



 Print Article  Close Window

From: www.cio.com

Why Mobile CRM Apps Are Slow to Take Off?

– David Taber, CIO

March 10, 2012

The last five years have seen a revolution in mobile computing. The old-guard mobile phones and PC tablets have been put on the junk-heap, while devices running iOS and the Android OS have taken over the mobile world. With 4G, dual-core processors, huge amounts of RAM and gorgeous screens, you'd think that these devices would be perfect for running CRM apps. But that wave hasn't really happened yet.

The Six Killer Reasons Why and What to Learn from Them

- 1. Demographic mismatch.** Yep, those squirrely users are just so darned confusing. So let's look at them in more detail. The iOS/Android crowd tends to be younger and more urban than computer users in general. While it's true that CRM devotees tend to be 40 or younger, you have to think about the specific users who would really need mobile CRM. They tend to be managers and road warriors, and they don't want to have to wear their reading glasses all the time. So tiny text and virtual keypads can be an unpleasant user I/O experience for them. While users of all ages are fairly happy with the "read only" versions of mobile CRM apps, upper management finds the utility and attractiveness of the fully operational app versions to be limited by the smartphones themselves.
- 2. Power mismatch.** Most anyone important enough to need CRM apps on the go will be powerful people. And it's been a tradition that power people are typically not technophiles. Even when they are, they don't want to be seen actually *doing* work—no matter how cool the devices might be—because, well, doing detail work just doesn't contribute to your power rep. For these people, it's the executive assistant who does dreary things like enter info into computers or look for updates on account status. For power people, the telephone—the actual audio, not the computer display—is their key user interface. Nerding out with a 2x2-inch touchscreen: no way for this fast-tracker.
- 3. Real Estate.** Until the latest generation of most phones, there just wasn't much high quality real estate—either in screen size or RAM. The mobile phone just isn't that great a place for a rich business app UI: there are too many menus, selectors, and keyboard interactions to be comfortable for most phones. Even with a full touch screen, if you have fat fingers, using an iPhone, Razr or Blackberry device for anything longer than 140 characters is just a pain. This

doesn't really get better as long as mobile phones are designed to fit in your shirt pocket.

4. **The Pad Thing.** This brings us to those Other Mobile Devices: iPads or Androids. These devices (particularly with a Bluetooth keyboard) really are a terrific platform for reading and entering data. Totally kewl for nearly any application. But since these devices have perfectly capable browsers, why wouldn't you use them- including bookmarks, plug-ins, and other useful items—to cover all CRM interactions? Why would you want to fire up and learn a dedicated app, unless it can seriously save you some time in a special use-case?
5. **The laptop thing.** For those of us uncool enough to not use an iPad, there's your laptop's 3G card or hotspot. Further, since many planes, trains and automobiles now offer WiFi access, you're never offline for long. So the browser UI is the natural way to go for the laptop user. Even if you are disconnected, products like SFDC's offline edition let you cache records and sync the updates once you're back on line. It just runs as a browser plug in—it's not a dedicated app.
6. **The Comprehensiveness Thing.** Here's a fine how-de-do: In the paragraphs above, I said the dedicated mobile CRM apps are too complicated for a small device. And now I'm going to say that the dedicated mobile CRM apps aren't capable enough when used on a phone. If you need to look up something in the CRM, you're likely to also need to look up something else or take some action in a related Enterprise app. Whether it's accounting (Refund issued?), or ERP (inventory available to promise?), or an external logistics app (where is that FedEx tracking number?), users need to check systems that are outside the immediate purview of a CRM. So you'll either need to have a hell of a lot of integration points (which would take a lot of custom coding inside some dedicated CRM mobile app) or you'll need access to an internal portal. This all points to the need to use a multi-tabbed browser for access to multiple systems. So in most cases, the browser trumps dedicated CRM mobile apps.

Today's takeaways:

- For most Enterprise (inward-facing) apps, it's usually not worth the effort to create a dedicated app for smartphones. And even if you do, it takes some special conditions for those apps to take off with internal users.
- For some Enterprise app use cases, it will be worthwhile to create a dedicated iPad/Android app.
- But for all Enterprise apps, you need to make sure that the browser-based UI is rock solid on Safari and on Android's browser, as well as Firefox and Internet Explorer.
- Get on board with HTML5, for anything you do in a new browser app and most of what you build in a mobile app. For rich multi-platform UIs, also look into what Sencha or Appcelerator are doing. In the long run, design your cloud UIs so that the browser versions share as much code as possible with the "container version" of your app. That way, your users can painlessly migrate to the coolest new devices that come out.

David Taber is the author of the new Prentice Hall book, "[Salesforce.com Secrets of Success](#)" 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, and David has over 25 years experience in high tech, including 10 years at the VP level or above.

Follow everything from CIO.com on Twitter [@CIOonline](#)

© 2012 CXO Media Inc.