

How to Deliver Business Data to iPads and iPhones Quickly and Easily

You get a request every day it seems from executives who want IT to give them the ability to download critical business data to their iPads or iPhones. These executives don't care what it takes; they just want to see this important information quickly and easily, and they expect you to respond fast. Rather than stress out, let's talk about a solution that gives employees the information they want, and the control IT needs.

If your company is like most, the proliferation of both employee- and company-owned mobile devices, particularly iPads and iPhones, is driving demand for access to corporate data. But in most companies, there is little support for such access.

There is great dissatisfaction with the level of support IT provides for consumer technologies in the workplace, a 2011 IDC survey¹ of 2,820 information workers and 610 C-level executives, vice presidents, director-level IT personnel, and business-unit level executives from 10 countries found.

This lack of access to business data is getting harder to justify. Executives, business managers, knowledge workers, and other employees already use iPads and iPhones to surf the Web, get email, and conduct other tasks directly related to their work. So they also want (and in many cases insist on) access to the sales, inventory, customer, and other data they need to perform their jobs, be more efficient, and make timely decisions.



Delivering what users want

The information users need is often stored in SQL databases, Excel spreadsheets, and a variety of other

1 <http://www.readwriteweb.com/enterprise/2011/03/consumerization-of-it-95-of-in.php>

data sources. Access to raw data can be helpful, but employees often want their data in easy to read reports and charts.

IT organizations are especially keen to find easy and quick ways to deliver business info to iPhones or iPads. To do this requires tools that are efficient for those quick “one-off” requests, yet robust enough for long-term solutions. Ideally, these tools should be easy, and usable by a wide range of IT staff, not just by the most experienced programmers.

Overall, delivering business data to iPhones and iPads demands:

- ✔ A quick development cycle: Users want results in days or weeks, not months
- ✔ Easy import of data in a range of native formats (e.g., SQL databases, spreadsheets, etc.)
- ✔ Painless serving of data to iPhones and iPads with forms optimized for these devices’ screens
- ✔ Ability to deliver data in visual formats such as charts, as well as in reports, lists, and forms
- ✔ Ability to combine data with files, such as PDFs, spreadsheets, photos, and videos
- ✔ Choice of distributing information to users for offline viewing, or connecting directly to live systems for real-time information
- ✔ Tools usable by a range of IT staff, not just experienced object-oriented programmers.

With these criteria in mind, how can companies provide workers with fast and easy access to data on their iPhones and iPads?

SOLUTION: Deliver business data with FileMaker Pro and FileMaker Go

FileMaker®, Inc., a subsidiary company of Apple®, creates database software that is the ideal tool for developing and securely hosting databases that reside at the heart of such solutions, and for delivering information to iOS devices.

FileMaker Pro allows organizations to quickly build iOS solutions, including the rapid creation of easy-to-use charts, reports, lists, and forms. The software, which runs on Windows and Mac OS PCs, has shipped more than 16 million copies to organizations of all sizes, from large corporations to small businesses, and from schools and universities to government agencies.

TYPICAL EXAMPLES

Solutions are springing up everywhere as organizations focus on delivering data to iPads and iPhones. Some typical examples are:

1. A large entertainment company creates an executive iPad dashboard that tracks sales, expenses, development pipeline, and licensee information for a range of products. Information is assembled from a variety of data sources including Oracle and SAP. Executives are presented with charts and graphs, can view summary reports, and can drill-down into data for particular initiatives. Information is available on the iPad and also on desktop computers.
2. A commercial retail development firm assembles property data such as contracts, tenants, street traffic, and related news articles, and delivers the information to iPads in an easy-to-digest format. The data comes from multiple corporate SQL sources.
3. A medical lab distributes up-to-date information to iPads comparing the effectiveness of different disease-detection methods. The data includes summaries as well as case-by-case images of the actual procedures.

FileMaker aggregates data from multiple sources, including direct connections to SQL sources, as well as scripted recurring imports of data-sets in a wide range of formats. Organizations can use FileMaker Server to host FileMaker solutions, and use the FileMaker Go app to deliver them to iPads and iPhones.

FileMaker’s iPad and iPhone solutions can combine files with structured data. For example, users of a project dashboard can open the associated project plan documents. Or they can present a chart along with a spreadsheet holding the underlying data. Or they can combine real estate transactions with pictures of the properties sold.

Any time company data is made available to mobile workers, security is an issue. FileMaker Pro supports role-based security privileges and integration with existing authentication systems like Open Directory and Active Directory. This means IT can leverage the same mechanisms used to control access to data within

the company to control access with mobile devices. FileMaker Server adds an extra layer of security because the data remains on the server, and is never stored on the local device. And server communications with mobile devices are securely encrypted using standards-based SSL connections.



Mobile access to data is provided via the FileMaker Go app for iPad and iPhone. A solution can be created on a desktop and consumed by iPad and iPhone users. Solutions provide full support for iOS gestures such as swipe, pinch to zoom, tap and double-tap. Forms, reports, and charts can be generic, or can be further

optimized for the specific iOS screen sizes. Mobile solutions can be distributed in multiple ways. Busy iPad and iPhone users can connect to a FileMaker server and access solutions and data in real-time. So, for example, when an invoice comes in, a chart of sales numbers is instantly updated. Alternatively, solutions can be distributed as standalone databases that users can email or copy to the mobile device, and consume off-line. This method is effective when presenting historical or reference information or when daily or weekly updates are sufficient.

Information viewed on an iPad or iPhone often needs to be viewed on desktop and laptop computers, too. iOS solutions developed in FileMaker automatically run on Windows and Mac OS X, which is not true when programming with typical object-oriented technologies. This dramatically reduces development time for multi-platform solutions.

Conclusion

In today's competitive business world, managers and executives insist on around-the-clock access to company data from wherever they are to make faster, smarter business decisions.

With the growing use of iPads and iPhones, they are asking for (and in many cases demanding) that IT deliver the needed data to these devices. Users require the data in ways they can really use, such as formatted reports and insightful charts.

FileMaker Pro, FileMaker Server, and FileMaker Go offer a type of middleware bridge that helps developers provide on-demand access to the required data. The software can be used as an information delivery tool that satisfies users' needs, while giving IT and business units a way to manage a secure data delivery process.

To learn more about how to deliver data to iPad/iPhone with FileMaker Pro, FileMaker Server and the FileMaker Go app, please see the video, articles, and webinar at <http://info.filemaker.com/ios.html>