



Why UX and UI are vital to enterprise app success

An **optimal user experience** and **user interface** are just some of the key elements in ensuring enterprises get the most out of the opportunities presented by apps for improved processes, efficiencies and output.

Apps are becoming increasingly important tools for enterprises, and have dramatically changed the way that people work.

As people have become accustomed to apps that are easy and entertaining to use in their everyday lives, they expect the same functionality with the tools they use in the workplace – so even enterprise apps have become ‘consumerised’.

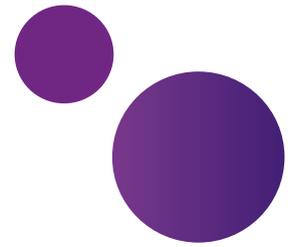
Enterprise productivity apps like Slack and Jira infiltrated workplaces from the ground up, while Zendesk’s appealing interface and cloud capabilities caught users’ attention.

But many enterprises are lagging when it comes to adoption of mobile apps, in particular because the apps that they access don’t meet their expectations around ease of use

and high functionality. In other words, the user experience (UX) is poor.

This is a missed opportunity for enterprises, as apps can help organisations to create process efficiencies, to re-imagine how the business operates, and build better systems to support it.

Enterprise apps with consumer-grade UX are an important tool for any business that wants to remain competitive and ensure they are not vulnerable to start ups, whose agility and lack of legacy technology encumbrances can make them disruptive.



Business transformation with apps

Businesses have been digitising their internal processes and systems for decades. Typically, an existing process is adapted from its manual, paper-based state into a digital, automated one.

Accounting is a well-known example. Information is automatically collected and tabulated in an electronic spreadsheet or online ledger book, rather than employing clerks to manually enter the data.

However, a straight replica of processes is a missed opportunity to adopt a new way of thinking about

how a business works. Using the app design opportunity well can help employees be more productive with better, faster, and easier-to-use processes. Ideally this will free them up to concentrate on using their knowledge and experience to add value to the business.

For example, an optimal financial management app might move on from simply mimicking a traditional ledger book, and instead pull together data from all of the organisation’s bank, supplier and partner accounts to paint

a more complete picture of its financial situation. This opens the possibility of analysing the larger data set to discover connections, correlations, risks and opportunities.

However, many apps have poor interfaces, which is a major barrier to adoption. This is where good UX design is so important.

UX design

Good UX design is key to easy-to-use, intuitive apps. UX is more than just an app's user interface (UI), but it encompasses background processes and functionality, as well as making the app easy to operate. It is central to the adoption and effectiveness of an app, including in an enterprise setting.

In the enterprise context it is not enough to simply digitise existing processes, or to concentrate on creating an attractive UI. The key question isn't, 'What kind of app should we build?', but rather, 'What can we do to make our employees' lives different?'

It is important when designing an enterprise app to go beyond existing systems and consider the overall result the app and the related business process are trying to achieve, and how the various parts of the process can be made to fit together. This will allow for a UX that will be functional and optimised for the tasks at hand, and will be the foundation of a UI that will keep users engaged and productive.

A critical step is a preliminary discovery process, which means speaking with users and customers about their needs. Based on these conversations, and existing knowledge of users from hard data, anecdotes, design documents and any other sources, the app designers can create a list of typical user 'personas' and detail their wants and needs.

For example, one persona for a finance app might be an administration officer who is not part of the finance team and only needs to enter invoices and expense claims; another might be an in-house accountant who needs to access a large data set; and a third might be the CFO or financial controller, who needs access to all information along with detailed reporting tools.

Designers need to make to make sure the app meets these different needs as simply and efficiently as possible, and be approachable regardless of the users' experience or technical ability.

Defining SUCCESS

App developers should also consider the metrics and KPIs the business wants the app to collect. This needs to be useful feedback on both the app's performance and how it's improving business processes.

KPIs for the app itself could include:



Adoption rates

If people aren't downloading and opening the app, then it's clear that a different approach to communicating and promotion might be required.



Drop-off

If users stop opening the app after just a few uses, then clearly something is amiss. If developers can determine a pattern in the user drop-off (for example, before or after accessing a feature, or after a certain period of time), then they can leverage this knowledge about user behaviour to improve the app.



Engagement

How often is the app used? How long is the average session and how easy is it to use? Are all of its features being accessed, or only the most obvious? This data can deliver strong insights on both UX and UI.

Typical business-related KPIs might include:



Resource savings

Resource saving measurement helps calculate return on investment (ROI). If a 1-hour task now only takes 10 minutes, or if systems had to be closed to other users when a key report was being created and can now remain accessible, then the app is generating meaningful savings.



Cost savings

Tracking cost savings is critical to understanding and app's ROI. The key is to fully understand the costs beforehand, especially if the app will be combining more than one process or workflow.

Finding the right app development partner

For enterprises looking to develop an app tailored to their business needs, finding the right app development partner is core to success. Developing an app isn't a one-off transaction, it's the beginning of an ongoing relationship.

There are several key attributes businesses should look for when choosing an app development partner. These include:

Cultural fit and business knowledge

A willingness to understand the enterprise's broader goals and ensure the app is designed to meet those goals.

Feedback processes

Willingness to accept feedback, and to adopt clearly defined milestones, user testing sessions, and a range of evaluation tools. Every app benefits from real-world feedback – it's important the developer can gather and act on such information.

Engineering skills

An app development partner should also have experience with enterprise-grade infrastructure to ensure they can make new systems work with existing back-end systems. This should include enterprise-weight skills in systems architecture and systems integration.

Communication protocols

Communication channels should be clearly defined, including day-to-day contacts for operational matters, escalation points, feedback and evaluation processes, and dedicated, shared spaces for exchanging documents and ideas.

Experience and UX skills

Along with a demonstrated track record in end-to-end product development and innovation, an app developer should have a clear, engineering-based understanding of UX design. This extends beyond UI design as good UX engineers can embed important features into the app's architecture. For example, a good engineer will use AI to anticipate user actions and pre-load information, making those actions faster and more efficient.

Development roadmap

A partner should provide a development roadmap that indicates important pre-release milestones as well as targets and timeframes for ongoing development after release.

The opportunity from user-friendly enterprise apps

The benefits of enterprise apps can be considerable, including business process transformation; cost savings; greater user engagement with the business and its processes; access to fresh, analytics-based business intelligence; and potentially, access to new markets, processes and capabilities.

To achieve these benefits, businesses must identify processes that can be transformed, not just digitised, and identify desired benefits and how to measure them.

The key for businesses developing enterprise apps is creating the right process, UX and UI. With these elements right, the apps should deliver significant benefits.



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