

REPORT REPRINT

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PowWow Mobile's SmartUX 5.0 packs a punch with new analytics and template tools

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The new templated design and build features in PowWow Mobile's SmartUX 5.0 release lower the barriers to adoption for mobile application platforms.

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Vendors in the no- and low-code mobile application development space continue to face a number of pressures. Top among these are: market consolidation, growing competition from across a wide spectrum of vendors and approaches, and challenges in identifying a sweet spot to target within enterprises and then crafting the appropriate messaging with which to convert them. The 5.0 iteration of PowWow's SmartUX platform seeks to ameliorate these pressures with new templating, styling, collaboration, deployment and analytics features. PowWow has been one of the pioneers in transforming existing applications, and over the last year the company has expanded its platform's capabilities to include key requirements for developing new mobile apps.

THE 451 TAKE

PowWow Mobile is looking to solidify and strengthen its base this year after having a big year in 2016. The departures of two industry hopefuls, Reddo Mobility and StarMobile (the latter was acquired by PowWow Mobile last November), signal ongoing uncertainty around the technology and the market. Despite this, PowWow Mobile has made significant strides with its SmartUX platform technology, which have won the company some large enterprise deals. The 5.0 release introduces new features across the app development lifecycle including templating and improved administrative visibility over live applications (the latter being the most important of the new features). To not only give itself a firmer footing but also flag wave for app refactoring technology in general, it needs to evangelize how the method can significantly reduce barriers to entry for custom app development, and extend the value from existing application investments. Its second big challenge will be to continue to add new functionality this year in order to build on its ability to enable aggregate 'super apps,' where for example, a Windows app, a web app and a REST data source can be easily combined into one application workflow.

CONTEXT

PowWow Mobile is a four-year-old mobile application platform providing a way for businesses to design, build, run and analyze business mobile applications. PowWow has steadily developed its core refactoring technology over the past several years, along with picking up the intellectual property (IP) of StarMobile's analytics and backend tools. This technology builds mobile applications on top of legacy Windows and web applications while introducing capabilities that allow new apps to be created.

It is headquartered in San Francisco. The company has roughly 20 employees spread between its Bay Area headquarters and a small outpost in Atlanta (where its November 2016 acquisition StarMobile was based). The young company had a big year in 2016 as it brought in a new leadership team with former BMC Software CTO Kia Behnia as its new CEO, and Ravinder Braich (formerly of Citrix) as vice president of product management; raised over \$4 million in new funding; and made the StarMobile acquisition. We estimate its 2016 annual revenue to have been below \$5m.

PRODUCT STRATEGY

App refactoring for mobile has looked promising – on paper, anyway – since it first came about roughly five years ago. As a market, however, it has suffered from too much noise and not enough solid product. With significant improvements from the original version of its platform, PowWow Mobile is now one of the leaders in a space that remains quite small. It now has the ability to better interact with legacy web, Windows and Java applications; integrates with mobile-first features such as notifications, GPS integrations and NFC capabilities; and provides additional mobile-optimal user interfaces.

With its SmartUX platform 5.0 release, the vendor has sought to improve the client experience from the build process through to increasing application adoption. A big part of this is lowering the barriers to adoption by providing common legacy-to-mobile conversions around approvals, timecard entry and corporate directory portals, for example. Its micro-app templates provide quicker onboarding by pulling data from multiple legacy application sources and simplifying it, which makes users' workflows more efficient across these key use cases. The templating process focuses more on which applications are the most important than it does on summarizing businesses' complex apps into fewer screens.

Where PowWow's micro-apps address data conversions that are more involved, new universal templates step in to cover basic interfaces used across applications including functions such as login, list view and calendars. It provides a data model on the backend so that a template that has been mapped to a SAP system, for example, can be reused for additional apps. For its UI templates, the PowWow uses Ionic's UI framework inside its Studio and AngularJS for its JavaScript framework. In addition to the prebuilt templates, it provides the ability to set custom style guidelines for apps, and it is also looking to enable its customers to build out their own versions with a specific look and feel that is unique to each customer. The 5.0 release also has support for Docker containers.

The firm is focusing a lot of its energy on how to enable an aggregate app where, for example, a Windows app, a web app and a REST data source are combined into one workflow. This idea dovetails well with existing use cases, such as approvals, that the company is addressing through its micro-apps strategy by aggregating different approval workflows from multiple systems like Concur and Expensify into one approvals app, for example. Generating PO order numbers would be another use case.

The other two major 5.0 additions deal with how customers interact with live applications. The recently announced SmartUX dashboard provides users with a suite of real-time analytics tools focused on improving the efficacy of mobile apps. Not only will the dashboard provide information on performance, it also gives metrics on employee adoption and usage. PowWow Mobile hopes that these advanced metrics – which allow admins to see what areas of the app users most frequently access – will help clients to improve existing applications and their penetration across different departments. The 5.0 release also includes role-based permissions, so that different user rights can be assigned to each app. This new function seeks to increase collaboration capabilities, allowing users to assign separate roles to groups such as developers, designers and marketing professionals.

COMPETITION

Web application-focused Capriza represents PowWow's core existing competition. Virtualization giants Citrix and VMware have yet to deal their hand, but as they look to give their customers new reasons to look at them as the unified workspace provider, they need apps and likely a custom application development strategy. Business application providers like SAP with its Fiori applications is also a competitor. Zebra Technologies with its 2015 ITR Mobility and iFacts acquisition may prove to be competition soon. PowWow could encounter mobile application platform and mobile middleware vendors including stalwarts like Kony Solutions and OutSystems, as well as long-tail – but promising – vendors like SkyGiraffe, who are looking to be the middleware for new apps.

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

PowWow's growing versatility between Windows and web applications remains a selling point against industry competitors. The pickup of StarMobile strongly bolstered the company's IP.

WEAKNESSES

The company needs to continue to build out capabilities to enable easy app creation, which will be essential for matching market demand beyond pure refactoring.

OPPORTUNITIES

There is growing interest in tools to enable easy, custom app development, and potential acquirer candidates - beyond giants like Citrix and VMware - will be looking on as well.

THREATS

The need to assuage continuing question marks over the long-term viability of app refactoring methods and of vendors in this space will require resources that this young vendor will struggle to spare.