Low-code platforms offer organisational innovation and agility

By Hyther Nizam
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With Covid-19 accelerating the digital transformation of businesses, many organisations were forced to adopt a work-from-home strategy, and customers began to increasingly purchase goods and services online. The outbreak highlighted the critical nature of software and its impact on people's lives, both professionally and personally.

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At the same time, the function of the IT department has evolved and it has been crucial in supporting organisations in shifting to a new way of working. While numerous departments have seen budget cuts, many businesses have increased their IT spending. This is because the department, now expected to complete more tasks more quickly, is vital to the success of a business.

The rise of low-code app development platforms

To accommodate the unexpected change in business, working apps and systems had to be developed and deployed in the shortest period possible. With IT departments now playing such a critical role in strategic business development, the evolution of low-code and no-code (L/N) has helped to lighten the IT load for businesses of all sizes. According to Gartner, low code applications will account for more than 65% of all app development functions by 2024, with 66% of large organisations adopting at least four low code platforms.

L/N development platforms allow for the rapid development of comprehensive technological solutions without the need for extensive programming skills. This makes life easier for business users, analysts, sales and marketing executives. In other words, those who are closest to the requirement and issue at hand are contextually more informed.

South African businesses that use low-code and no-code software benefit from the following:

1. Reduce the time it takes to develop and deploy innovative apps.
2. Reduce the strain on professional developers by ensuring that all business requirements are met while adhering to regulatory criteria for development methods and components.
3. Allow business users to give shape to their innovative and practical solutions without having to specialise in specific programming languages.
4. Bring together business and IT teams. Business developers can create applications within the constraints imposed by IT specialists. A centralised, simple-to-use development platform also enables the IT staff to monitor the development process and intervene as necessary.

Low-code platforms also help address the challenges posed by 'Shadow IT' or 'Rogue IT' practices, which often happens when business teams or individuals start using different tools to solve their problems without keeping their IT teams in the loop.

IT possibilities enabled by low-code platforms

Recently, businesses have successfully launched two types of apps employing the low-code application development paradigm, with some focusing completely on solutions as part of their pivotal strategies in the face of the pandemic.

1. **Internal apps:** Current conditions have sparked a rise in internal collaboration apps such as contact tracing, virtual check-in portals for remote employees, and Covid-19 live dashboards to name a few. From employee management to streamlining operations with automated approval processes, low-code platforms have played a vital role in allowing different types of users to ship critical solutions for automation, connectivity and communication, allowing thousands of employees to take their work home with them and for business to continue as usual with minimal disruptions. This is further enabled by the ability of modern low-code platforms to integrate with legacy systems and processes, allowing for web and mobile apps with seamless user experiences that can push and pull information from existing internal systems.

2. **Customer-facing apps:** Post lockdown announcements during the first wave of the pandemic, many businesses quickly rolled out self-service web portals and mobile apps, and extended their products and services to their customers digitally. For instance, a number of banks launched digital solutions for banking, loans, forex etc. Even the large, well-established banks that witness stiff competition from fintechs and neobanks (who are technically more flexible and savvy) are now able to compete successfully with the latter, thanks to low-code application platforms.

The potential for simpler business process automation, unencumbered by complex code structures or delivery delays, makes L/N platforms a strategic asset for any company. Not to mention the fact that we now have AI-assisted L/N platforms that can provide guided experience for non-programmers, assisting them in developing better applications through intelligent suggestions.

All things considered, low-code and no-code solutions will give businesses the freedom they have always needed to achieve true agility and innovation.

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