How the Apple Watch Will Affect Enterprises

Accella

Accella

How the Apple Watch Will Affect Enterprises

INTRODUCTION

The Apple Watch was announced on September 9th, 2014. As with most Apple products, it immediately generated a tidal wave of hype and speculation that was felt throughout the tech industry.

As the April launch date approaches, companies across the world are beginning to shift their focus from the concrete considerations of the device (features, price point, etc.) to the hypothetical - that is, considering and conceiving of ways that the device will affect both their day-to-day operations and their business models. In 2007, few people could have predicted the iPhone's future success - much less its ubiquity. Fewer still could have foreseen the unique ways it would influence technology through the creation of markets for apps like Instagram and Snapchat. The iPhone's release also helped usher in the era of BYOD policies, as well as bringing immense change to the landscape of enterprise IT.

In light of this, we believe that it is not a question of if the Apple Watch will have an effect on enterprise operations. Rather, we assert that is merely a matter of **how quickly** the device will change how technology is used in a business setting.

WEARABLES AND INTERNAL USE

Enterprises are almost invariably the vanguard users of a new device. From the first Cray supercomputers to the smartphones of today, enterprise level users often put new technology to the test long before it reaches the broader consumer marketplace. This is partially due to price, and partially due to the idea that businesses often develop a need for new technology before consumers typically do. In 2003, the average person probably didn't receive enough emails to justify purchasing a BlackBerry, nor was there a need to access any social networks. Nobody needed to access the web from the road except for enterprise users.

The very same day that the Watch was announced, Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff asserted that wearables would become an essential part of the enterprise technology infrastructure. This claim is bolstered by Salesforce's heavy investment in its wearable division, as the company already offers an SDK that features integration support for devices like the Pebble Watch and the Oculus Rift.

The Apple Watch will not replace the iPhone, nor is it meant to; the device will act as extension of the phone's capabilities. A critical trend to keep in mind is that each new Apple device expands upon the features of its ancestor e.g., the iPhone brought cellular functionality to the iPod; the iPad took what was great about the iPhone and proved that it could work on a physically larger scale.

Thus, the Apple Watch's "killer feature" may be its ability to glean and display useful information from the

iPhone without the user needing to view their actual device. Such functionality could be critical in improving productivity for field technicians, internal IT staff, and team members in the midst of client presentations.

DEVELOPING FOR WATCH

Like all other iOS applications, apps for the Watch will be written in xCode, using the WatchKit SDK. However, unlike typical iPhone and iPad applications, Watch apps must be created in two separate parts - a WatchKit app that runs on the iPhone, and a set of user interface resources that are installed on the actual Watch device. The WatchKit SDK was released in November 2014, and while it's almost a certainty that some apps have been developed for the device, it's very likely that few have had the opportunity to receive any actual testing.

"The first wave of apps we see for the Watch will be really similar to what happened with the desktop-to-mobile shift."

- Sravish Sridhar, CEO, Kinvey

Consider the above quote: most of the early apps for the iPhone were simple ports of common desktop applications that weren't necessarily optimized for mobile use. It took a few years for the device's full functionality to receive the benefit of specialized design and development. With that hindsight in mind, your development team may feel more free to think about the abstract potential of the Watch; that is, to consider how the device can help your organization get the edge on the competition.

WEARABLES AND THE CONSUMER

The role for wearables in the consumer market is still developing and evolving. Devices like the Oculus Rift are still seen largely as entertainment tools, whereas tech like Google Glass is still struggling to find a functional application.

When the Watch was formally announced in Apple's 2014 keynote presentation, the company highlighted a number of different consumer facing apps that will be available immediately upon the device's launch. Several large companies have already invested in developing applications for the device, including American Airlines, Starwood Hotels, Twitter, ESPN, and Honeywell.

The Watch provides functionalities that are crucial to helping these companies save their customers time, money, and convenience. For American Airlines, the Watch will allow travelers to check into a flight with a simple tap on their wrist; they'll also receive uptodate gate information as they proceed through the terminal. Starwood Hotels will allow Watch-bearing guests to access their room just by waving their device in front of their door, eliminating the need for a plastic key card.

The American Airlines Apple Watch and iPhone apps

It should be noted that Apple does not allow for "standalone" Watch apps; rather, all Watch programs will run as extensions of iPhone-based applications. As seen above, the American Airlines Watch app will offer Watch functionality as a companion of the company's current iPhone application. Thus, companies looking to develop apps for the Watch will need to keep in mind that they will also need to develop for the iPhone.

To this degree, the name of the game for the first year of Watch availability will be "added value" functionality. The most successful Watch apps will be those that can improve the user's experience and derive utility from the companion iPhone application.

One obvious vertical for the Apple Watch will be integration with fitness apps; however, it will face strong competition from entrenched opponents like the FitBit. At this stage, companies looking to capitalize on the wearables market will do well to develop Watch apps for internal use; that way, they can get an idea of when, where, and how people will use the device.

CONCLUSION

Apple Watch is not the first wearable technology to enter the market, nor will it necessarily be the most successful; however, it is inevitable that it will achieve a certain level of popularity and adoption, in no small part due to its pre-existing integration with the Mac OS and iOS ecosystem. With this in mind, it is likely that the Apple Watch will be the first device to truly bring wearables to enterprise users. The future of mobile development for enterprise starts with the Apple Watch. More than ever, the time to develop for wearables is now.

ABOUT ACCELLA

Accella specializes in creating happy clients through the design and development of websites and mobile applications. From customer-facing apps to backend databases, our team of developers and designers has the creativitiy and skills needed to bring your project to life. We pride ourselves on making sure our client's projects get done, and get done well.

Visit us today at accella.net.