

HARD facts on SOFTWARE – A fresh look at mobility

Contributed by Immo Böhm
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I read a few days ago that most cell-phones nowadays are shipped with a mobile browser. The percentage of phones that are smartphones increases exponentially as well. So in essence in the future nearly everyone will have a computer in the pocket. With this comes the ability to do more things while on the go, and business software vendors are trying to publish software and features that easily run on a mobile device.

HansaWorld has been the one vendor globally that had the full ERP software running on mobile devices for many years now. The same article I read the other day also stated that most of the new phones are now shipped with a touch-screen. The iPhone really started a revolution three years ago. Come to think of it… the iPhone is now three years old and still the coolest phone around. Have you ever watched how many people buy iPhones? And how all other phone companies try to build a phone that is just like the iPhone?

So what is this all about? It’s about mobility and it’s about ease of use. It’s no use having a mobile device when its not user friendly. You would rather wait until you get back to the office and work on your computer there. Or you would lug around a laptop. Being truly mobile is about being able to do on your phone – as easy – if not easier – than on a computer. This is very difficult to achieve since we all do different things on a computer, and we do them differently. So vendors have turned to what we term “Roll based Apps” You would typically not install the whole ERP software on your phone, but an application that connects to the ERP and that fulfills a specific function.

We have apps that focus on reporting for example. CEO’s and MD’s typically will use these since they need to have their thumb on the bottom line at all times.

We have an app for sales on the shop floor. This app works with a little clip-on on the back of the iPhone or iPod touch. This clip contains a barcode scanner and credit card reader, and connects to the ERP via Wifi or 3G. So the sales person can walk around in the shop with the customer, scan whatever the customer desires into the customers basket, (who still uses plastic bags these days? Raise your hand!) then swipes the customers credit card on the phone. The system will e-mail the customer a receipt and the customer is off without having to go to a queue.

Now imagine the possibilities! Other possibilities include to have POD’s signed electronically at point of delivery. At least one other Vendor, Accpac, together with a third party software provider has been delivering such a solution also for some time now. You could also read water meters or electricity meters and have the readings live on the ERP while being on the road. You could have your vehicle travel logs live while on the road. You could do so much more than you can today.

But what if you don’t have Internet on the go? What if you are in the bush and there is not live connection to your database? Well, then switch back a couple of years and use synchronized data. The app running on your phone would typically be synchronized with the data in your database while you are still connected, and you would then collect new data while on the road. Once back in civilization your phone would synch the data back to the database. This is what

many vendors were doing for many years, when communication technology wasn't what it is now. So this is tried and trusted technology.

Important to note that you should explore options on where you can make your workforce more mobile, so that they get more done in a shorter time and more cheaply. And they would love you to buy them an iPhone to do it!

Until next week, and remember……keep it (A)FRESH!

About the writer: Immo Böhm

Immo Böhm is the founder and managing director of Afresh Consult. He has been involved with business management systems for many years. He is an experienced implementation and process design consultant and has done in excess of 60 projects in this regard. Immo has a B.Sc degree, a diploma in IT and a MBA (UK).