

Lessons learned in rolling out a mass market B2B mobile app

A paper by Terry Hughes, Widelity

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What is *momentem*™ ?

There are 2 key components which together make up the *momentem* service;

- the instantly downloadable app for *BlackBerry*, that users rely on to tag their calls and other mobile activities with meaningful context including allocating tags to specific contacts and projects.
- the app communicates with the hosted *momentem* service which manages the subscribers, their tagged records, and delivery of Excel reports to them.

Typical users are business people, both SMB and people within enterprises, and “prosumers”, who have busy mobile lives and need to keep track of their calls and activity

Users benefit by accounting for their time, recovering more of their phone bill, and keeping an audit trail of all calls and activity.

Read more at www.momentem.net

“As one of the launch apps on BlackBerry App World in 2009, and as one of the most popular business apps out there, we have learned so much (and made a few mistakes along the way). It’s time to share some of those experiences for the good of the wireless industry.”

Terry Hughes, President and Head of Market Development, Widelity

This paper aims to provide anyone in the wireless industry with a snapshot of what it’s like to roll out a successful app+service to hundreds of thousands of demanding business users across the globe. Within the paper there is lots of advice for anyone considering rolling out a sophisticated B2B app. It’s also a retrospective look at the first full year of the new “app economy” from the perspective of someone who has been there and got the T-shirt.

Before we get started, here are a few things you should know about the *momentem* service, in addition to the overview in the panel on the left.

- # it’s more of a service than an app, in fact the app is the means by which users get access to the service. Users use it all day every day, in fact it pops up after every call, so it has to work reliably and smoothly
- # people use it to recover hundreds of dollars of billable time and expenses every month, so it’s not some throwaway app
- # the service is where the team have put their focus, including the running of the back-end servers, maintaining a secure database for all users, billing and subscription management, and high quality customer support
- # Widelity is a RIM ISV Alliance Member and is a “proper” company with employees, offices, QA processes, and financial backers. This is different from many of today’s app providers that are “two men in a garage”
- # One year ago Widelity set out to get above the noise of the app world, to deliver a product that people absolutely loved, and to constantly improve the service based on customer feedback. This then is the story of that journey and what lessons were learned along the way ...



Widelity is the developer of *momentem*™ and was recently acquired by Wmode, a major provider of app distribution and content management services. Powered by Wmode, Widelity provides a range of services to the app economy helping app providers to get above the noise and monetize by delivering scalable quality services.

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What did you learn about running *momentem* as a service rather than an app?

The first thing to say is that it's orders of magnitude more complicated and costly to operate an ongoing quality service rather than to just deliver an app that has no back-end. However we are delighted that we adopted a SaaS (software as a service) model, because it has enabled us to generate recurring revenue, to monitor usage and trends in real time, to engage with – and retain - our customers, and to enhance our service without having to ask hundreds of thousands of people to re-download the app!

What have you learned about delivering a sophisticated service to app buyers?

Although our service is quite complex compared to most apps (because it enables users to categorize their activities and request detailed Excel reports), we made it really simple for the users to sign up and get started. They simply enter their email address within the app to register, and that's it – their account is open and they can start tagging calls on the fly. Delivering a standalone service is critical, i.e. a user doesn't need to set anything up or integrate with any other system, they can get an ROI within minutes. We then followed that up with 3 "how to" videos to get new users comfortable with the overall concepts, each individual feature, and "how to get the most out of the service". We get very few "how to" questions from users.

What did you learn about business models?

The typical app buyer has so many apps to choose from that having a free option is critical to attract attention and to get people to try out the service. So we adopted the "freemium" model where our cut-down version was free on App World. This provided us with a critical mass of users, from whom we learned everything we know today. It also created huge buzz for us and got us above the noise. In terms of our paid-for premium version, we proved that people were prepared to pay a monthly fee, and to see how we found that out, read the green panel on the right!

Going forward, we believe that a **combination** of free+premium (i.e. freemium!), and pay-per-use where people pay when they want a report from the system, and flexible monthly billing options (including Name Your Price and having *momentem* appear on the carrier bill) are critical, because one price and one model definitely doesn't fit all.

What did you learn about the importance of usability?

We made a few small design mistakes that became magnified once we had hundreds of people pointing them out, so we realised the importance of getting those things right. We didn't implement our password system as elegantly as we should have, and there were a few configuration options that would have given our users a better experience. Luckily, once we got the app out there with those enthusiastic early adopters, they were happy to tell us, we were happy to address the issues, and they were happy to update their software. It was better than any narrow focus group.

Key takeaways

- having a hosted service (rather than an isolated app) is essential to build long term value and recurring revenues
- delivering a standalone service rather than an integrated system reduces the sales cycle from 9 months to 9 minutes!
- simplicity is key; even though the service may be complex, make it easy for the user to sign up and to use every aspect of the system
- flexible and experimental business models, that can change over time, is the only way to find the "sweet spot"
- getting early adopters to "test" the app and report any issues isn't a bad way of improving the product, compared to sterile focus groups, as long as there is a baseline quality and utility there to begin with, and as long as feedback is quickly acted on

Name Your Price

momentem users can name their own price depending on the value they perceive for the *momentem* service. It is normally \$8 per month, and here's we are finding;

- the average is \$5.50, not the minimum \$2 price point!
- there has been a ten-fold increase in sign-ups as users feel they are in control of how much they are paying
- feedback has been really positive



Key takeaways

- track as many aspects of your business as you can, as often as you can, and adjust your business based on what you are seeing in the real world
- impress people in the industry (such as RIM) by delivering high volumes of downloads but more by making people love their phone so they rave about it in reviews
- only automate your systems when you have tested and tweaked them manually

Manual vs. Automation – an example

Many app companies offer free trials, but the user has to enter their payment details before getting the download. With *momentem* we tried something different, with great success.

We allowed the user to download without giving any payment info, then I personally reached out to every user during their trial, to find out;

- whether they were happy or perhaps they had questions

- what price they felt the service was worth

- how they were using the app

- what approaches and wording worked best to get people to sign up

What did you learn about the importance of tracking, stats and metrics?

We made it our obsession, and it transformed our business. We track everything we can track, including;

server loading and busy hour, which countries our users are in, what handsets they have, how many tags a day they send in to the system, how often they request reports, on average how many contacts and projects they use, how many minutes of billable time they recover, how being an App World Featured app changes uptake levels, how changes in wording affect user behaviour, which distribution channels work the best, the number of support issues, common bugs and suggestions, and on and on.

Most of those are only trackable because of our SaaS system, if we were a handset-only app we would not be able to track anything. We even provide our analysis to RIM on a regular basis because we have visibility of things that they don't, such as what profiles of user are signing up and how they are using the app.

What did you find was important to a partner like RIM?

We didn't spend our time schmoozing RIM, instead we rolled up our sleeves and delivered a solution that was worthy of their high quality platform. We spent our time delivering business benefit to their users, enhancing the BlackBerry in the eyes of those users, delivering a quality service with first class support (with no complaints to RIM from our users), getting significant uptake for a business app, and most importantly getting hundreds of positive reviews and a 4 star rating. We even achieved Top 10 status with some major publications. Seeing us achieve those things gave us the credibility we needed with RIM, rather than some fancy PR which was full of hot air and empty of substance.

What did you learn about automation vs. manual systems?

With any mass market system it's vital to automate any of the repetitive tasks. However we took an approach of doing many of the other things manually, because we wanted to keep our finger on the pulse for the first few months, and we also didn't know how to automate something properly until we had been through it manually. It's also good to feel the pain, e.g. we only automated the password reset process once we had to do 20 a day manually! A balance of automated vs. manual is essential; as a small company you can't grow if you are spending all your time on admin, but equally you can't grow if you don't know whether your systems are even working well. See the side panel for a great example.

What did you learn about engaging with customers?

This has been the most critical aspect of the past 12 months. I spent 2 – 4 hours a day exchanging emails with our customers. Far from being a drain on my time, it



has enabled me to shape the future of our business, by listening to real customers day in, day out. The green side panel on this page lists some of the key benefits of doing this, for any app company.

We wrote two great articles on customer engagement, [here](#) and [here](#)

What did you find out about techniques for communicating with users?

We have the user's email address on our system because that's how they receive their Excel reports. Firstly, we treat it with the utmost respect and security, and we never spam. It's vital that users know that, too. Here are a few other things we have learned;

- # short, plain text emails, with no trackable links, get a far better response than those pretty HTML colour newsletter style emails
- # as we have a free version, it's hard to avoid using the word "free" in emails, but "free" is the one word that triggers spam filters, so it's a tough one!
- # we know the home timezone of each user so we send emails at a convenient time, not in the middle of the night!
- # we segregate our database by which distribution channel the user came from and when they joined, and we have other data such as their country and language, so we can segment our messages very effectively
- # we make it really easy for users to opt out or cancel the service
- # I give every user my Widelity email address, and they love that because they feel they can reach out to the management rather than some faceless system
- # and our support emails come from a human with a name, which users love (and if they were irritated to begin with, they suddenly calm down when they see a fast professional response from a friendly person)
- # we do also have every user's mobile phone number, but we never use it to contact them

What have you learned about running an efficient support operation?

We didn't invest in some big automated trouble ticket system because we wanted to feel the pulse and the pain. So every incoming support form is received by me, and by our support team. We are obsessed with responding quickly and with a personal response, not some canned reply. However, behind the scenes, we log every support issue and we assess whether it's a bug that we should fix, a great idea for a product improvement, something we should document on our FAQ page or user manual, or something we should automate. What we found was that instead of recruiting a dedicated support person, myself and the CTO deal with the support issues because we need to understand what is making people contact us with a problem. And, although the number of users has risen exponentially, the number of support emails has remained static because of what we have learned and built in the past year.

Key takeaways

- spending quality time listening to customers, and engaging with them, is the most important thing you can do (see the green panel below)
- perfecting email communication techniques is vital. Our opt-out rate is among the best in the industry, and we have a high user satisfaction level, because we respect our users
- support shouldn't be viewed as a pain, it's another chance to engage with a customer and make them happy, and to improve the product and processes going forward
- if management are spending 50% of their time with customers, it's not a bad thing!

Why should the senior management talk to the customers all day long?

- users have all the best ideas about where the product should go next, they help you design your roadmap
- you can test out your assumptions on them; pricing, how the app is positioned and marketed, and you can bounce new product ideas off them
- you can find out which publications they read (for marketing), where they perceive the value within the service, and how changes to the service would affect them
- you can encourage them to write reviews and tell other people
- overall, a happy engaged customer that is being listened to stays with you and becomes your best salesperson



Key takeaways

- don't underestimate the importance of a high quality User Interface, both in terms of getting users to use the app, and also the buzz and reviews that having a cool sexy app generates
- understand where you are in your technology adoption lifecycle curve, and how the changing types of users impact on your communication and engagement programs
- leverage the power of the app store as a free shop window that the world can see, and implement techniques to maximise that exposure (see panel below)

Some techniques for maximising exposure in an app store

- naming the app correctly is vital. *momentem* doesn't mean anything to anyone, so we had to call it "Call Time Tracker!"
- the app description is also vital, because people decide whether to download within 5 seconds of reading the first few lines
- remember, the app store wording is ALSO picked up by the Google search engine, so choose the words cleverly!
- getting good reviews, at the top of your list of reviews (i.e. the most recent), along with getting 4 or 5 stars, is critical
- choose the category with care; place the app where the target users will be browsing, more than what the app functionally does
- a sharp punchy description gets the right users but lower volumes, a vague description will get more people but with worse usage metrics

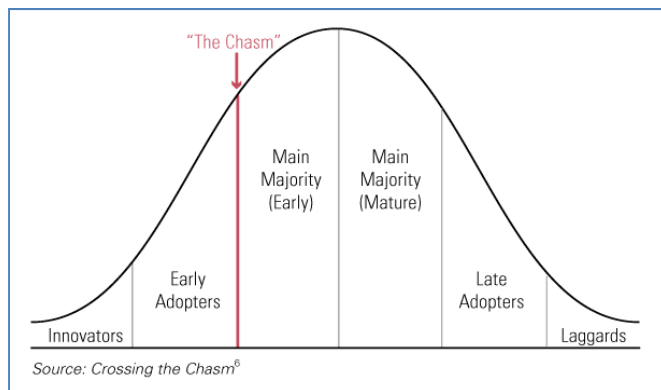
What did you learn about the importance of the user experience?

In terms of the app, and the UI (user interface), when we first built the app 2 years ago the appearance wasn't as important as the functionality. Now, in 2010, I would argue that they are on a par with each other. Thanks to the iPhone's cool user interface, customers are expecting a much higher level of UI quality from their apps, and that goes for BlackBerry too. We have an app that is reasonable looking and fairly easy to navigate around, but it is "steak without the sizzle" and if we were starting again we would add some sizzle, because that's what causes the word of mouth and increased usage of the app. We would have also built in all the major languages, but we didn't realize quite how global our success would be!

I believe that if we had incorporated better in-app help (e.g. lots of "what's this for?" question marks to click near every menu option), a getting started wizard, an in-app tutorial, and more intuitive buttons and graphic illustrations, we could have reduced our support issues by around 20%. Luckily we do deliver most of the value from the service, not the app (the app is just a means to an end).

Have the users changed over time?

Most definitely. 1 year ago, the real pioneer Early Adopters were so enthusiastic; they would put up with imperfections, they would write long reviews on App World, and they would spend hours telling us what they liked and loathed about *momentem*. Now,



1 year on, we are in the Main Majority (Early) phase of the curve, and we are lucky if we get more than a handful of positive reviews per month, even if we ask them to write something to help us out. And yet the uptake and usage is soaring, it's just that they can't be bothered to engage with us as much. The good news is that we successfully crossed the chasm and we have built a system that can scale, and we are automating more and more as we go along. However, figuring out ways to engage more with the Main Majority is something we don't have the answer to just yet.

What have you learned about getting above the noise on a busy app store?

I have jotted down a few things in the panel on the left. Overall, I believe that an OEM app store such as BlackBerry App World is the single best *free shop window* and promotional showcase available for any app developer, so it must be leveraged to its full extent, however there's an art to getting it right. If you can make it work, it will provide you with your customers, large volume leads, partner opportunities, media exposure, high profile with the OEM and their sales teams, and much more.



So, have we been successful? Did we learn anything in the past 12 months?

Judge for yourself.

1) read the traction and exposure that we have received over the past year [here](#)

2) read hundreds of real customer comments [here](#)

3) read what we have learned about RIM's Super Apps initiative, and how we plan to build on what we have to embrace it, [here](#)

4) and see what 12 months of frenetic activity have given us in terms of vision and how we see the future panning out, [here](#)

5) Contact me .. I tag and reply to every call or email !

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Terry Hughes

Here is our 10 Point Plan for Success for anyone wanting to enter the crazy chaotic app market, especially those wanting to build a B2B service, which is exponentially harder than building the next trendy gimmick app.

Widelity's 10 Point Plan for Success

1. when designing the product/service, **figure out who the target demographic is**, what they are looking for, where the app will be placed within an app store, and what the competition for similar users looks like. **Understanding the target users** intricately dictates the approach for all of the next 9 points
2. keep it **standalone** to begin with; every interdependency with other systems reduces the potential audience, slows down the time to ROI, and dramatically increases support efforts
3. **incorporate a service** element into the offering if at all possible, because having a service presents opportunities for recurring revenue, tracking and metrics, and better customer engagement and retention
4. **design the app with user experience in mind**, via a high quality User Interface and by making the app as simple as possible to get up and running and to use on a daily basis
5. **choose the name carefully**, bearing in mind how it will appear on app stores, it's hard to change it afterwards! Also, if you can't fully describe the app within 100 words, nobody else will get it either. the value proposition has to be crystal clear in the description
6. ensure you have **maximum flexibility in business models** so that you can quickly test out what works and change on the fly. Experiment with many to find the golden nugget
7. fully **leverage the "free shop window" of the app store**, however don't rely on app stores to achieve your goals. **Set up a direct-to-user service** via your website and use web 2.0 / Google / viral marketing to get the word out
8. once the solution is of an acceptable baseline quality (and not a moment sooner!) get it out there, **get early adopters, get feedback**, and spend 3 months fine-tuning the solution
9. **spend 50% of the management's time engaging with customers**, both from a sales and support perspective, they will tell you everything you need to know, and more
10. obsessively **Monitor and Measure Metrics, and use them to Morph** the business constantly



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