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Novus International CIO Insists Growing User ***Enthusiasm Around Mobility*** Is an Asset

Maximizing Mobility May Require a New IT Mindset

by **David Hannon**, Features Editor

Novus International, a maker of animal nutrition products for over 20 years, has evolved from a fairly small company to a near-billion-dollar corporation doing business in 90 countries around the world. In 2010, the business went live with its first implementation of SAP software. This move, according to Novus' CIO, Dave Ploch, was a great one for the company — it enabled the IT organization to deliver information in such a way that everyone across the enterprise is using same data within the same processes.

"But immediately, our employees and management wanted to know when they could access the data on their iPhones, just like they saw in the commercials," Ploch says. "The whole commercialization of mobility and the consumerization of IT has really permeated our organization, and we're trying to understand how to build a strategy to deal with that."

Instead of constantly trying to avoid those questions and quell the curiosity of IT users, Ploch says that IT organizations should be channeling that enthusiasm and asking business users for input on their enterprise mobility strategy.

"Some of our business groups have been innovating with cloud technologies, buying new mobile devices, and doing things that IT organizations usually want to put a stop to — but those are the things that got our business users excited about mobility," says Ploch. "If *we* had given them those devices, they might have complained. But because *they* selected them, they are much more enthusiastic — and we can capitalize on that."

Novus is using this approach to help guide both its internal and customer-facing mobile strategies. But effectively tapping into that enthusiasm means truly listening to the business users and giving up some of the strict control IT usually wields.

"Mobility is teaching us that IT isn't the only place where the answers are all held," Ploch says. "Our users are going to start bringing more and more ideas, and they are going to be important ideas."

The App Heard 'Round the Enterprise

Novus' IT organization was introduced to mobility when employees began asking IT to support the latest mobile devices. For example, business users saw the iPad and wanted to use that instead of their laptops. So when the eMarketing team developed its own simple iPad app — that lets users search through pages of Novus product literature and request to receive documents via email — and unveiled it at an industry tradeshow, the level of mobile enthusiasm within Novus spiraled to a fever pitch.

"We used the app at our booth and generated a real buzz at the show," Ploch recalls. "When our executive VP of sales and marketing came back from the conference, he proudly showed the app on his iPad to everybody at the office."

Two days later, there were 10 more requests for apps from various parts of the company. And in the following weeks, many more requests came in for both internal and external apps. It was a fundamental shift in how the IT organization — and mobility — was viewed by users across the company.

Ploch certainly didn't want to say "No" to every request that came in, but he also knew it was the right time to take a step back and gather some input on the company's longer-term vision of enterprise mobility before moving forward.

"We are used to the internal-facing requests, but developing external-facing apps is more complicated from an IT perspective," he says. It's also more complex from a business process perspective because the goals and content of a customer-facing app extend well beyond the IT domain.

So Ploch will be putting out a call to senior leaders across the enterprise for their mobile projects, including both internal and external apps, which will be evaluated in terms of their value to the business. Novus' eMarketing team is taking part in the customer-facing app development process. External expertise will be brought in to help evaluate and prioritize the projects.

A Spotlight on Internal-Facing Apps

Much of the internal-facing excitement over mobility at Novus is geared toward mobilizing the functionality users have gained since the SAP ERP deployment. Almost immediately after go-live, Novus IT users were asking for the ERP system's reporting and business intelligence capabilities on their mobile devices.

"Compared to our old ERP system, we have an amazing amount of information about our business, transactions, customers, and costs," Ploch says. "Now, we have to provide those analysis tools to users on their portable devices."

Some mobile pilot projects that leverage SAP ERP are already underway at Novus. The first is tied to the deployment of SAP Customer Relationship Management (SAP CRM) and will deliver account fact sheets to sales representatives in the field, so they can easily pull up all of the vital customer account information, including their most recent transactions, moments before walking into a sales call.

The second is a workflow app for product pricing approval. "This app will allow those individuals who are part of the business process to do their approvals directly from their mobile device," he says. "There are multiple steps in the process, and this should speed it up considerably."

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Mobile's Broader Impact on IT

Ploch says that, in the broader sense, mobility — and specifically the development of mobile apps — will challenge the resources and skill sets within most IT organizations. Where most IT organizations are set up to deploy and support existing software, the mobile trend could have more resources focused on developing apps and mobilizing solutions.

In many respects, Novus is doubling the infrastructure being supported since most users will have both a PC and a smart device. According to Ploch, this is another opportunity for IT to transform from a cost center to a profit driver. The key will be managing that transition smoothly.

"Our IT organization loves working with these new mobile devices and figuring out what these devices can do," Ploch says. "But at the same time, the team members don't see us taking anything off their plate."

Ploch hopes that by leveraging a combination of outsourcing and cloud computing, he can reduce the infrastructure support required at Novus to free up some of the IT organization to focus more on the rush of mobile projects coming down the pike.

"Then we can focus our resources on truly supporting end users and delivering real solutions to the organization," he says. ■