The cellular phone market has evolved from mobile phones to feature phones to PDAs to smartphones. Consumers have responded to the enhanced communication capabilities, increased ability to interact and the convenience of mobile devices, and the market has grown quickly. The pace and complexity of change has meant that most organizations have found themselves in unchartered territory. Far from a passing trend, Forrester believes that mobile is the “flash point for a holistic, far-reaching change” for businesses.1 Gartner estimates mobile transaction volume averaging 42 percent annual year over year growth between 2011 and 2016, and they forecast the worth of the mobile market at $617 billion with 448 million users by 2016.2 This does not include the business process transformation and optimization opportunities around leveraging new mobile technologies and the portability of access to back-end systems. The ever-increasing customer adoption and utilization of smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices means that organizations must enter the mobility arena in some capacity or they will surely be left behind competitively.

While most organizations’ mobile strategies are at various stages of maturity, many seem to need help, as three-quarters (78 percent) rank their mobility strategies at low to medium maturity. The lack of maturity is likely due to the inherent challenges in the fast moving and fragmented ecosystem that makes up the mobile landscape. These challenges include but are not limited to the comprehensive workforce strategy required to attract, retrain and/or utilize the specialized resources required for developing and maintaining effective mobile applications. Additionally, nearly half of respondents do not have a mobility Center of Excellence (COE) specifically designed to address the rapidly evolving and unique mobile environment, including an effective quality assurance (QA) strategy, user interface technology and a short cycle, highly collaborative, mobile-adapted, agile and iterative software development lifecycle (SDLC), further corroborating that most mobility efforts are not as evolved or able to support end-to-end development.

Attributes of Successful Mobile Outsourcing Partnerships

By partnering with a trusted vendor who is organized and aligned to address the needs unique to the mobile landscape for outsourced support, clients can improve time to market, maximize their investment in mobile technology and position themselves for success.

Outsourcing Mobile Support

In an effort to better understand the mobility landscape, TEKsystems commissioned IDG to survey Computerworld’s audience regarding their organizations’ mobility strategy, the approaches they have pursued or are pursuing in implementing mobile technology within their organization and the various ways providers have addressed or plan to address select mobility obstacles. The findings presented here summarize the results of the survey.

Over a third of respondents, 38 percent, choose to outsource the development of mobile applications. The two most commonly cited reasons for outsourcing relate to the difficulty in resolving resource or skill gaps, as 67 percent cited issues with lack of expertise in-house and 56 percent claimed mobile technology was not a core competency. Other benefits to outsourcing include speed, as an outside vendor can bring a project to completion faster; cost-efficiency; improved quality and increased agility.

On average, respondents currently partner with two external vendors for mobile support, but some partner with as many as five. Respondents tend to agree that less is more and nearly one quarter would rather partner with fewer vendors. Further, the majority agree they’d like to see improvement in these partnerships: 60 percent are looking for a better experience from their mobile vendors. The results of our survey indicate that respondents would like to see the following attributes and qualities from their mobile vendors:

Offer Mobility as a Dedicated Practice

Mobile technology moves at a fast pace and requires specialized talent to keep projects driving forward. One-quarter of respondents believe a vendor’s lack of experience with large-scale mobility projects is a risk factor, and qualified talent is hard to find. Organizations place significant value on mobile skill sets, such as developers, QA testers, architects and UI/UX designers, with the mobile developer role as the resource most often relied on to drive project success, either in-house or on a vendor team. These highly specialized skills are different from those required for traditional enterprise client server development and more than two out of five respondents (41 percent) struggle with finding and attracting the talent they need to handle mobility projects in-house. As a result, one in four (26 percent) projects are in jeopardy when vendors place unqualified resources on mobile projects a risk few organizations can afford.

Vendors who offer mobility as a dedicated practice provide access to skilled professionals with the experience to drive results. Why? Specialization. With a singular focus in mobility, these resources become familiar with the tools, frameworks and unique skills...
Attributes of Successful Mobile Outsourcing Partnerships

required to deliver effective mobile applications. The experience builds on itself and has significant value to organizations looking to deliver on the promise of mobility to the enterprise. Organizations who partner with such vendors can also leverage the knowledge benefits of investment in technology accelerators, tool and technology partnerships, mobile-specific best practices and enterprise mobile application delivery capabilities. Organizations don’t just want scale; they want mobile-specific experts and expertise.

Adapt to an Organization’s Need Without Bias

Flexibility in support and delivery is crucial in mobile development. Vendors must create the best user experience across the wide range of devices and their associated operating systems, without sacrificing quality and performance, and no single approach will work best in such a varied and fragmented environment. Nearly half of respondents find that supporting the full range of popular mobile platforms is the most daunting aspect of mobile application development, and at least three-quarters cite the importance of being able to develop and test mobile applications across different platforms, devices, screen sizes and versions. As a result, almost two-thirds, 65 percent, are likely to partner with a technology- and platform-agnostic mobility vendor.

Vendors who are not restricted by device or platform can implement solutions based on the needs of each individual client. Often, those needs extend beyond technology, and clients will also require flexible delivery options; nearly half want assistance in determining the best location to deliver the work for their project. A vendor who can offer an option of an on-site/on-premise, off-site, near-shore or off-shore model based on each client’s individual requirements, complexity, maturity, skill sets needed, budget and other unique factors provides a competitive advantage. Presenting a strategic ‘best-shore’ approach allows organizations to mitigate risk, manage costs and increase productivity with their vendor.

Deliver an End to End Solution

No two mobile projects are exactly alike, and what’s important to the consumer (usability and functionality) may be different from what’s important to the enterprise (integration to back end systems, security, supportability). User experience is key in mobile success, and many organizations do not have the expertise, time or resources to develop and test for all scenarios. Nearly 60 percent of respondents would like a vendor to focus on application development, while more than half seek a vendor who can design and implement sound QA. A successful mobile strategy also encompasses an effective integration with core back-end IT systems that provide and process the services ultimately delivered to each device, and nearly three-fourths of the survey respondents agree that vendors should have expertise in these areas, such as encryption and security compliance. The variety of responses and needs suggest that organizations require mobile support along a continuum, depending on the maturity level of their mobile strategy. Respondents also want a consultative partner, as 57 percent look to their vendor to provide an innovative solution to their needs including delivery models, tools and best practices.

Vendors who can provide end-to-end services, meeting client demands across the spectrum of technical consulting, mobile development, mobile testing and mobile application support are well-positioned to lead their clients to success. Depending on the volume of demand for mobile applications, in combination with
existing in-house expertise, organizations should also look for the ability to engage vendors at a component level across the mobile applications SDLC landscape.

Leverage a Center of Excellence

Half of all respondents cited lack of clarity around expected outcomes as a risk in project success, indicating guidance and oversight is often needed in mobility initiatives. While organizations struggle with defining the end goals and objectives of their mobile strategies, they are also challenged with managing the risk, cost and organizational structure related to mobility. Security breaches and failure to secure budget were cited as the top two significant risks to mobility projects. Organizations need a framework in place to evaluate project worthiness and success rate, how and when to involve stakeholders, and how to define processes.

Vendors who have an established COE can help manage these challenges. Backed by a COE, an organization can evaluate projects through the lens of existing best practices, monitor and control processes, and leverage the insight from experts in mobile development and support. With in-house specialization, expertise and a wide range of support offerings, they also offer established governance to guide their processes and keep projects on track. The COE can help mitigate risks, address concerns and define standards of action. Less than one-third of respondents are currently supported by a COE.

Conclusion

As the need for mobile technology increases and organizations seek to keep pace with the market, the demand for strong mobile outsourcing vendors will continue to grow. Outsourcing is most successful when organizations choose a vendor with the resources, strategy and structure to meet them where they are in their mobility development lifecycle and then take them where they want to go. The strongest vendors will have an established mobility practice, providing and retaining the wide range of qualified talent needed to adapt to technology shifts across a variety of devices, platforms and versions. These vendors will also be flexible, offering delivery models based on each client’s budget, risk level and project requirements. They will offer integrated, scalable services that can support all phases of the mobile application lifecycle: technical consulting, development, testing and support. Finally, vendors who have established standardization of processes and defined best practices through a defined COE enable stronger support within the organization and enhanced decision-making. Finding the right vendor to partner with will help organizations not only meet today’s mobile demands but also position themselves to meet the expectations of the future.

ABOUT TEKSYSTEMS

MOBILITY SERVICES

TEKsystems Mobility Services helps clients deliver on and execute all of their mobile application needs—including development, testing, support and technical consulting services. Our comprehensive offering helps clients adapt to the fast-paced, evolving mobile environment by providing targeted solutions based on individual market, budget and functionality requirements. Led by industry experts, our practice provides agility and flexibility to deliver on the promise of mobility.