On the Radar: Securing enterprise mobile apps with the Appmobi Secure Mobile Platform

Mobile app security should not be an afterthought

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Summary

Catalyst

The security of enterprise mobile apps is an area of ongoing focus for organizations. The enterprise need for apps that can help transform business processes will continue to increase, but security is often an afterthought. The Appmobi Secure Mobile Platform has been created to help developers secure mobile apps quickly as part of the core app development process.

Key messages

- The enterprise need for mobile apps that can help transform business processes will continue to grow.
- The security of enterprise mobile apps will become an increasingly important design consideration as the number of mobile apps being developed for the enterprise increases.
- Appmobi is a secure mobile platform that empowers app developers with capabilities that can help them secure mobile apps quickly, at the development stage.
- The company's vision is to provide a solution that acts as the security technology layer utilized in support of an enterprise mobility strategy.

Ovum view

Appmobi offers capabilities that can help enable organizations to secure mobile applications quickly, with limited friction – a benefit, given that many apps are designed and deployed by enterprises quickly in response to modern day business needs and feature pressures. The mobile app estates held by most organizations will grow dramatically over the next few years, and solutions that can help secure mobile apps and the data held and referenced by them will be of increased importance to organizations.

Recommendations for enterprises

Why put Appmobi on your radar?

Mobile apps present organizations with a real opportunity to transform existing business processes and enable new levels of employee productivity. The security of enterprise mobile apps will become an increasingly important design consideration as the number of mobile apps being developed for the enterprise grows. Additionally, mobile apps are often integrated with legacy systems and data stores that contain sensitive company information. This further reinforces the need to adopt a more formal and structured approach to securing apps at the development stage, rather than in retrospect. Solutions such as Appmobi that can secure apps seamlessly and quickly will be increasingly important for organizations looking to grow their mobile app estates securely.

Highlights

Feature pressure and a need to develop and deploy apps quickly are some of the key reasons why the necessary security considerations relating to mobile app development are often not addressed. As a result, many mobile apps are being released into the enterprise in an insecure state; this will be of increased risk as utilization around these apps increases and as further features and integrations are built into them over time.

Compounding this challenge is the lack of mobile app security expertise in many organizations – an issue that highlights the need for not only technology, but also universal best-practice advice that supports organizations in their efforts to realize value from mobile apps.

Appmobi is a secure mobile platform that can help organizations secure mobile apps. Specifically, the solution empowers developers with a breadth of features that enable them to implement important security measures, including user authentication and encryption. The solution also secures communications undertaken within an app. The platform consists of the following five core capabilities.

Core capabilities

Security Kit

The Appmobi Security Kit capability encrypts data handled by mobile applications and enables developers to define security requirements at an app level. Encryption can be handled at multiple levels, including on the device. It also offers user authentication, strengthening identity management. The multiple levels of app security offered include the following:

- Level 1: App-level shared key encryption
- Level 2: App- and device-level shared key
- Level 3: App- and device-level, as well as authentication (active directory authentication is possible).

These capabilities can help organizations mitigate the security risks developers face when building mobile apps that need to tap into sensitive back-end data sets, from a NoSQL database, for example.

Secure push messaging

Push messaging helps developers and app managers/owners send manual or automated messages to those utilizing an application. The Appmobi platform enables developers to add secure push messaging to an application. These notifications are secured end-to-end, with app- and device-level RSA shared key encryption. Messages can be sent via a platform API or the platform's dedicated user interface.

Secure data store

The platform securely stores and encrypts mobile app data on a device. All data can then be securely synced to a server that can be hosted on-premise, or via a secure public or private cloud.

Secure live update

There can often be a lack of control associated with updating mobile apps offered by an enterprise app store. Additionally, effectively managing app updates and even rolling back an app when something goes wrong can be challenging. Appmobi's secure live update functionality enables

developers and app managers to roll out full or partial app updates in real time, and even to roll back to a previous app release when required. The solution also offers various update options, meaning that app developers can choose to update an app immediately, when it is next opened, or upon a user request.

Secure analytics

Storing and displaying analytical data needs to take place via a secure environment. Such data should help organizations derive valuable insight that can be used to refine an application strategy, helping guide future decisions relating to mobile apps. Appmobi can deliver a quite granular level of insight relating to mobile app utilization behaviors. For example, the capability can help organizations understand how many people are utilizing an app, how often it is being opened, and how users are engaging with push notifications. The analytics capability is customizable and extensible, empowering users with the ability to define reports around a particular need. This capability could have value beyond just app managers and owners – for an IT support function, for example.

Background

The Appmobi Secure Mobile Platform was launched in November 2015; however, the company was originally founded in 2006. In 2009, Appmobi launched a mobile SDK, followed by a set of mobile cloud services such as push messaging and in-app sales solutions in 2011. By 2012, in excess of 100,000 mobile developers were using Appmobi. In 2013, Intel acquired Appmobi's SDK and most of its mobile software developers, but not the company itself. Appmobi relaunched in 2015, supported by a new round of funding, a new management team, and a group of experienced mobile developers. The company's focus is now mobile security; the Secure Mobile Platform is its core solution offering.

Current position

The Appmobi platform has been developed to integrate with other enterprise mobility solutions, including mobile app development platforms (MADP) and mobile application management (MAM) solutions. The solution differentiates from broader EMM solutions by focusing solely on security and offering functionality that extends beyond a core set of security capabilities. Appmobi's vision is to be the security technology layer utilized in support of an enterprise mobility strategy. Initially, Appmobi focused on offering capabilities that enabled developers to secure Cordova-developed applications. The company has recently added support for the security of apps developed across native platforms, including iOS, Android, and Windows Phone.

The decision to relaunch Appmobi rather than create a new brand entirely is an interesting one. Appmobi advises that this was a consideration as part of its strategic planning for the new organization. Although it was recognized that its new focus may confuse some who were familiar with Appmobi, the company name still holds strength, and it was this that motivated the new team to move forward under the Appmobi brand.

In terms of its future roadmap, Appmobi is planning to launch evolved secure data store and secure analytics capabilities. The company advises that between four and six product evolutions are set to be released annually.

Data sheet

Key facts

Table 1: Data sheet: Appmobi

Product name	Secure Mobile Platform	Product classification	Software-as-a-service
Version number	v3.0	Release date	November 2015
Industries covered	Primarily regulated industries with a need for strong security, such as healthcare and financial services	Geographies covered	Global coverage
Relevant company sizes	500 employees or more	Licensing options	(1) Secure cloud; (2) private stack; and (3) on-premise
URL	www.appmobi.com	Routes to market	(1) Activate through the company website; (2) through partnerships; and (3) through a direct sales channel
Company headquarters	Poughkeepsie, New York, US	Number of employees	20

Source: Ovum

Appendix

On the Radar

On the Radar is a series of research notes about vendors bringing innovative ideas, products, or business models to their markets. Although On the Radar vendors may not be ready for prime time, they bear watching for their potential impact on markets and could be suitable for certain enterprise and public sector IT organizations.

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