



# DA Systems - Strategic Insight

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## **Mobile-data applications - DIY vs expert supplier**

Dave Upton, managing director at DA Systems, discusses whether to develop bespoke mobile applications in-house or use an external specialist

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*Among the larger adopters of mobile data systems, there is often a desire to be self sufficient when it comes to developing these applications. This desire often stems from a perception that costs can be controlled and absorbed into the business. There is also a belief that no one understands the business processes and application requirements as well as you.*

#### THE IN-HOUSE APPROACH

Internal projects have a habit of being far more time consuming and resource intensive than you expected.

It is an unfortunate fact that the same priority is never placed on internal projects, as external projects will always take precedence. Even if the project is moving along smoothly, your development continuity can be hindered if a developer leaves your team or is diverted onto another project. This usually means that the development time will usually be too long to produce a fresh, relevant application.

You should be prepared for long project timescales with this approach as it can take 18 months to develop even a basic range of functions. Although you will then have an application designed precisely for your needs - these needs may have changed over those 18 months and your business processes, the market and other technologies will have probably all moved on. This can leave you with a redundant and stagnant application.

In-house projects can also be very expensive and involving - so be prepared to devote a lot of time and financial

resource. However, because it is now your application, you will obviously benefit from reduced ongoing licence costs.

It is also a common belief that you can absorb a mobile application system within your existing infrastructure by using a spare server or utilising your data centre. This means that you have to accept full responsibility for the up-time and other running costs of the application. These costs can include, software and hardware as well as support and maintenance costs - not to mention the double purchase of a resilient system for application failover - and the high-end server costs.

What's more, as you expand, scalability costs to cover hardware, licences, network design & build, security systems, data communications lines and infrastructure costs will also need to be budgeted for. And lastly, however thorough you are with your quality processes, they will never be as stringent when compared to an external provider.

Organisations are increasingly realising that they don't need to employ valuable resources developing and running business applications, in-house. If you have already embarked on or inherited an internal development project and witnessed some of the issues listed above, you may have decided that 'DIY' may not be the best option. The good news is there's an alternative - find a specialist application supplier.

#### THE EXPERT SUPPLIER

Using an external specialist to develop and manage an IT application enables you to concentrate on strategic and revenue generating activities. The beauty of using an expert supplier is that you are benefiting from their core expertise, investment in staff, R&D and infrastructure. The supplier

can offer proven, tested processes and solutions, meaning that you don't have to learn painfully from mistakes.

Once you decide to use a supplier to develop your application, you also will want to quickly and effectively capitalise on your market opportunities. The best way to achieve this is to source a supplier that offers a rapid application development (RAD) for your mobile solutions and can then manage the application for you.

The key benefit of RAD is that it 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 effective 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 DIY application, plus additional benefits of building on a proven 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.

By employing a supplier using 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.

If the supplier offers a managed service, all of the elements that ensure your application is available on demand 24/7 will be included in the price. These vendors have designed platforms that are highly available and resilient. This includes providing all the power, connectivity and network redundancy, sophisticated monitoring equipment and application engineers. All this is prohibitively expensive for most organisations to replicate in-house.

You will also benefit from having your application backed up and part of a tested disaster recovery (DR) and business continuity plan, ensuring in the event of unforeseen IT problems and downtime is minimised compared to an in-house system.

Here is a summary of the benefits of using an expert supplier:

Expert Supplier Benefits
Application is designed and built 100% for you
Application is 100% fit for your purposes and is developed rapidly
Fraction of the development and management costs compared to DIY
Short development time- weeks rather than months, maximising market opportunities
Greater range of relevant functions than DIY
Future changes are easily made
The application is available on demand 24/7
Data communications lines and infrastructure

*By using an external supplier to develop and manage your mobile application you will gain an excellent, bespoke, application and enjoy significant on-going efficiency and cost savings - enabling you to focus IT resources on other areas of your business.*

*I hope this article will help you in your decision-making process, to ensure that you select the best development route for your organisation.*

# About DA Systems

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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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