
MOBILIZING THE ENTERPRISE: LESSONS FROM A DISRUPTOR

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The Details

Northern Light, a provider of strategic research portals and content sets to global organizations, just unveiled a **new mobile App** in the category of online IT business news. In some ways, the move is bold. After all, it means entering a crowded field where the established leaders are a mix of entrenched industry stalwarts and exciting nimble startups. In some ways, the move is prudent. Having built it for other reasons, there is little harm in releasing the app this way to test its broader appeal. Either way, it is a case study of how digital disruption is unleashed and provides us with identifiable lessons for Enterprise Mobility along the way.

Northern Light will release the new app in six versions each focused on a specific vertical. Ones targeting Pharma, Financial Services, Healthcare, Agribusiness and Energy professionals, will soon follow its first iteration targeting professionals in the IT industry. Offering roughly 30,000 daily news stories broken into 90 topical choices, users will find roughly 200 relevant stories per day in their explicit areas of interest. That compares quite favorably to the relatively Spartan coverage found within the much broader topical threads from current leaders such as Flipboard, Google News or News 360.

As with many disruptors, Northern Light is providing this at no cost to consumers and with nothing more than a small acknowledgement at the bottom of the app that it is provided by them. Why? For good reasons. Doing so creates little to no additional cost to the firm. That is because their flagship offering SinglePoint is a turnkey, hosted (SaaS) strategic research portal that integrating multiple content streams and allows seamless search and authorized access to all of a company's research content. While that portal displays well on a tablet, like most web based content offerings, it needs to be refined to render effectively on a smartphone.

This new app is a subset of that development effort to serve their existing global client base. By releasing it to the general public as a free app, they are able to test functionality without extra spend. It also creates a bit of good will while allowing them to experiment around the experience and UI. Of course, the company will not shy away from any increased awareness that it generates among its target audience of market intelligence and IT professionals but that is the proverbial gravy on a meal it already needs to serve.

Why Does This Matter?

As the case with Northern Light's entry into mobile news, Digital disruptors often enter new markets because they can, rather than because they must. Further, they often do so for nontraditional reasons – such as creating goodwill or testing the waters around a strategic initiative as was the case in this move by Northern Light – and not to generate direct revenue. This means they easily disrupt existing business models and value chains. Yet what is often overlooked is that this lack of a direct profit motive means the disruptors can also be short lived or worse so steeped in ulterior motives that ultimately create their own conflicts such as what [this blogger so aptly points out regarding Google Docs](#).

Yet despite these challenges, there are other traits these potential disruptors bring that every enterprise can adopt and by doing so lessen the impact they may ultimately face. These traits are especially pertinent to those adopting our extending their mobile initiatives today. Three of the most important ones to highlight around mobility are:

- » **Remember that less is more.** Much more. Keep a constant eye on how to simplify every use case to something easy and do-able for your end users regardless of whether they are customers, suppliers or employees.
- » **Enable the right action at the right time.** Creating a successful mobile interface is about more than just a nice graphical design, it is about weaving the experience into your end users workflow. For example, as Northern Light is demonstrating, content curation is not just about pretty pictures and fun friendly interface it is about identifying and serving the right content for the right time.
- » **Targeting only iPhones is no longer enough.** While BYOD policies are increasingly the norm, we still witness many enterprises targeting their development efforts exclusively at iOS. Perhaps reflective of executive demand (as these devices still dominate that demographic), this approach almost guarantees failure as greatly hampers adoption given the widespread use of Android today. The good news here is that cross platform development tools have progressed rapidly in the past 12 months so multiplatform adoption is easy and looks good.

What to Watch

The consumerization of enterprise IT environments is perhaps nowhere more prevalent than in the mobile space. Expectations as to what information is available and how have been set by a wide range of consumer apps. Not just the obvious ones like Dropbox and Gmail but by the likes of HomeAway, Uber and Nest where physical assets are procured, paid for, and / or controlled by the flip of a thumb. Increasingly the canned response that because an enterprise is running a host of legacy systems it simply can't operate in this same fashion is one that is falling on unforgiving ears. As such, we are witnessing increased activity around either modernizing these systems and / or patching them into new interfaces that can meet emerging demands. We expect this activity to continue to rise and soon become a key initiative for the vast majority of IT departments as 2015 unfolds.

About the Author

Ned May



Ned is Senior Vice President of Research and a member of the research leadership team at HfS. His remit is to develop and inspire leading edge research focused on the technology enablement of business services. His coverage areas include IT Services, enterprise mobility and digital transformation. As a senior adviser to IT and business executives, Ned recognizes the characteristics of emerging market leaders and sees nothing but great opportunity for HfS in the coming years.

With nearly 20 years of broad strategy experience, Ned combines a love of long-term thinking with a strong appreciation for the challenges of ensuring daily excellence in execution. Over the years, he has not only helped hundreds of clients navigate and capitalize on changing landscapes, but along the way has led diverse research teams and launched and run new products often aimed at directly cannibalizing existing offerings.

Ned comes to HfS from research firm Outsell where as a Practice Leader he grew and served the company's largest strategic accounts across the media and publishing industries. He also oversaw the firm's cross industry research that served the industry's leading technology suppliers. While at Outsell Ned oversaw the development of an interactive online benchmarking tool serving executive management and authored many groundbreaking studies including ones on the impact of emerging technologies, the evolution of business information, and the new opportunities presented by mobile interfaces.

Widely quoted in the global press, Ned has been a regular speaker across a broad range of leading industry events. He has also appeared on PBS's Nightly Business Report and FOX Business.

Prior to joining Outsell, Ned ran the Worldwide IT Services research program at IDC where he covered the largest global players in the midst of the emergence of offshore outsourcing and utility computing. While at IDC Ned was also responsible for the creation of their Worldwide Quarterly Services Tracker- a product that continues to this day.

In his spare time, Ned enjoys a wide range of outdoor activities with his wife and three kids. In the winter, you'll often find him skiing in the White Mountains while in the summer he'll be swimming and sailing in the cool waters off Maine.

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About HfS Research

HfS Research serves the research, governance, and services strategy needs of business operations and IT leaders across finance, supply chain, human resources, marketing, and core industry functions. The firm provides insightful and meaningful analyst coverage of best business practices and innovations that impact successful business outcomes, such as the digital transformation of operations, cloud-based business platforms, services talent development strategies, process automation and outsourcing, mobility, analytics, and social collaboration. HfS applies its acclaimed Blueprint Methodology to evaluate the performance of service and technology in terms of innovating and executing against those business outcomes.

HfS educates and facilitates discussions among the world's largest knowledge community of enterprise services professionals, currently comprising 150,000 subscribers and members. HfS Research facilitates the [HfS Sourcing Executive Council](#), the acclaimed elite group of sourcing practitioners from leading organizations that meets bi-annually to share the future direction of the global services industry and to discuss the future enterprise operations framework. HfS provides its sourcing executive council members with the HfS Governance Academy and Certification Program to help clients improve the governance of their global business services and vendor relationships.

In 2010 and 2011, HfS Research's Founder and CEO, Phil Fersht, was named "Analyst of the Year" by the International Institute of Analyst Relations (IIAR), the premier body of analyst-facing professionals. HfS Research also achieved the distinction of being voted the research analyst industry's Most Innovative Analyst Firm in 2012.

In 2013, HfS was named first in rising influence among leading analyst firms, according to the 2013 Analyst Value Survey, and second out of the 44 leading industry analyst firms in the 2013 Analyst Value Index.

Now in its seventh year of publication, HfS Research's acclaimed blog "[Horses for Sources](#)" is widely recognized as the most widely-read and revered destination for unfettered collective insight, research, and open debate about sourcing industry issues and developments. Today, Horses for Sources receives over one million web visits a year.

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