



DA Systems - Strategic Insight

The bespoke approach to developing valuable mobile applications

Dave Upton, managing director at DA Systems, explains the different bespoke approaches to developing mobile applications and which one ensures real business success



BESPOKE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

The origin of the term 'bespoke' comes from the creation of high quality, personalised suits and clothes. More recently, this term has been extended to technology - especially for software consulting services.

Every business is different, you may offer similar services or products to competitors but you will have at least one key differentiator. This could be within your business processes, or you may offer multiple services that, for example, cover both service management and technical courier.

This difference means that companies deserve a bespoke approach when developing applications that are specific to their unique selling points (USPs). The creation of valuable mobile applications can offer an effective conduit to channel these USPs to your customers.

This bespoke approach becomes even more critical when developing the mobile applications that will support your staff. This is because your mobile workers are custodians of your brand and are sometimes the only direct point between the supplier and customer.

Employing multiple clever applications, able to be used on one mobile device, can help you utilise your resources more effectively across the business. These applications could enable your mobile staff to fulfil multiple tasks – as well as making them work harder and more effectively. For example, this might include field service engineers, who, in addition to their maintenance work, can also take sales orders.

By employing these business efficiencies will also have the additional advantage of driving down both your device support

and staff costs. All these benefits could be critical in helping you survive and prosper throughout periods of economic downturn.

WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS?

To start, you have three different options when developing mobile applications. So what type of approach do you choose to create these bespoke mobile applications? Well, it can be a little confusing, as you will be faced with some very different approaches, offering varying degrees of success.

Bespoke Application Development Options	
Option 1	Ground up bespoke
Option 2	The Toolkit
Option 3	Rapid application development

I will attempt to explain what bespoke development options you have, how each approach works and which is the most effective in delivering real business value.

GROUND UP BESPOKE APPROACH

With this approach, a provider will develop the mobile application from scratch and to your exact requirements. You kick off the project by specifying these specific requirements and then experience every detail of the project until its completion.

The problem with this approach is it can take at least 18 months to develop even a basic range of functions. You will then have an application designed precisely for your needs - but these needs may have changed over those 18 months! Over this time your business processes, the market and other technologies will have probably all moved on. This can leave you with a

redundant and stagnant application - with no further changes or upgrades being offered by the supplier.

Ground up Bespoke Approach

PROS

- Application is tailored 100% for you
- Reduced licence costs

CONS

- Long development time
- System will be stagnant on delivery
- High development costs
- Time consuming involvement

You should also be aware that this approach can be very expensive and is very involving - so be prepared to devote a lot of time on it. However, because it is now your application you will benefit from reduced ongoing licence costs.

THE TOOLKIT APPROACH

With the ground up development route the sky is your limit but with the toolkit approach your aspirations can't be fully catered for. This because your eventual application will be compromised by the boundaries of what the tools can achieve.

Toolkits are often sold as bespoke-like propositions and they may claim that they will tailor the application for you but in reality only the tools in the kit can be used. You can liken this approach to using building blocks - if your requirement is to build a perfect circle this can't be

made from square blocks! This means that you can never achieve a fit for purpose application, specifically for your business and you will need to lower your expectations.

However, compared to the ground up approach, a toolkit application costs less and is far quicker to build. These savings

The Toolkit Approach	
PROS	
Lower cost	
Quick development time	
CONS	
Not truly bespoke	
May force business process changes to fit	
Not flexible	
May not deliver on your specific goals	
'Sledgehammer to crack a nut'	

occur because the components are pre-built. This is all good news if you are happy to change your business processes and unique requirements to fit around the toolkit solution. But this won't really help you get that important competitive edge. Another issue to bear in mind is that when you buy a full-scale toolkit, you will only utilise a fraction of the overall application.

RAPID APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT (RAD) APPROACH

This final approach recognises that although all companies have unique needs,

they also share common requirements. The concept is highly innovative and simple, as 90% of the application is pre-built. This includes fundamental elements that are core to any mobile application. Some of these essentials include; data compression and transmission, retry strategies, push technology and security.

It is at the last 10% where this application development really excels, as this is where all the unique business logic and workflow processes exist. The flexibility of this approach enables multiple types of business logic, which relate to the different job functions within a business, to be created as a single application.

This means that you receive all the benefits of a ground up solution, plus additional benefits of building on a proven

The RAD Approach	
PROS	
Application is designed and built 100% for you	
100% fit for purpose	
Fraction of the cost compared to ground up	
Short development time - weeks rather than months	
Greater range of relevant functions than ground up	
Future changes are easily made	

solution. Importantly, you don't have any of negatives, in terms of high costs, long timescales, time-consuming involvement or when the application is completed - stagnation.

With the RAD approach, you really

have complete freedom. There are no restrictions to the applications that can be created for your unique business environment now and for future adaptations.

As you may now gather there can be great potential for the right mobile application to create significant increases in productivity, efficiency and cost savings for organisations. By enabling you to gain more from your mobile workforces, you can also create more business opportunities and success in these challenging times. Hopefully this article has highlighted and discussed the three possible approaches to mobile application development. It will help you in your decision-making process, to ensure that you make the right choice for your business.

About DA Systems

Formed in 1999, DA Systems (<http://www.da-systems.co.uk>) is a leading UK provider of software solutions that enable end-to end management of the movement of goods and people across the transportation, logistics and service delivery sectors. Through Advanced Courier Interface, DA Systems provides real-time management and scheduling for distribution, fleet and field-based staff operations. DA Systems' highly advanced NX Transport and NX Fleet Tracking solutions deliver instant, seamless communications between office and field-based staff. NX Framework (<http://www.nxframework.com>), a managed, fully bespoke mobile-data solution, enables companies to capture and manage any type of job information or data in real-time.

By using these powerful systems, organisations can control and manage their operations, significantly reducing operating costs, increasing business efficiency and maximising service quality. The company has over 60 UK customers that include, UK Mail, The DX, Rico Logistics, Courier Systems, Echo Logistics plc and CEVA Logistics.

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