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## DreamForce's Big Idea: Smartphones as an Enterprise App Platform

– David Taber, CIO

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Although I'm a 20-year marketing veteran, I'm generally allergic to marketing messages and naked sales pitches. Call it an autoimmune disorder. I therefore tend to discount most of the pitches I hear at tech conferences.

Every once in a while, though, I see an idea presented that's important but not yet true. These kind of visionary or revolutionary ideas essentially represent a big decision that the industry has to make; you have to decide which side of the bet you want to be on. These bets are rare but important.

After the fact, of course, we all say we knew which side of the bet to take and claim that we chose right (even if we didn't). The iPad is a recent example of this kind of bet. Of course everybody knows *now* how important the iPad is — 250 million of anything is important, and tablet sales are killing the PC — but think back to the days before the iPad announcement. Doubters questioned the value of this not-phone, not-computer. Even Steve Jobs said at the time, "We *think* there's a market &hellip;"

**Dreamforce 2013 News:** [Salesforce.com Unveils Salesforce1 Platform](#)  
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So it is now with the big idea from [Dreamforce 2013](#): Smartphones as the primary target for new apps. It's not entirely obvious which side of the bet you should be on.

### What If the Smartphone Becomes the Business Device of Choice?

For games, ecommerce and social networking, that's a serious "Duh." The battle is over. But for B2B and B2C products and services, that idea is a [brave new world](#).

The notion of desktop PCs as secondary, legacy clients for business apps, with smartphones in the driver's seat, sure doesn't seem to be true yet. If the smartphone is to become the primary client any time soon, though, that means the browser-based cloud app will be relegated to admins and other desk-bound dullards.

What happens, then, if high-value users pull the smartphone into the role of primary target for business apps? It would certainly require a huge retooling of application development, infrastructure, deployment and support. It will demand skills in SSO, mobile security, mashups, UI and usability. Any new app you build will need to be seen as a series of Web services chained together in the smartphone.

This will mean a lot more vendor focus on APIs that are deep and complete enough for integration and extension on an iOS or Android device. I see two particular areas of focus. First, vendors must make moving information from a smartphone app to paper, PDF or DocuSign output much easier than it is today.

Second, data input must improve. On most smartphones, keyboard entry is painful and slow. Voice input, through Siri, Google Now, [Nuance](#) or whatever, will become a key success factor. This is an area where more vendor APIs are in order. They need to add trainability, too, so weird product names and abstract part numbers can be understood when spoken.

To its credit, Salesforce has made huge progress with mobile APIs, even making the claim that, for any new functionality, the APIs will come first, before the feature is enabled.

## The Revolution Will Not Be Televised — But You Will See It in a Mobile Video

So which side of this bet should you take? While there's no doubt that [tablets will be an explosive force in business apps](#), smartphones are another matter. Reviewing my own writings, I have noted only the surprising [slow mobile uptake in CRM](#).

But many of the issues with smartphone adoption for business apps can be overcome by larger form-factor devices. Look at the Samsung Galaxy Note, HTC One, Sony Xperia or LG Nexus. These devices aren't far off from being tablets — and if they get more popular Apple will come out with an iPhone maxi. This kind of crossover device may be what drives us to the tipping point.

### Analysis: [Are We Ready for a Mobile-first World?](#)

#### Also: [CIOs Must Move From 'Mobile First' to 'Mobile Only'](#)

Let's look at this from a different angle: Which "wrong bet" would be more expensive?

On the one hand, if you bet on smartphones becoming the primary client for business apps, and it doesn't happen, you will have wasted some investment. However, the new skills and infrastructure improvements you make won't be wasted at all and will, in fact, be transferrable to traditional cloud apps. Most managers will give you brownie points for at least being proactive.

On the other hand, if smartphones do become the primary business app client, and you're not ready — well, that won't be fun at all. You'll have some serious catching up to do, and your executives and field personnel won't be big fans for a while. They may feel like they can't compete with industry innovators because IT holds them back.

This may be one of those situations where [the politics of the bet](#) may be more important than the economics.

*David Taber is the author of the Prentice Hall book, [Salesforce.com Secrets of Success](#), now in its second edition, and is the CEO of [SalesLogistix](#), a certified Salesforce.com consultancy focused on business process improvement through use of CRM systems. SalesLogistix clients are in North America, Europe, Israel and India. Taber has more than 25 years of experience in high tech, including 10 years at the VP level or above.*

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