

INDEPTH TECHNOLOGY



Du Toit says that security is also a concern when one is doing cross-platform development and RAMP has a high level of certified security.

"When new platforms come to the market – like we are seeing with Windows Phone – that can cause a problem because you need to create your application for the new system," says Du Toit.

"But with RAMP, we will add new platforms as a module and then developers using it will be able to deploy their application for the new operating system without having to recode it."

According to Du Toit, the RAMP system can be used to develop applications even with just basic XML competencies – one doesn't necessarily have to be proficient in the various programming languages required for mobile application development.

Price and patience

Another consideration is the cost involved in app development. Matthew Buckland, MD of Creative Spark Interactive in Cape Town – a local web and mobile development and consulting firm – says mobile app development is generally

app strategy would depend on how core applications are to its broader digital strategy and whether there is a good fit with their current customer base.

"For those with small budgets and who want to just test the environment, we recommend highly-templated, app builder solutions – AppMakr.com or Mobile Roadie are examples for iPhone and Android. We've done this for companies like the National Arts Festival, which have a

want custom applications," he says.

The other option is to look offshore to parts of the world where app development has been turned into en-masse operations with much lower prices.

Thank you India

Many companies have sprung up in this space. One of them, iPhone App Development Company India, says it has developed over 150 successful iPhone applications already.

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WILTER DU TOIT, VIRTUAL MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES

expensive unless you're able to do it yourself.

"The application world is an expensive world because the platforms are relatively new and constantly evolving," he states.

"The devices for which you are building these apps demand rich, involved functionality and design. So it's an expensive, but rewarding world for a business."

The expense of effective app development may lead to an expectation that this is beyond the realm of small- and medium-sized businesses, but it shouldn't be.

Says Buckland: "We've done apps for big companies and small companies. But it's not just about the size of the company or budget. Whether a company wants to have an

great-looking iPhone app.

"Another approach we have taken is to build hybrid apps, which frame universally accessible mobile web pages within the rich applications. The trade-off can be less functionality and a slightly compromised design – but it works quite well in some cases. A good hybrid app is one where you don't notice that the app is part application, part mobile web page."

Buckland says there is a significant cost saving in going the hybrid route because you can apply an identical mobile web element across a variety of app platforms.

"Bigger companies or companies that deem app creation to be a core part of their digital strategy generally have more complex demands – and

The company also has an Android division and offers tablet-specific development too.

The company works hard to convince potential customers in the rest of the world that it will work closely with them in development, despite geographic divides. Part of this means doing PR for India as a technology hub.

Of course, hiring international developers does mean facing language and cultural barriers along with some other challenges, but it can be done.

With many options to consider, there's no reason to veer away from mobile apps. At the very least, your company should be rethinking its website and how this could be adapted to mobile devices and users in a meaningful way. **■**