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CIO REVIEW

The Convergence of Mobile and Tablet Technology: Sales Reps' Swiss Army Knife

By Brian Longo, General Manager, Commercial Products, Veeva Systems

Many life sciences field sales reps have too many redundant technology devices – smartphones, tablets, and desktop PCs. At some point soon, these devices are destined to consolidate as has already happened with gadgets. Point-and-shoot cameras, GPS navigators, and MP3 players have all largely been absorbed into smartphones – the Swiss army knife of modern technology.

As smartphones get faster and more powerful, and tablets get smaller and more power-efficient, the two are destined for a collision course. Soon, smartphones will be powerful enough to run a full desktop operating system that can do virtually everything today's computers can do, including photo editing and 4k video streaming, email and more. Tomorrow's smartphone will not only be a communications device, but, with a combination of the cloud and local syncing, it will also hold the key to accessing all business applications, social networks, data, and multimedia, making it as relevant to business users as to consumers.

In fact, some companies are already experimenting with large form factor phones, aka “phablets”—defined as phone and tablet hybrid devices with screens of at least 5.5 inches. Phablets are all-rounders, fulfilling the combined roles of two devices, but for a lower price. Despite a lukewarm reception by naysayers initially, total sales in this category have grown steadily ever since Samsung's launch in 2012. Phablets accounted for 12.8 percent of mobile sales worldwide in 2014, and almost quadrupled sales in the U.S. during the last quarter of 2015. Apple's iPhone 6 Plus was the biggest driver behind soaring sales.

Exciting for Consumers, But All Hype for Pharma?

With each passing season, another wave of mobile devices is released that's more capable than the generation preceding it. Now, with Apple's A8 chip, the iPhone 6 Plus is 50 times faster than the chip in the original iPhone, and its

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CPU is 84 times faster, ensuring the next wave is more than just a consumer fad. This unparalleled processing power will close the divide between tablets, phones, and desktops. The resulting efficiency will bring new meaning to mobility as users, for instance, would no longer have to concern themselves with syncing devices in order to keep contacts or data up to date—it would just happen. Users would always work with the latest information and data. In addition, administrators would have less variance to support, fewer devices to manage, and more time to innovate.

The combination of a larger screen and more processing power, as well as built-in 4G connectivity, makes this convergent device a real contender for field-based tasks as well as for executives on the move so long as it includes built-to-form-factor interfaces to critical enterprise applications like Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Master Data Management (MDM).

“Most life sciences sales reps are currently tri-device users—the smartphone and tablet for the field plus a PC in the office—and would prefer to just use a single device in the field. However,



Brian Longo

it's IT that will drive this convergence as they want to minimize the number of devices that they have to support," explained one IT analyst. Stephen Pritchard, editor of IT Pro, predicts, "If the trend continues we're likely to see more of these once niche devices in enterprise use, and more business apps being developed to exploit their specific features."

Always connected to a 4G network, phablets enable instant communication, constant flows of real-time data, individual authentication for high security, and unlimited access to key enterprise systems. Storage would be the only thing holding a life sciences company back from becoming a single-device organization – well, that and a possible reticence to change. But, with the cloud, storage at least, is not an issue as cloud-based storage is already increasingly a necessary part of daily workflows.

For the convergence of technologies to really take shape in the life sciences industry, the trick will be to ensure information is easily accessible and that enterprise applications are properly optimized for the smaller form factor. Veeva Systems' life sciences-specific, multichannel Veeva CRM solution, for instance, can be optimized for a smaller screen and still offer full functionality and performance.

Here are few ways that convergent technology will help transform the life sciences industry:

1. Hello "Always On" Data

Convergent technology means that the end result will enable more devices to leverage an "always on" data flow. With a continuous flow of data nearly everywhere, it will be far easier to quantify and report on data from more sources, including the growing number of customer interaction channels today. Data has become one of the most precious commodities but has been notoriously well-guarded by only a precious few providers and well-protected, rightly so, for the benefit of patients. However, a continuous flow of data from interactions with physicians—and even anonymized data from patients—can help life sciences companies improve the relevancy of each customer engagement.

2. By 'More,' We Mean Less

Phablets-like devices make financial and practical sense: it is cheaper to buy a phablet than a tablet and a smartphone, plus IT management and overhead costs are reduced by only supporting a

single device. Additionally, phablet prices have been tumbling since they were first introduced as consumer demand has grown. Life sciences companies, always under pressure to produce life-saving products faster and for less, will be able to dramatically reduce their overall technology expenditure.

3. Better, Faster Person-To-Person And Data-To-Person Communication

Data is going to become an even more integral part of the life sciences industry once convergence takes center stage. Devices and machines will more readily share data. Other forms of data sharing that convergence will aid include: Human-to-human, human-to-device, device-to-server, server-to-server, and more.

As technology converges, the demand put on data flow will increase dramatically. This means developers will have to make that flow of data as fast, seamless, and efficient as possible. The creation of more efficient data flow will have the added benefit of making the machines that use the data more powerful so innovation in life sciences can continue at an even faster tempo.

4. Want It Now? You Got It

With a convergent smartphone, life sciences sales reps will be equipped to provide physicians with immediate response to nearly anything they need. If they want something emailed, they can access it via the cloud and send it right from their CRM system to ensure compliance. The email goes to the customer instantly, without waiting until the user is back in the office or worrying about having an available Wi-Fi network since the device is 4G-ready. With a built-in camera, reps can instantly video-conference in medical science liaisons to answer off-label or other medical questions rather than trying to schedule a call later. Reps can join web meetings with the device wherever and whenever. Overall, a robust phablet can ensure relevant, immediate, and comprehensive customer interactions every time.

A year or two from now, most life sciences sales reps will carry the technology device equivalent of a Swiss army knife—fully capable with access to real-time data, multiple engagement channels, and robust enterprise applications like CRM. 

