Mobility Consulting: Creating Value for Customers — and Your Bottom Line

By Kevin Casey

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About the Author

KEVIN CASEY writes about technology and business for a wide variety of publications and companies. He won an Azbee Award, given by the American Society of Business Publication Editors, for his InformationWeek.com story, "Are You Too Old for IT?" He's a former community choice honoree in the Small Business Influencer Awards.

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Mobility Consulting: Creating Value for Customers — and Your Bottom Line

AT FIRST BLUSH, THE MOBILITY BOOM SEEMS LIKE A NO-BRAINER FROM A PARTNER BENEFIT PERSPECTIVE: SELL your customers a bunch of new hardware, preloaded with a bunch of new software and then rinse, wash and repeat every couple of years.

But a "just take the order" strategy, as Tina Gravel, senior vice president, global channels at Cyxtera, called it in our recent report on digital transformation, doesn't ultimately pay off for partners. As Gravel said: "That strategy will not sustain their business long term."

The same holds true for mobility: Just taking an order for hardware and apps isn't a strategy, it's a great way to leave money on the table and open a gap for competitors.

"Mobility is not about devices," says Techaisle Principal Analyst Anurag Agrawal. "It's about solutions." That means equipping a customer's workforce with smartphones and tablets is, for some, the easy part. We say "for some" because there's stiff competition, especially in the SMB market, from other hardware sales channels — including from the wireless network providers themselves.

Fortunately, it's everything that comes *after* the devices are in employee hands that really matters, both from the customer's perspective — they need help with productivity, management, policy-making, security and more — and the partner's, as well.

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So how do you develop a holistic approach to delivering mobility solutions that better suit your customers' needs while also beefing up your margins and recurring revenue streams? It's ultimately about taking a consultative, services-led approach — check the "just take the order" attitude at the door.

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U.S. Mobility Spending Forecast

Worldwide spending on mobility solutions is forecast to be $1.72 trillion in 2021, according to the [IDC Worldwide Semiannual Mobility Spending Guide](#). The U.S. will account for nearly one-quarter of this spending, making it the largest geographic market at nearly $392 billion in 2021. The banking and professional services industries will have the largest mobility spending over the forecast period, reaching $55.1 billion and $54.9 billion in 2021, respectively. Discrete manufacturing and retail will be close behind with 2021 outlays of $49.7 billion and $45.7 billion. The industries with the fastest growth in mobility spending will be professional services (7.5 percent CAGR), construction (7.1 percent CAGR), and telecommunications (7.0 percent CAGR). Four other industries — federal/central government, health care, retail and security and investment services — will also outpace the overall market, each with a 6.9 percent CAGR, according to the forecast.

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In this Report, we'll dig into some of the ways partners can build more value-added services and products into their mobility offerings. Before we do, here's some extra motivation: A services-led model that also enables product sales, rather than vice versa, is not just a mobility strategy. In fact, it's increasingly one of the key success factors for channel partners, and especially managed services providers.

Techaisle, which tracks both the channel and the SMB IT markets, found yet again in its most recent research that successful MSPs strike the proper balance between services and products, in that order.

"There is a clear distinction: Successful MSPs lead with services, while channel businesses that are not successful at selling managed services lead with and derive the greatest proportion of their revenue from product resale," Agrawal writes in a recent [blog post](#). "Very successful MSPs have a revenue mix of 48 percent product resale and 52 percent services revenue. The revenue is also divided as 59 percent services-led contracts and 41 percent product-led contracts."

Moreover, even on the product side of the mobility equation, it may be too narrow to think simply in terms of "devices," especially given evolving form factors, IoT and other trends.

"There are many different opportunities for providers in this space," says Jeff Budge, vice president of advisory consulting and product management at [OneNeck IT Solutions](#). Budge adds that he prefers the term "endpoints" to better reflect our increasingly connected world, one that transcends traditional lines between business and personal use. When you consider the mainstreaming of IoT in business and personal contexts, too, the term "mobility" takes on a whole new meaning.

"Mobile devices are but one of several types of endpoints our end users leverage to access business applications and data," Budge explains.

With that in mind, let's look at some potential pieces of a robust mobility offering that doesn't just push device sales, but instead addresses real customer needs, as a means to achieving more sustainable revenues.

Mobility Policy

This is one of the key areas where customers need significant help, especially as they grow from a handful of employees into a larger organization. How do they develop smart policies that govern mobile data use, BYOD, data governance, security and other pressing concerns across a diverse workforce?

The right answer: That's where you come in. This is also a big opportunity because, once you've helped develop and implement successful policies for several clients, you've got a repeatable framework you can customize and deploy for others, rather than starting from scratch each time. If you need some inspiration, there are scores of examples of such policies online, including these via TechTarget.

Security is a big deal on the policy front, especially when approaching more sophisticated IT decision-makers. Past Techaisle research has consistently found "information security" among the top evaluation criteria for "advanced" and "enterprise" buyers in the small and midmarket company segments. The latter buyer group represents the biggest spenders among SMB channel customers, too.

Security is also a logical place to start when considering how you can build out a mobility offering that goes beyond selling and deployment, says Gregory Morawietz, CIO at Single Point of Contact.

"Cybersecurity is at the forefront of everyone's mind," Morawietz says. "Giving people access to knowledge about the security of their devices is definitely something that is commonly overlooked when providing devices to your workforce. A solid security offering can propel you beyond simple deployment."

Mobile Security Tools

Policy is a starting point to helping customers better secure their mobile workforces, not the endgame.
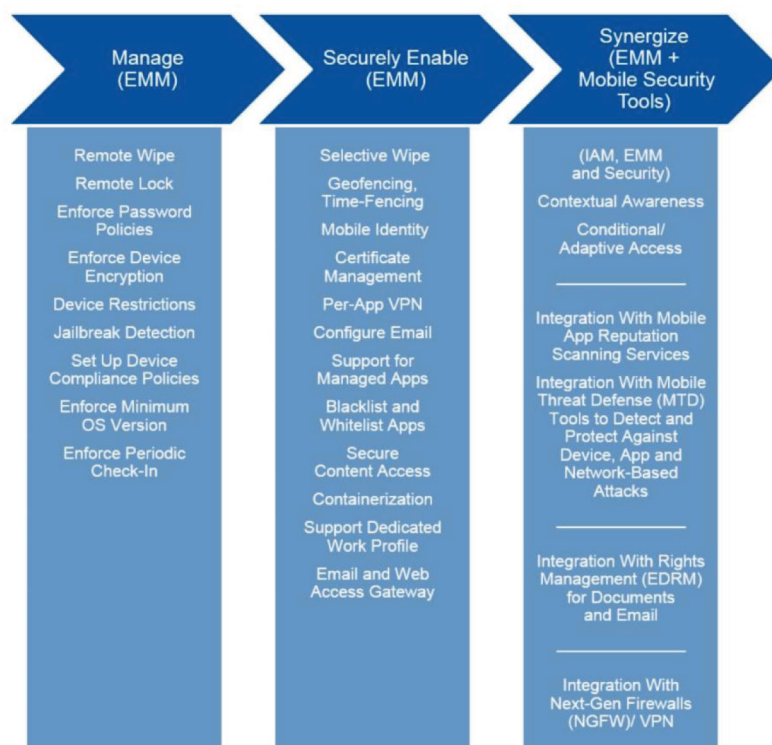
Budge notes that mixed device ownership — meaning a mix of company-owned, personal and unknown-owner endpoints — are now the norm in most corporate environments.

"Obviously, an IT department has less control as employees move to personally owned or unknown ownership devices," Budge says. "Regardless, an assumption needs to be made that employees need to securely access their work applications from anywhere at any time on any device."

Helping to develop and implement mobile policies, especially mobile security policies, enables the next step: offering security-centric tools and services as part of a complete mobility solution.

"Partners can use the security policy to segue into selling encryption, remote wipes, tracking and GPS services," Morawietz says. "Security policies are great, but they need to be reinforced by software and services."

3-Part Approach to Secure Enterprise Mobility

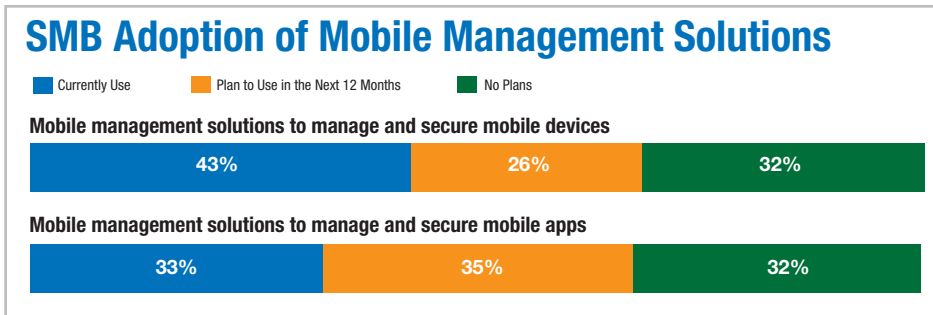| Manage (EMM)	Securely Enable (EMM)	Synergize (EMM + Mobile Security Tools)
Remote Wipe	Selective Wipe	(IAM, EMM and Security)
Remote Lock	Geofencing, Time-Fencing	Contextual Awareness
Enforce Password Policies	Mobile Identity	Conditional/Adaptive Access
Enforce Device Encryption	Certificate Management	
Device Restrictions	Per-App VPN	Integration With Mobile App Reputation Scanning Services
Jailbreak Detection	Configure Email	Integration With Mobile Threat Defense (MTD) Tools to Detect and Protect Against Device, App and Network-Based Attacks
Set Up Device Compliance Policies	Support for Managed Apps	
Enforce Minimum OS Version	Blacklist and Whitelist Apps	
Enforce Periodic Check-In	Secure Content Access	
	Containerization	Integration With Rights Management (EDRM) for Documents and Email
	Support Dedicated Work Profile	
	Email and Web Access Gateway	Integration With Next-Gen Firewalls (NGFW)/ VPN

Source: Gartner

Both Morawietz and Budge point to mobile device management (MDM) platforms as a logical next component; more on that in a moment and in this related report. Budge also points out that, when it comes to unknown devices that are another degree (or several) removed from the corporate domain, other approaches may be needed. These unknown devices might include, as a quick example, an employee logging into a corporate system from a spouse's laptop or a hotel business center. These scenarios are likely to increase with IoT, when sensors of all sorts start looking to connect.

"The focus [here] should be on endpoint platform independence," Budge says. "Providers must help their customers navigate platform capabilities such as federated authentication, virtualized desktops and even application modernization to support this type of endpoint access."

Mobile Device Management Platforms

One of the most straightforward ways for partners to build out a more robust mobility offering, including the kinds of security tools and services mentioned above, is to offer MDM capabilities.

"Mobile device management is a great first step to embark on for unlocking the potential of the mobile workforce," Morawietz says. "[An MDM platform] is a great toolbox for managing mobile devices. You can remotely install software, remotely wipe systems, enforce corporate policies, track users locations, run reports, et cetera."

SMB Adoption of Mobile Management Solutions

■ Currently Use ■ Plan to Use in the Next 12 Months ■ No Plans

Mobile management solutions to manage and secure mobile devices

43%	26%	32%

Mobile management solutions to manage and secure mobile apps

33%	35%	32%

Figures do not total 100% due to rounding
Source: SMB Group

Budge points out that the MDM (sometimes referred to as enterprise mobility management, or EMM) space is continually changing, so partners need to pay attention.

"This market will quickly evolve and providers must keep up on the latest developments in this space," Budge says.

Check out our Mobility Management Seller's Guide for plenty of other insights on this high-growth category.

Application Modernization

Budge shines a bright light on one of the most overlooked areas in mobility strategies: modernizing corporate apps and tools for a multichannel, multidevice world. Arming several hundred employees with brand-new mobile devices doesn't do much if they can't effectively access and use the applications the company relies on as part of its daily business processes.

"Many legacy applications are still in active use," Budge explains. "Providers also have a great opportunity to help customers navigate the options for application modernization, helping them uptake newer generation [user interface] designs, where multichannel is well supported."

Budge notes that, historically, companies relied on enterprise application vendors to provide at least a rudimentary mobile experience. But passing off a stripped-down version of a desktop or web UI as a "mobile experience" is no longer acceptable.

"We have now reached a tipping point where the drivers for application enhancement *are* the endpoint [and] mobile experience," Budge says. He adds that partners can build out their mobility consulting services by helping clients modernize homegrown legacy apps for mobile interactions, as well as by shepherding customers to vendors offering cloud-first or SaaS-native apps, where multichannel endpoints were assumed from the start.

Network Modernization

Budge points to the network as another considerable opportunity for partners; many haven't been adequately modernized for the mobile era.

"As endpoints have evolved, so has their method of connectivity. Many companies are already at a point where endpoints connect wirelessly by default, and wired connections are the exception," Budge says. "This shift requires companies to evolve their network and security architectures to ensure network isolation, throughput optimization and other areas; assume wireless connections will be the majority."

Business Continuity

Here's a bonus category for partners: By helping reluctant customers (finally) come to terms with the bring-your-own-everything age, you're also creating an opportunity to assist with better business continuity planning in the event of IT outages and other events, such as ransomware, that cause downtime. Those mixed device ownership environments potentially add redundancy, a benefit that can be codified into the mobility policies you help the client define.

"If a customer is fully embracing multichannel and mixed-ownership endpoints, then their options for device-independent access to their business applications just increased," Budge says. "We can now think differently about how our employees can connect if our corporate endpoints are not accessible."

The major theme here: Successful partners approach their mobility consulting initiatives in the context of the broader digital business landscape, one with nearly limitless potential for the channel.

"Providers have a wealth of opportunities to advise, guide and enable customers to truly integrate an endpoint strategy in their overall digital transformation strategy," Budge says. Don't let it pass you by.

Related Reports

Mobility: Plugging Into the API Economy

While the application programming interface (API) isn't new, it is taking on a new level of importance in its critical role in the development of mobile applications. By enabling software programs to communicate with each other, APIs make it possible to integrate resources and build new applications on top of existing services, saving development time and cost, and mitigating the risk of errors. This Report examines some real-world examples of API-enabled mobility projects and the opportunities available to channel partners in the API economy.

Mobile-First? Try Mobile-Only: 5 Areas Where Partners Should Invest

Mobility is good for business, but it brings technological, service and security challenges. No matter the maturity level of their mobile strategies, customers need your expertise and advice to make the most of investments. This Report examines five areas experts say you must master to help your clients thrive in a mobile-dominated world — while gaining profitable services expertise.
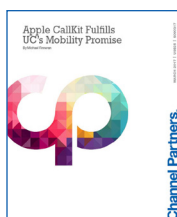
Apple CallKit Fulfills UC's Mobility Promise

Customer end users need UC capabilities when they're on the road. Too bad most mobile UC apps are wildly unpopular, often forcing people to settle for a degraded user experience to get UC functionality. With Apple CallKit, that can finally change. Now, partners need to understand where their UC suppliers stand on CallKit implementation.
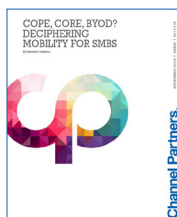
COPE, CORE, BYOD? Deciphering Mobility for SMBs

Mobility management is big with small companies — a big headache, a big expense and a big area of possible conflict with mobile-savvy employees. SMBs are desperate to keep their data safe and their employees satisfied without breaking the bank. This Report shows how partners can help clients identify and meet their goals for mobility — with big rewards.