The world's gone mobile, and so have innovative learning, content and performance management systems. If you’re like most retail operations executives, the perceived time and effort of moving enterprise software to the tablet, and encouraging employees to adopt it, may be daunting. But new SaaS solutions make this transition surprisingly simple: Their easy-to-deploy, video-based platforms and end-user focus speed implementation and help secure stakeholder adoption - from in-store associates on up to corporate management.

Stakeholder adoption is key to any new software roll-out, especially one introducing a new touch point, such as the tablet, for user interaction. When the new roll-out delivers new enterprise-wise training and communications focused on key brand and customer-driven strategies, its adoption must be vigilantly planned and executed. End users’ personal, social, psychological and motivational needs must govern the roll-out from discovery through to life cycle maturity to assure the deep-rooted adoption that brings customer-centric software goals to life.

To that end, retail organizations must completely rethinks the “adoption phase” of today’s fluid, curated retail learning, content and performance management systems: Traditionally a finite event, yesterday’s “adoption phase” must transform to a infinite, consistent pursuit that discovers, initiates then continually stimulates a successful, customizable and well-received implementation.

300% Higher Returns On End User Programs
In fact, “there is a direct correlation between starting user adoption efforts in the discovery phase of the software life cycle and the adoption rates of technology,” stated Chris Dowse, CEO of Neochange. Describing results of a study conducted by Neochange and Oracle UPK, titled: 4th Annual IT Adoption Insight Report, Dowse said that “user-focused companies start their organizational change efforts early and achieve 300% higher returns on their end-user programs than the tech-fo-
cused practice of starting with/after deployment.”

Survey participants also revealed end user productivity losses of roughly 17%. “At 17%, the economic value of user losses outweighs 100% of total IT spend,” Dowse stated. “How could any IT organization possibly declare deployment success when the software’s promise is so heavily overshadowed by end user struggles?”

**CHALLENGES TO ADOPTION**

Enterprise software adoption is a multifaceted challenge presenting diverse obstacles. The scale and cost of creating enterprise software typically requires broad functionality to make the product marketable. Unfortunately, employees at every level typically resist the change that new and broad functionality requires.

In addition, enterprise-wide end users typically won’t embrace a “one size fits all” solution. Their workflow needs differ greatly from one person, department and store environment to the next. To secure end user adoption, the enterprise software must address this challenge with the flexible customization and content curation that generate a tailored, influential and engaging implementation.

Often the retail C-suite unwittingly blocks user adoption of innovative enterprise software by delaying or minimizing its investment. For example, many leaders champion only those roll-outs delivering immediate ROI, such as operational cost savings. In doing so, they overlook important ROI benefits - such as unified associate, brand and corporate goals that deliver on the consumer-driven retailing promise - revealed over a defined timeframe. Progressive retail executives must now embrace new ROI nuances, as well as the mobile, cloud and smart computing tools that generate them. C-level support of systems focused on nuanced benefits that help empower end users go a long way to excite associates and spur adoption.

Today’s more sophisticated retailers use well-defined combinations of store metrics to clearly quantify human contributions to store performance, or lack there of. Others still using outdated ROI financial models “are stuck using old paradigms of measuring benefits in terms of headcount and similar operating cost savings as a result of automation,” blogged Andrew Bartel, a Forrester Research VP and principal analyst serving CIOs. These models for projecting the business value of technology investments worked reasonably well for the past 70 years, during which technologies “primarily focused on process automation and the benefits were mostly in allowing more work to be done faster and with fewer people.”

But for many of these new technologies, “especially the new mobile technologies of smartphones, tablets, and mobile apps, and the new smart computing technologies of enhanced awareness, analysis and collaboration,” wrote Bartel, “the primary business benefit is not doing more work with fewer people. Instead, the main benefit … is reducing the probability of bad business outcomes, and increasing the probability of good business outcomes,” he stated. “For CEOs who are worried about uncertain economic growth and/or focused on meeting quarterly earnings-per-share expectations, the lack of traditional [and immediate] economic benefits provides a good excuse to delay or minimize investments in these new technologies.”

Now fast forwarding to 2014 and beyond: Using continued comment from Bartel as the spring board, here are 10 recognized methods of correctly driving adoption of contemporary enterprise software, such as mobile learning, content and performance management systems.

**THE 10 BEST PRACTICES THAT DRIVE USER ADOPTION**

1) **Focus On The End User:** With enterprise soft-
ware, the ‘end user’ is the ‘customer,’ so enterprise solutions must be designed around the end user, or customers needs, beginning at concept and discovery. The software must be intuitive and delightful to use, and be easily adapted to an individual’s actual workflow. User-focused applications should recognize each associate and his/her role, channel and preferred language. They guide employees in their individual learning, keeping them always engaged in their own development. Personalized learning also invites employee participation and achievement, increases job satisfaction, and promotes brand advocacy - all of which help assure execution of company strategies.

Comparing technology-focused to user-focused companies, “technology-focused organizations spend about 13% more on IT than their user-focused peers as a percentage of revenues,” said Dowse. Furthermore, “the user productivity loss of tech-focused organizations is 2.3 times greater than user-focused organizations. Tech-focused organizations are leaking almost a quarter of their users’ application usage time.” In addition, user-focused organizations “outperform tech-focused companies, achieving 23% higher revenue-per-employee against their industry peers.”

“You’ve got to start with the customer experience and work backwards to the technology,” said Steve Jobs. “You can’t start with the technology and try to figure out where you’re gonna try to sell it. As we have tried to come up with a strategy and vision for Apple, it started with what incredible benefits can we give to the customer - where can we take the customer.”

2) Value The “Soft” Benefits (i.e., Don’t Be A “Block-head”): As discussed, C-levels must also recognize and champion the benefits that new enterprise technologies reveal over a defined timeframe. “If a firm tries to measure benefits in terms of headcount or operational cost savings, it won’t find them - and as a result won’t make the investment,” said Bartel. “Reducing headcount always seems the hardest of the hard savings. But this kind of hard-headedness can often turn into block-headedness, when headcount costs are reduced without factoring in the impact on business operations.”

In the current environment of consumer-driven retailing, “customer satisfaction, loyalty, customer lifetime value, responsiveness and many other analytics aren’t as easily quantifiable as ROI, but are just as critical,” said Kamal Ahluwalia, CMO at Apttus. “Greater synchronization of department processes, systems and people, when aligned to customers’ needs and preferences, deliver far greater value than any layoff or cost reduction strategy.

3) Endorse Change Management: Even when stakeholder needs are addressed as early as the concept stage, many associates will balk when asked to alter the way they work, learn and communicate. This transition is eased with thoughtful, ongoing change management that outlines the software’s user benefits, solicits user opinions and addresses pain points by integrating user feedback into the solution. By promoting involvement, consensus, awareness and enthusiasm early-on, retailers demonstrate to their associates that they care about their needs. This helps to build a community of program evangelists.

Most certainly, “it’s key that leaders let their teams know about any new software tool coming down the pike - from why and how the company will adopt it, to how it will change people’s jobs for the better,” according to a blog by Tim Clark, a market research analyst for The FactPoint Group. “If people don’t know about a tool’s implementation from the start, how can they get excited about it, and adopt it?”

Companies also must provide incentives for employees to change established ways of doing things, Clark stated: Incentives “need to be tangible, such as a process that works better than the previous one, being easier to use, more efficient, reliable, etc.”

4) Choose Fast, Cost-efficient Deployment: Traditional learning management systems require up to 18 months to design and deploy. By that time, the knowledge base, including consumer demands and brand strategies, that propel software design are likely obsolete! The retail industry moves too quickly to accommodate 18 months until system kick-off. In addition, two entire holiday seasons could be lost in that time period.
New, powerful and customizable enterprise solutions are deployed in as little as 12 weeks. Particularly if app-based on the tablet, these customized retail solutions also are created at lower cost. In fact, one of the most beneficial elements to retailers of the iPad is “the ability to adapt technology cost-efficiently,” according to an article published by Retail TouchPoints. In addition, with the iPad, “companies can boost their human capital on a budget.”

5) Embrace App-based Delivery: Knowledge and communications systems are best adopted when provided in the way most associates are familiar, comfortable and interested: App-based digital resources. The future of retail enterprise technology that universally empowers store associates is a customized tablet/iPad app that works in tandem with existing software and hardware to communicate everything from product knowledge to all levels of training and store management.

Retailers must reinvent their enterprise software tools for a digitally savvy workforce now accustomed to the omnipresent tablet. This strategy stimulates adoption, as most associates “are much more likely to interact with peers and employers if communications are digitally delivered to a mobile device,” noted a study from IDC Retail Insights. In addition, more modern, app-based tools that engage employees also enable them to serve the customer better - “which, by the way, creates a more satisfying work environment.”

6) Incorporate Video Content: Today’s retail workforce wants to be engaged and entertained. Video shows associates how to be successful by demonstrating correct selling, service and leadership behaviors. The use of video reinforces learning with highly-interactive exercises and assessments. Video also replaces the volumes of expensive, paper-based training materials that become outdated quickly in today’s fast-moving retail environment. Interacting with video content has become mainstream: 187.8 million Americans [nearly 60% of the U.S. population!] watched 46.6 billion online content videos during March 2014, according to comScore. The duration of the average online content video was 4.3 minutes!

“Video is quickly becoming essential for both on-demand and mobile learning because it is flexible, self-governed and self-sustained,” according to a Bersin by Deloitte research brief, titled: Using Video to Impact Learning Initiatives. “On-demand videos allow learners to consume knowledge that is personalized, highly accessible, and can be rapidly applied to their work effort.”

Tablets were built to provide a rich media experience. The most effective app-based enterprise programs provide high definition video to each store without streaming - from any device, on various platforms, without any delays - even in stores where bandwidth is limited. Locally installed apps residing in the iPad software already contain the video content, so no buffering or streaming is required. The desired video already is in the palm of the associate's hands, unleashed instantly with just a few fingertip swipes. Engaging HD videos play smoothly, regardless of onsite bandwidth - clearly promoting adoption - and are simple and inexpensive to modify.

“The benefits of using video to train have been proven,” noted Greg Buzek, founder and president of IHL Consulting. “In the industry's next stage of digital training, a video stored locally on a mobile device eliminates the network as a point of failure, which is huge.”

App-based video learning “is the wave of the future - a fail-safe way to educate associates, deliver one clear message to all, and provide each associate the same opportunity to develop their individual skills,” said Neal Treadwell, an independent retail sales education consultant. “App-based video e-learning also allows associates to learn in their own environments,
and provides the ability to flex associates’ education/training experiences to match their availability and learning capacity.

7) Unleash Associates From The Back Room: One of a store's most compelling aspect is social interaction, for both shoppers and employees. Don't expect associates to embrace enterprise software solutions that tie them to a backroom computer. With app-based enterprise solutions, associates stay out on the customer-facing sales floor, where they belong.

In between customer time, they engage with software segments that are instant-on - as if by light switch. When a customer approaches, associates click off immediately to turn full attention to customer service. Bookmarks allow users to click off then return quickly to the same spot, which helps smooth usage and adoption.

8) Implement Bite-sized Learning Modules: To further encourage end user adoption, the most effective enterprise software apps deliver very short, 2-minute segments that maintain associate interest and system adoption.

Bite-sized modules also make the frequency and number of store and chain-wide updates simple to effect and manage: Easy modifications can be made only to those segments affected by a change. Store and corporate-wide procedures can be revised easily and cost-effectively across any/every device in every store, region and/or country, without the need for expensive video servers.

9) Measure What Matters: You can’t manage what you don’t measure. New mobile enterprise software tools are equipped with online quizzes specifically designed to help Store Operations improve KPIs. With cloud-based platforms, managers easily can monitor results of employee adoption and participation in enterprise activities, such as e-learning and directives execution. Interactive quizzes and exercises - regardless of geographical location and onsite bandwidth - provide instant measurement and feedback via a website, where leaders can see individual or group progress in real-time. With the knowledge metrics and adoption level of every participant reported in real time, store, district and regional managers can quickly identify improvement areas: This leads to greater communications and mentoring of associates.

“What gets measured gets better, and a corollary to that is what gets measured gets the most attention,” stated Ahluwalia. “Concentrating on what matters most - the quality of your service and the confidence and trust nurtured with customers - needs to pervade how enterprise software investments are evaluated and implemented. Only then will they become a strong catalyst of customer-centric, profitable growth.”

The reality is that “if management says something is important but doesn’t measures response, associates simply assume that it really isn’t important,” said James Dion, President of Dionco, Inc. “However, when compliance and subsequent results are regularly assessed, employees clearly understand there is a relationship between their [adoption] behaviors and overall performance. In terms of mobile training, we see implementations increasing exponentially as retailers come to understand their power and impact.”

10) Choose An Experienced Partner: Secure enterprise-wide software adoption by choosing a talented, versatile vendor partner experienced in delivering the enterprise solution elements that C-level retailers and their end users desire. The vendor toolbox should include everything from the customizable technology itself to scripting and concepting; casting; filming; editing; graphics; interactivity; seamless deployment; instant reporting; powerful, cloud-based website access; and a list of happy retail customers.
LEARN FROM EACH OTHER
Look around at other brands that may not have focused on enterprise roll-out Best Practices for assuring user adoption.

Avon, for example, shelved a software implementation in excess of $100 million specifically due to user adoption issues, according to EnterpriseAppsToday.com: “What was meant to be a worldwide deployment was stymied after Canadian end-users reported deep dissatisfaction with the application. Some sales people even quit their jobs, citing the [solution] as a direct reason for leaving. Looking back at the debacle, Avon would have undoubtedly benefited from a well-defined user adoption strategy. If business analysts and project managers were on the ground with that initial group of end-users, they might have been in a better position to deliver an application that met the sales team’s expectations.”

CONCLUSION
Given the large-scale investment required for enterprise deployments, and the positive impact that widespread stakeholder adoption has on deployment success, following these 10 Best Practices helps assure a winning enterprise-wide mobile software strategy - one that drives adoption, performance and execution of customer-centric strategies.