



UltimateITGuys.com

## Evaluating Mobile Solutions For Housing Authorities



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## Intro To Mobile Solutions

The goal of this guide is to help you answer the following questions:

- Do I want to start a mobile project at my housing authority?
- Where do I begin?
- How do I begin?
- What questions do I need to ask make these decisions?

We are going to walk through a series of things that you need to consider before starting your project. There will be a lot of questions and thinking required, but we have tried to make it easier for you. There are a series of checklists and cheat sheets available on our website at [www.UltimateITGuys.com/mobile](http://www.UltimateITGuys.com/mobile) that accompany this guide on mobile solutions that will help you with the evaluation and planning processes.

Part 1 intro discusses to mobile solutions and Part 2 discusses taking care of your mobile investment.

### **SELECTING YOUR APP**

#### **Does the app meet your needs?**

The first thing to consider when selecting your app is does the app meet your needs? Sometimes the right answer is simple, to get the app that is made by your housing software company. However, if it does not do everything you need then you will not be happy.

**Does the app currently have all of the key features that are important to you?** If not, what is missing and how important is this feature to the success of your project?

**Does the app work with your existing software?** If the app does not work with your housing software, then you are creating a problem. Example: If you are doing work orders, can the app get the tenant name, unit number, & phone number from your housing software. If not, then this will be a manual step to add this information each time. While this may not seem like a big problem on the surface, you want to minimize the amount of data entry that is required on the mobile device. Having to manually add information each time will frustrate the user and add unnecessary time to the work order process.

#### **How much does it cost?**

At some point, cost always enters into the decision making process. More expensive does not always mean better, but it also does not make sense to pay extra to get additional features if they are not needed.

#### **Does it work with the device that you will be using? (Apple vs Android)**

The debate over Apple vs Android can become quite heated. From a technology stand point, they both work well. Most people tend to be very passionate for one or the other. If most of the users already use Apple then it is a good idea to use Apple devices. If most of your users are Android users, then you probably should go with an Android device. Many projects fail because this was not properly handled.

#### **What is the feature that you like most about this App?**

What is the one feature about the app that stands out to you as the most helpful? Is it important to the success of your project? Is it a critical "have to have" feature?

#### **What is the thing that I dislike most about this App?**

What is this app's short coming? Is it important to the success of our project? In other words is it a critical "have to have" feature?

#### **How good is the support?**

Support is a key factor in the long term success of your project. Make sure there is a way to talk to a support person when you need them. Many companies have started implementing processes that require you to submit a ticket on their website, then they will call you at their convenience. This can be frustrating if you need. The quality of the answers or solutions they provide is another thing to immediately consider.



#### Intro to Mobile Solutions

- Selecting your App
- Planning
- Training
- Follow the Process

#### Taking Care of Your Mobile Investment

- Physical Protection
- Security
- Mobile Device Management



### How often do they have updates?

Are they regularly releasing updates with new features and patches to security issues? Some companies just create the app and never touch it again. Stay away from companies that do not provide periodic updates. Be sure to question whether the price of updates or upgrades are included in your initial purchase price or if there will be additional charges for the updates.

### What do other users say about it?

Talk to someone that already uses the app that you are considering getting. They can be a valuable source of information to help answer some of these questions. Be careful if they are giving a strongly negative evaluation of the app and ask some clarifying questions. Many times a strongly negative opinion of an app is based on one of the following causes that might not be the fault of the app:

- Lack of proper training
- Bad attitude about using the app
- They do not like the platform (Apple vs Android)

## PLANNING

### Document your process

If you do not have a process for what, how and when you will use the app, you will get erratic results and end up frustrated with the app.

### What, How & Where will you use your mobile app

Some considerations are:

- Do you have a good cellular and/or wifi signal at all of your locations? If cellular signal is poor, consider putting in a secured wifi router if possible.
- Will you be inputting information while you are inside or outside? Glare and visibility can be a problem with some devices in bright sunlight.
- Will you be sitting or standing while trying to enter information? If you are standing you should consider a case that has a loop for your hand on the back so you can hold on to the device while inputting information.
- When creating a work order, do you want to create a work order for every activity or will you have certain activities that are exceptions? 0

### Plan for the unexpected

Planning for problems is critical to your success. It is helpful to everyone if they know what to do when there is a problem. Examples include:

- Who do you call if the app isn't working?
- If you do not have wifi or cell service in a building how can you get the information for your work order?
- If your phone or tablet is not working for some reason, what is the procedure for completing the work order?

## TRAINING

Training is critical to the success of your project. Train the users with the process that you have documented. Make sure that they know what to do when problems or surprises happen. Have a good contingency plan and make sure the users know what the contingency process is and when it is ok to use it.

### PLANNING



### THINGS TO DO

- Document your process
- How & where will you use your mobile app
- Plan for the unexpected
  - Dead battery
  - No wifi signal
  - No cell service



If possible, use hands on training with real world scenarios to supplement the written training. This will give the user confidence and give you a chance to see that they know what to do when they are using it in the real world.

Your training will only be as good as the thought, time and effort that is put into it. Make sure that the users take it seriously and can demonstrate that they know what to do. Just reading through the document one time will not lead to good results.

We have all been through training where we said “yes, I think I’ve got it”, but then on Monday when we try to do it we cannot remember what to do. Make sure that the users get plenty of chances to use the app while in training. This will help to reinforce what they read, give them a chance to get comfortable with the app and more chances to ask questions while there is still someone there to answer. This will help to ensure that they know what to do when they start using it for real. If possible, try to train in the morning then utilize it on the job in the afternoon. The shorter the time between the training and their first real world use the better your chance for success.

### **FOLLOW THE PROCESS**

People, Process, & Technology. People are often the weakest link. your people are vital to the success of your project. It is human nature to get distracted and make simple mistakes. It is entirely different to have a bad attitude about the project or not be on board with seeing the project succeed. Sometimes the bad attitude of one person can doom the entire project if not dealt with quickly and decisively.

Everyone has to be accountable for their part in the process. As a manager or project leader you must be willing to hold everyone accountable to do their part and to have a good attitude about the project. This can be tough, especially at small housing authorities where all of the workers tend to have close ties to each other. If you are not willing to take a stand and hold each person accountable on the project, then you are in danger of the project failing. This is critical. Many projects fail even though they got all of the other steps correct, because they ignored this one.

### **SUMMARY**

Just because there is a shiny new device or application out there, does not that it is a good thing for your business. Sometimes the best answer is No.

Use the steps outlined here to help make your decision to use mobile technology in your business.

Select the right app, plan & document how to use it, train your users, and make sure everyone follows the process. These are the keys to using mobile technology in your business.

### **TRAINING**



### **THINGS TO DO**

- Train your users with the documented process
- Train your users on what to do when surprises happen
- Reinforce the written training with some hands on real world scenarios.

### **FOLLOW THE PROCESS**



### **THINGS TO CONSIDER**

- People, Process, Technology. People are usually the weakest link
- Everyone has to be accountable for their part of the process.
- Following the process is critical. I have seen projects fail even though they got all of the other steps correct, but ignored this one.