Government agencies are embracing the notion of mobility both for their employees and consumers, but they’re finding that adoption means plenty of adaption. Most of the time, IT managers can’t simply apply desktop PC requirements to mobile devices and call it a day.

Mobility brings a host of new challenges that can best be solved by looking at the individual pieces with the finished puzzle in mind, said Shiraz Hasan, senior director of AT&T’s Advanced Mobile Applications Practice, during a March 26 webcast titled “Mobilize Your Agency’s Workforce with Holistic Mobile Enterprise Management Solutions.”

“One of the key things that we’ve seen in the mobile solutions space is there is a very small percentage of IT organizations or IT executives that truly have a strategy,” Hasan said. “The main reason for that is the market has been so dynamic, from a mobile application and a mobile device perspective, it has been difficult to hone in on a strategy.”

Getting started
The first step is to understand what comprises mobility. To that end, AT&T defines a three-pronged Mobility Biosphere:

- **Devices** – “Between 2007 and 2013, we have seen a huge proliferation of smart phone and tablet devices being used by the average consumer,” said Hasan, adding that the market penetration of devices is seeing double-digit growth every quarter. “These are the same people that come to work for a federal agency and these are the same types of people that also use these devices in their daily life and want to use these devices to interact with the federal government.”
- **Network** – AT&T and other carriers have had to make infrastructure investments to ensure they could provide the bandwidth the average consumer expects.
- **Applications** – The way people use mobile devices is through applications, or apps.

In the past 12 to 18 months, the public sector has made a huge mobility push, Hasan said, and that trend is expected to continue. According to AT&T, by 2015, more Americans will access the Internet using mobile devices than desktop PCs.

“That in itself is a huge indicator on how the expectations of the users are changing in this space and how they want to interact and do business or perform tasks,” he said.

Still, only 10 percent of chief information officers have a mobile plan in place, Hasan said. To set one, CIOs should ask themselves:

- What’s the most practical operating system and device for my agency? Is it one type of device or can employees choose their own?
- If choice is an option, do I create a model to let employees bring their own device and connect to corporate information? And do I use dual-persona software, which creates two mirror images on a device, one each for personal and business use?

Approaches to building apps
“The reality in the mobile applications marketplace is it’s a very noisy marketplace,” Hasan said. “There are many different ways a mobile application can be developed today.”

Depending on the type of application,
developers might take one of five approaches:

• Create a mobile version of the existing website.

• Go native and build it from scratch.

• Use a platform, which involves middleware software that allows you to develop applications in their integrated development environment that you can deploy to many types of devices.

• Try HTML 5, the latest standard for the web.

• Use a pre-packaged app.

When considering app creation, don’t look for a silver bullet because there is no one way to create an app, Hasan said. Instead, think mobile first in terms of how people will use the app. For example, he said, some banks let customers take pictures of their checks with their smart phones to deposit them.

“That’s a feature that was created to allow them to perform a task that they couldn’t in a laptop or desktop environment,” Hasan said. “It changes how customers do business.”

Additionally, don’t mobilize existing apps, but instead mobilize the processes relevant to a mobile environment, he said, and standardize on a methodology for your agency. Then, prioritize what you want to mobilize.

But writing an application is only the beginning, Hasan added. IT managers also need a partner to help ensure growth and stability as the needs of the users accessing the app change. For example, he said, consumer-facing applications are subject to reviews.

“Once you launch an app, the citizens will rate those publicly, and you want to be able to nimbly adapt your app to that feedback,” he said.

How AT&T helps

Like the mobility biosphere, AT&T’s mobile enterprise management approach has three components: application (development and management), device (MDM) and workspace.

“We take the technology out of the discussion initially with the customers,” Hasan said. “We don’t own IP in any one of these spaces today, and the reality is it allows us to truly focus on the business requirements that you have short-term and long-term, and then we can pick the right technology based on those requirements.”

AT&T’s approach to MDM is to create strategic relationships and a vendor-agnostic stance to help clients find the right solutions for their short- and long-term goals. The company offers services built around MDM products that enable the option of an end-to-end solution that includes developing and implementing mobility, application service desk support for troubleshooting, and solutions deployment, including staging, loading, provisioning, installation and testing.

“These are siloed solutions that can be put together to create a holistic solution,” Hasan said.

“Mobility brings a host of new challenges that can best be solved by looking at the individual pieces with the finished puzzle in mind.”

— Shiraz Hasan, senior director of AT&T’s Advanced Mobile Applications Practice

As federal agencies push toward more mobility for employees and constituents, they must consider how to best manage mobile devices, said Shiraz Hasan, senior director of AT&T’s Advanced Mobile Applications Practice. The three things his customers most often look for are:

1. Security
   Devices and users must adhere to agency rules and regulations.

2. Manageability
   IT managers need to see what applications are connecting to the network, how they are using it and how often they’re using it.

3. Scalability
   “You don’t want to invest in a solution that can’t keep up with the growing nature of your agency,” Hasan said.