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The rise of no-code enterprise applications

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'no-code applications is a counterbalance to the everything-is-software trend'

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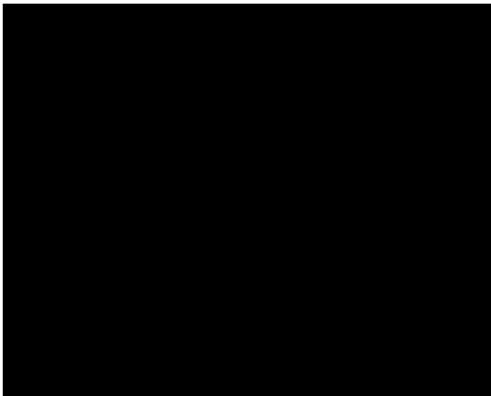
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You often hear these days how everything is software – or, as Marc Andreessen once wrote in a Wall Street Journal essay, '[software is eating the world](#)'.

More than a half-century of digital innovation has led a point where 'all of the technology required to transform industries through software finally works and can be widely delivered at global scale', he said.

The last few years have been good for the software industry and the 'software-defined economy'. In fact, the [Computer and Communications Industry Association](#) has gone so far as to say: 'There is no difference between the digital and the traditional, offline economy anymore. The economy *is* digital.' Much of this is driven by heavy enterprise investment in developers and code-intensive platforms that make businesses more productive, efficient and lucrative.

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There is a concurrent trend, however, that is helping ensure this software-defined economy won't be solely defined by the complex coding environments accessible only to die-hard IT experts. This emerging category of 'no-code' or 'low-code' applications is a counterbalance to the everything-is-software trend, and the accessibility of such applications give a broad community of users the ability to solve their own business problems without waiting for IT.

Avoiding the IT bottleneck

Just a decade ago, business applications remained code-heavy and difficult to maintain such applications. In those days, business users did not dare try to create their own applications, simply because they couldn't. Development frameworks like J2E on top of IBM and Microsoft .Net were (and still are) great technologies. But they have never been user-friendly for non-developers.

Even today, IT is often perceived as a bottleneck in an organisation. Business-critical functions will always take priority and even the most well intentioned IT departments simply don't have the bandwidth to address every aspect of every worker's requests for better tools. This is not only frustrating for employees at large, but also for IT staff themselves, who earn pariah status every time they tell colleagues 'no', 'not yet' or 'someday'.

So while highly technical software development will always play a central role in business, the rise of no-code or low-code applications helps untangle some of the complexities and democratise technology access to the broader business user community. This can eliminate much of the time and expense associated with software development, and consequently lead to increase profits and productivity. Displacing a certain amount of the user-community burden on IT will allow core technical staff members to focus on the initiatives that matter most to the bottom line.

Some have been very vocal about this [shift away from IT support](#), but I would hesitate to think of it as an either-or situation. The trend toward no-code enterprise applications is a movement that acknowledges the underlying importance of software and those who thrive on its complexities, but also recognises the need to make technology accessible and manageable for business users as well.

New workforce, new expectations

This democratisation of access via no-code enterprise applications is not just a good idea; it's a solid expectation from a newly connected — and demanding — workforce.

Today's employees grew up with the internet. They're highly collaborative and use technology intuitively and fluidly. They expect technology to be powerful, but also easy-to-use and device- and platform-agnostic. They want to rapidly design and deploy solutions to solve business problems on the fly. They're not willing to wait days, weeks or months for an IT department solution to their problems. They want it now and won't settle for anything else.

The no-code movement is an empowerment trend along the lines of the bring your own device (BYOD) phenomenon over the past decade — where workers began taking their own Blackberrys, iPhones, tablet computers and other mobile devices to work. More recently, the bring your own app (BYOA) phenomenon has taken hold, with creative and tech-savvy business users building and deploying their own applications to solve problems in near real time.



The good news is that along with this kind of access and inclusion comes accountability. Building on the success of BYOD and BYOA, the related no-code and low-code movement is helping employees feel more ownership of their work, down to the processes they develop to achieve success. It's an environment where business workers solve their own problems directly by sourcing and deploying applications from the cloud and integrating with internal systems.

>See also: [How millennials are changing the face of application development](#)

Given that people are expected (and generally willing) to be constantly accessible, these same capabilities can be easily leveraged on mobile devices so employees stay in touch and productive no matter where they are. Today's combination of cloud-based computing, mobile connectivity and an array of device options have created a hyper-connected world in which we are consistently 'on' and capable of hitting new levels of productivity.

In managing this movement away from IT-centric structures it should be clear that, technologically, the lift is minimal. But the cultural shift from the silo mentality and passive reliance on IT is huge. Employees need not only the technical tools to experiment and work independently, but also the governance and information-management structures to ensure that both their jobs and their company's data assets remain safe while doing so.

The organisation's task is to make sure everyone understands that this shift of both autonomy and responsibility toward the user is seen as an empowering one. The point is not to heap on new job requirements, but rather to give workers the freedom to define the best and most innovative ways to perform in their current roles.

Sourced from Adriaan van Wyk, CEO, [K2](#)

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