The New Mobility Equation

Why going wireless is more compelling than ever

ADOBE STOCK

*In his former role as IT director for the Naperville Park District in Illinois, **Omar Sandoval** developed (and obtained a patent for) a mobile app that helps residents find park locations, register for activities, report issues and more. Now the director of government programs for the Center for Digital Government, Sandoval shares insights on how mobility implementations are changing and how agencies can take advantage of the opportunities these shifts present.*

Many CIOs are reorienting their service delivery strategy around mobility. Has mobile finally become the default channel for user engagement?

Yes, and there's no turning back. The pandemic uncovered the digital divide. Not everyone has quality internet at home; many people depend on their mobile phones for connectivity. If families have to choose between spending on a phone or a PC, they'll usually opt for a phone because they can access a computer at work, school or elsewhere. When COVID hit, a lot of people lost that access, so now they're trying to do everything on their phone. Mobility has become the answer to that lack of availability and bandwidth. It has made things more accessible, and now it's all around us.

What does this shift mean for IT leaders and their teams?

Technology providers and the technology itself are pushing organizations to shift more toward wireless rather than wired connections. Supporting underground infrastructure — plain old telephone service (POTS) lines — is no longer viable. The cost to maintain POTS lines is increasing exponentially, and people with the skill sets to maintain them are retiring. The infrastructure to build out cellular is much cheaper. However, as providers push for mobile, IT leaders have to assess whether mobile truly meets their needs, and then determine the best path forward.

You developed an innovative mobile app for the park district several years ago. Would you do it the same way today?

Definitely not. The cost of ownership over time and the rapid pace of technology change is not conducive to a native mobile app, where the application is downloaded onto your phone. I would do a mobile friendly web app for one reason: a native phone app responds differently depending on each phone's manufacturer. In addition, users often ignore notifications for app updates, so traditional mobile apps can become stale and unstable. With a web app, there's just an icon on your screen that takes you to the most current version of the web application. Most phone apps operate this way now.

Any thoughts on how to proceed into the future?

It's becoming much more cost effective to put things out on cellular rather than through an internet service. If I were in my previous role, I would look to offload some of my traditional ISP services to cellular services. I'd evaluate the return on shifting to that technology and how that shift affects everything moving forward. To ensure solution viability, I'd work with my cellular providers on going to 5G and expanding coverage to make sure users have the best, most reliable coverage wherever they are.