Information Management

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A mobile year, and much more mobility to come

I think that 2011 will be seen as the year that mobile access arrived and 2012 will be a year of significant development. Two of the award winners in the 2011 Intranet Innovation Awards were mobile implementations http://www.steptwo.com.au/iia. One of the winners was the Web team at the UK Houses of Parliament and on Tuesday 17 January 2012 Sharon O'Dea will be speaking about this application at the Intranets Forum meeting. In terms of mobile platforms it is now a three-horse race between Apple, Google and Microsoft, with Apple still being the benchmark in the tablet sector. One of the two big developments in 2011 has been the growth of the tablet market, and that means that any mobile strategy has to integrate smartphones, tablets and PCs. I think that users will expect a seamless experience as they move between these three formats, and I would encourage you to look at http://precious-forever.com/2011/05/26/patterns-for-multiscreen-strategies/ which is a superb paper on how these three formats can be used in various combinations. It is also worth looking at a video produced by the Boston Globe to illustrate responsive design that reformats Web pages that are responsive to device format. http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/features/

and http://designmodo.com/responsive-design-examples/ for more examples. If your tame designer is not familiar with the jQuery Java Script library http://jquery.com/ then suggest that this is a gap in their toolset.

The other big development has been the acceptance that organisations are not going to provide employees with a 'business smartphone' but to support whatever the employee is using, a concept described as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). This brings me to a note about mobile apps. Native apps use the internal software and hardware of the phone (and tablet), taking advantage of the various sensors that are embedded in the phone. These apps will continue to work when there is no mobile connection provided no updating is required. Web apps just use the phone/tablet browser, and need to maintain a connection with the internet, though the advent of HTML5 will enable Web pages to be cached. In a BYOD world organisations will need to provide native apps for all the main platforms, and that takes a bit of doing when Google seems to lose the upgrade roadmap from time to time. For some strange reason the success of the various mobile platforms has been judged on the basis of the number of apps that are available,

but research is now indicating that most users can only manage perhaps a maximum of twenty apps (two pages), so having 60,000+ around is not much help.

The early thinking about mobile was that communications managers would be the prime sponsors because of the ease with which corporate news could be pushed out to mobile workers. What is becoming clear is that the primary requirement of these workers is to converse and collaborate with other mobile workers. The starting point for this is the staff directory, and if this is not fit for use on a mobile phone then the time to start working on it is tomorrow. Then come all the social media and collaboration applications, including enterprise-level calendars, so that staff can optimise their working month. Mobile devices will also be used for reporting back to base on sales and service calls. The result is quite a complex mix of interactions between mobile employees and office-based staff.

For 2012 you absolutely need to have a mobile strategy, even if that strategy is that you will not support smartphones and tablets until 2014. My own suggestions for actions in 2012 are:

Governance

1. Set up a steering group which brings together all the stakeholders and make sure it has the scope and resources to get things done, including

- IT
- HR
- Line-of-Business, especially sales and service
- Communications
- Legal
- Web

2. Educate, educate, educate!

3. Seek out 'mobile champions' who can see immediate business benefits from investing in mobile information solutions

4. This is a fast-moving area – make sure you monitor and assess the implications of industry developments and case studies from the early adopters.

Information

1. Carry out research into the information and collaboration requirements of mobile employees. This cannot be done from an office desk!

- Focus on tasks, not information
- Think spatially
- Take into account 'when', 'where' and 'how'

2. Take into consideration:

- Links between these employees, not just corporate – employee links
- The balance between smartphone, tablet and pc usage

3. Set up a proof-of-concept group of users

4. Work out how to deliver the staff directory to mobile users.

Technology

1. Make sure your corporate website is mobile-ready, and bring the lessons learned into the Intranet platform

2. Understand the advantages and challenges arising from

- Three major platform vendors, and RIM Blackberry if you already use it
- Integration across mobile, tablet and pc
- Web apps versus native apps
- Enterprise apps stores
- How best to use HTML5
- Personal ('Bring Your Own Device') and business-provided devices
- Security management

- Enterprise search
- 4G broadband, especially availability and tariffs.

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