follow the best practice of having at least three steps with gates between them.

Step 1: Proof of Concept (POC)

The proof of concept should demonstrate how your project solves the intended business problem. The gate for the end of this step should be when the stakeholders agree that it is worth moving forward. This will ensure that you have the support to work through problems in the next few stages.

Step 2: Pilot Deployment

A pilot is a mini deployment that tests your theories but adds sufficient scale to validate upside and expose issues. This step is your best hope to catch the "unknown unknown" parts of your project - the things you haven't considered (and that an experienced partner can predict).

Step 3: Deploy Your Mobility Program in Phases

If everyone is still on board, you should plan to launch the rest of your deployment in phases. You will find additional elements of scale or context that you and everyone else forgot to consider and you will be thankful if you don't have to address all of them at once. As Rob Seemann, VP of Sales and Marketing for Vox Mobile says, "Deploying mobility at scale exposes gaps that are very hard to see until you've experienced them. When we have a scoping conversation with a customer, we always hear them say 'I hadn't thought about that' about a dozen times."

2 No-Touch mobile deployment technology:

If you are considering any size of mobile device deployment, you should plan to use one of the zero-touch configuration and enrollment technologies, like Apple®'s Device Enrollment Program (DEP). Apple and the other OEMs have been working diligently to solve the deployment problem from a technology perspective and have succeeded in making this part of the program a no-brainer. All iOS devices can now be enrolled in DEP and managed centrally such that users have very few, if any, requirements in turning a new, unopened box into a working, fully configured device. The list of things you don't have to worry about when your devices are enrolled in DEP is extensive and, without it, this list of tips would have to be 50 items long. According to Mr. Seemann, "No other development in enterprise mobility has had a more positive effect on deployments and management than DEP. There used to be a time when it wasn't appropriate for all environments, but that is no longer the case."

Some of our favorites include:

a. MDM/EMM enrollment and configuration can be automated
b. Content and apps can be deployed, configured or reconfigured, over the air
c. Centralized control of when updates are pushed to the devices
d. Managed Location tracking
e. Central management against device lock-out (never have an iOS device become a "brick" again)

3 Logistics can eat your budget:

The technology won't be where your budget explodes, it will be in moving devices and accessories around, repairs and replacements. If you are using DEP or some other zero-touch platform, software and configurations can be managed over the air, but broken screens will still require human intervention. There will be some percentage of your devices that need physical attention every month, but you won't know how often this is the case until you have your devices operating in the way you intend to use them. This is one of those things you will want to benchmark during your Pilot and early phases of your deployment. Fully planning and diagramming what happens when the inevitable device breaks or goes missing will help you think through things like where you keep your replacement devices, how long a worker or process is down if the device is unusable and what your options are for getting everything back up and running. Experienced providers can help you with options and scenario planning, but more about that later.

4 Don't buy the mobile devices:

No matter what you deploy, there's a good chance it will be ready for replacement in the next 24 months - both because the technologies will have advanced and because the older devices will start to want more attention. The market for used devices is relatively stable now, making it easy to identify leasing opportunities for your fleet. Many providers will now also include cases, insurance, support, software, like MDMs, and even bandwidth in the package - making the whole project a mobility-as-a-service model, meaning you consume the devices and service at a rate closer to your value realization. If you are still thinking that those nearly-free devices from your carrier are a good deal, you have missed the multiple reports from multiple analyst organizations that show otherwise. In almost all cases, you will be best off if you bundle all the cost elements of your deployment into a leasing model that protects you from economic risks so you can focus your attention on ensuring that the project returns the business value you were looking for originally.

If you do plan to buy, don't buy ahead of need. The cost of the device won't go down enough based on volume to give you any reason to buy devices all at once. Margins on hardware are minimal to begin with so discounts are razor thin. The risk of making it all sit on a shelf while you solve other problems is far more likely and far greater. According to Mr. Seemann, "We have had pallets of our customers' devices sit in our warehouse only to be sold later for pennies on the dollar."

5 Model the bandwidth during the Pilot:

Mr. Seemann cautions, "Most of our experiences with device deployment suggest that the device will consume more data when in service than you originally predicted which can either cause unexpected cellular data fees or clog Wi-Fi networks." Some of this can be planned for and managed, like iOS updates that can be delayed and handled in an orderly fashion if they are managed by DEP. Others will likely surprise you, particularly if you don't restrict access to bandwidth-hungry apps on the device. As you plan your Pilot and initial roll-out stages, plan to monitor bandwidth consumption or network traffic so you can calculate your eventual needs or work to suppress the unwanted flow.

6 Plan to revise your Plan:

Regardless of the amount to planning you have put into your configuration or that custom app, you will very likely need to make some major adjustments at the Pilot or initial deployment phases. You should plan for that time and expense in your project plan and make certain all your stakeholders know it is coming. According to Mr. Seemann, "In our experience, you are better off thinking through how you plan to measure business value and then get your project started. Whatever you thought was going work will only be partially right and version 2 will be much better." Don't get stuck in version 1. No one will like it and likely no one will use it.

7 Consider other carrier options:

Your devices will need bandwidth and, as stated elsewhere, probably more than you think. Regardless of how good of a relationship you have with your carrier, they still struggle to tailor programs that meet with specific or specialized deployment needs. Customized bandwidth packages, multi-carrier bandwidth pools and IP restrictions are just a few of the dozens of features that can make mobile deployments – especially tablets – effective and efficient. Virtual carriers, carrier aggregators and MVNOs are available to cover a wide range or specialized needs.

8 Don't be afraid of Mobile App Development:

Most organizations begin their mobile program journey with baby steps in one of three directions 1) Just deploy the third-party apps for your internal systems 2) Hire a third party to develop a minimal custom app or 3) have internal resources that are not particularly experienced with mobile app development put something together. None of these are bad first steps, but your expectations on business impact shouldn't be larger than your commitment. All three of these paths are good starts (better than doing nothing) but they all require second and third phases for a program to connect with users, lock into business process, and deliver the breakthrough value that you should be aiming for with your mobile program. There are compelling stories across every business type, from well-known examples in Healthcare and Retail (https://www.apple.com/business/resources/) to business-changing transformations in manufacturing and distribution (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRHIFLDTa68)

9 Don't make your design too dependent on a single model:

Everything changes. As you have likely come to recognize, market forces put extraordinary pressure on the OEMs to update their device lines multiple times per year. Unlike earlier corporate technology deployments where you might attempt to lock in a particular model or form factor for an extended life time, mobile programs operate more efficiently if you accommodate the inevitable changes to size and ports and focus your standardization efforts around a set of technologies, like iOS and DEP. Apple has settled into an enterprise-friendly cycle of maintaining inventory of devices for a healthy long lifetime (for mobile devices) both as new and reconditioned devices but you will likely find the 2-year replacement cycle to be best for keeping devices in good working order. The hardware purchase isn't where you will see cost leakage, it is in the handling of devices for replacement and reconfiguration. With iOS and DEP, you can minimize trouble and risk on the resource intensive part of the program (support and logistics) and instead keep your investment focused on things that actually add value, like newer hardware, applications and user experience. (https://www.enterprisemobilityexchange.com/eme-device-management/news/mobile-device-failure-workers-stress-anxiety)

10 Service Providers can remove the risks:

A mobile deployment can involve a lot of moving parts, some of which will be resource intensive for a limited time. The most important part for internal resources to focus on during the early stages are the user experience (which impacts adoption and utilization) and the business value return. Getting good at these things will be valuable to the organization for a long time to come so it worthwhile to develop these skills. The rest of the job you might want to leave to someone with more experience, systems, and processes. Third party service providers will already have a battle-tested project plan for the critically important (but low-value) parts of the mobile program like procurement, configuration, activation, and user support that you may decide to bring back in house later once you have developed good muscle memory around the more strategic activities.

The best part of all this is that there are ample examples of deployments – both successes and failures – so you don't have to go into one of these projects like you are inventing the process. There are best practices for each step and well documented project plans and rationalized timelines so you can be clear with all your stakeholders on the requirements and projected outcomes and costs.

Ready to get started with your company's mobile deployment project? Vox Mobile has completed hundreds of deployments of tens to tens of thousands of devices. Contact us to learn how we can help you.

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