

Five Ways Mobile ERP is Evolving

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Apple just released a toolkit for easily incorporating augmented reality into mobile apps. You're not alone if you think this is an opportunity for mobile ERP. In fact, even before Apple announced its push into augmented reality, ERP makers already were busily working on ways to make ERP data more useful and accessible for mobile.



“A major innovation area for mobile ERP solution providers is the incorporation of artificial intelligence and virtual reality,” says Lonny Oswald, CEO of ERP provider, MobileFrame. “It is anticipated that AI and VR will find its way into more field service based apps as 2017 draws to a close.”

There was a time when mobile ERP meant clunky apps that gave limited access to ERP systems while employees were outside the office. Those days are gone. Mobile ERP is evolving fast as it catches up to the fact that workers now carry their computers in their pants pockets and everything is in the cloud.

“Mobile ERP is definitely moving into a proactive rather than reactive mindset,” says Brian Stein, CEO of ERP provider, SYSPRO. “I think it is going to be more mobility of data rather than focusing on mobile.”

Augmented and virtual reality still are a year or more away for most businesses, but here's how mobile ERP has evolved already.

1. No Longer Complex

While ERP systems still are complex under the hood, they no longer are necessarily complex for mobile end users.

“In the first stages of developing mobile ERP, a lot of vendors tried to emulate what they had on the desktop,” says Stein. “ERP quickly figured out that this was two different use cases, and started to simplify the screens, eliminate or automate steps in process, and building to a simple task.”

This simplification also has led to faster onboarding, making ERP more accessible to employees—especially Millennials, who expect software that just works.

“While traditional enterprise applications have concentrated on functionality with users requiring structured training on how to use the system, mobility solutions tend to offer an intuitive user interface similar to consumer applications that are familiar to the Millennial generation,” says Jill Smith, senior director of Aptean’s manufacturing product, Ross ERP.

2. Real-Time Data Entry and Access

A second evolution of mobile ERP has been the shift from accessing select data in the ERP system to entering data right at end points, whether this is on the factory floor or at a retail outlet.

“Mobility is allowing input of the ERP data closer to the transaction. Before advanced mobility functionality, sales reps wrote sales orders and then sent them to the accounting department to enter in the ERP system,” says Stein at SYSPRO. “Now, with mobility, sales reps are able to look at inventory levels or production schedules and do CTP (capable to promise) and create the SO all while in the field next to the customer.”

David Chao, head of industry solutions for integration platform provider, MuleSoft, adds that companies are hurriedly adapting processes to take advantage of this new opportunity.

“As cloud-based and software-as-a-service solutions become increasingly critical to business processes, organizations now need to integrate not only their ERP systems on-premise, but also shift data to cloud-based applications and mobile platforms,” says Chao.

3. Better Security

Encryption no longer is something businesses must ensure is present in their ERP system; military-grade encryption and security features such as two-factor authentication now comes standard with mobile ERP. This is opening up mobile ERP data like never before.

“The mobility revolution has evolved to the point where there are literally no restrictions on the data that can be shared seamlessly with the field,” says Oswald at MobileFrame. “Medical records,

financial data, proprietary business process data... Customers are deploying apps across the enterprise and across their network of customers that include these sensitive data as part of the standard business workflow in their mobile ERP apps.”

4. Configurable API

Another way that mobile ERP is evolving is the expansion of fully-customizable APIs that help businesses easily connect systems with new technology such as AI, more easily roll out apps that expose select parts of the system, and make ERP more widely accessible to field service workers.

“The processes themselves are what businesses really care about, not the ERP systems,” stresses Chao at MuleSoft. “Our customers tell us [that] by adopting an API-led approach to connectivity and using APIs to extract data from their core ERP systems, they can allow multiple stakeholders to consume data from the same ERP. That reuse streamlines business processes, while providing the agility and operational cost benefits that prompted them to adopt cloud solutions in the first place.”

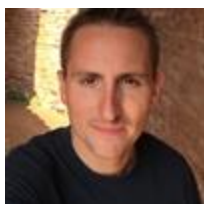
5. Advanced Search

Mobile ERP has evolved significantly in terms of being able to find data within an ERP system, too. Since navigation is constrained on most mobile devices, ERP systems have greatly improved their search functionality to accommodate.

“‘Google it’ has become a ubiquitous phrase. Whenever answers are needed, this answer is the one most people receive,” notes Smith at Aptean. “Thanks to the mobile revolution, all of the data within an enterprise system can be available via an enterprise search. Business stakeholders now have the ability to search for information at their convenience on the device of their choice.”

While these are five ways that mobile ERP has evolved, don’t expect the evolution to stop any time soon. AI and augmented reality definitely will shake up mobile ERP in the near future, not to mention the innovations nobody has thought up yet.

About the Author



Peter Kowalke is journalist and editor who has been covering business, technology and lifestyle trends for more than 20 years. When not writing, he runs Kowalke Relationship Coaching.