Real-time Mobile Apps Boost Workforce Productivity

In today's competitive business climate, companies are constantly on the lookout for ways to boost employee productivity and improve customer service. If you have an organization with field-based employees, you need to make your mobile workers as effective and efficient as possible when they operate outside the four walls of the office. Missing opportunities to increase productivity and effectiveness of field-based workers can mean lost revenue for your company, as customers who are left waiting for service could turn to competitors. Meanwhile, if you require your workers to return to the office to input information captured in the field, valuable time is wasted — time that could be spent servicing additional customers.

Fast responses and reduced time-to-resolution define customer service in the field, and paper-based procedures can no longer keep up with these demands. Information must flow between field locations and the main office as quickly and easily as possible to keep your businesses running, simplify management of your mobile workforce, and extend the amount of time your field workers can spend with customers.

Mobile, real-time workforce management solutions have emerged as an efficient way for field-based employees to stay productive and competitive. Based on GPS-enabled mobile devices — typically smart phones, tablets, or ruggedized devices — these solutions offer workers a real-time alternative to paper forms and allow for increased communication with the main office. With GPS capabilities, these solutions offer mobile workers features such as optimized routes, which reduce travel time and gas costs while boosting productivity and delivering fast returns on investment. Combining these devices with a robust wireless network and complementary Software-as-a-Service (SaaS)-based offerings allow you to choose the applications that fit your needs, empowering your workers to make efficient use of time in the field.

"We're taking something that didn't exist — or only existed in paper form — and placing it on a mobile device," explains Ned Sheeran, Associate Director of AT&T's Mobility Product Management Division. "At a company that isn't using these mobile solutions, the worker has to drive to the office to get forms with customer name, location, and so forth, and then visit the customer to perform the service. There's a lot of value in taking that type of information and putting it on a mobile device so the worker doesn't have to go into the office."

The Potential Benefits of Mobile Apps in the Field

Here are just some of the potential benefits of deploying mobile applications to your field-based workforce:

- Boost efficiency and productivity
- Fast responses and reduced time-to-resolution
- Optimized GPS routes that reduce time and cost
- Positive impact on customer satisfaction
- Improved overall company performance
- Complete data capture in the field
- Reports completed quickly with in-field wireless forms
- Significant return on investment

Leveraging mobile workforce management solutions that take advantage of real-time data and technician or vehicle location can significantly improve your decision-making abilities, which can have immediate positive effects on the business' bottom line.

Productivity Gains

Real-time mobile workforce management solutions can help you boost employee productivity and customer service, and therefore maintain a competitive edge. Whether your organization offers HVAC service and repair, home healthcare providers, direct-store delivery, or is a local government agency or utility, empowering your field employees with these solutions can have a positive impact on customer satisfaction and overall company performance.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) manages many aspects of the state's $38 billion agricultural industry. Until just a few years ago, WSDA's pest control and hops quality monitoring programs, which deploy field workers in state forests and agricultural processing facilities, relied on pen-and-paper reporting for crucial information gathering and analysis. To improve data collection and communication with home offices, WSDA developed an integrated

mobile workforce management solution based on AT&T's wireless network that combines mobile communications, in-field wireless forms, and data exchange from a GPS-enabled mobile device.

The solution allows WSDA to connect with the mobile workforce, which can now quickly produce reports on field conditions. By being able to keep closer tabs on field conditions, WSDA can better protect the state's forest resources and enhance crop values. "We are able to do within hours what used to take days and weeks," says Jeff Painter, IT specialist with WSDA. "It's the forms and the data that are key to us, transferring that information to the office with the least amount of hurdles to jump over at the lowest cost possible."

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Additional Benefits

In addition to boosting mobile employee productivity, mobile workforce management solutions have the potential to offer a significant return on investment – thanks in part to the declining prices and increasing capabilities of mobile devices today. While five or 10 years ago the price delta between a mobile phone and a ruggedized laptop designed for field use was significant, today you can choose to outfit your mobile workers with either smart devices or tablets, or even a laptop, for significantly less than what you would have paid a decade ago, but with the same or more capabilities. The value of these solutions becomes clear when you factor in the costs savings you can gain from:

- The ability of workers to visit more customers in a day because they don't have to report to the office

- More effective data capture in the field

Many mobile workforce management offerings can also integrate with back-end applications, such as payroll, so that mobile employees can, for example, clock in and out of work without ever having to report to the main office to punch a card. And by allowing mobile employees to tap directly into back-end databases and applications – instead of taking written notes in the field and then entering information into the system back at the office – these solutions save time, eliminate redundancies, and reduce the chance for human error.

Because the handheld or tablet devices deployed in mobile workforce management solutions are typically GPS-enabled, employees gain the advantage of being able to optimize routes, saving on time and gas costs. And because a worker's exact location can be pinpointed, you can gain insight into how long it takes to complete a given job and what average travel times are, adding accuracy to quoted arrival times and job durations. By building this type of knowledge into your business, you can deliver better service. For example, an organization armed with this information can whittle down four- to eight-hour service windows to one- to two-hour windows, boosting customer satisfaction. And with GPS-enabled devices, the main office can determine where the closest mobile worker is located when emergency service is required. Leveraging such capabilities allows you to advertise the fact that you know where your field employees are at any given time – which can attract more customers.

Enabling Technologies

A number of recent technology advancements enabled the development of these integrated mobile workforce management solutions. The prominence of smart mobile devices – not only among consumers, but also in the business world – means that workers can stay in constant contact with their offices as well as with their suppliers and partners. The fact that handheld devices continue to decrease in price while increasing in functionality makes them attractive to companies, and the learning curve for these devices is negligible because so many employees are already quite comfortable using them. Because texting and other mobile tasks are so popular, you can deploy solutions based on these wireless devices without fear of extended training periods or low adoption rates.

"At this point almost all companies are using mobile phones. With mobile workforce management solutions, you can add apps to those phones, keeping processes simple at first and adding more capability slowly over time as your workers become more comfortable," says AT&T's Sheeran. "It requires a behavior change, going from paper forms to capturing information on mobile devices, but because of the prevalence of wireless devices, it's not as wide of a delta as you would think."

Another technological advancement that can help you empower field-based employees – particularly those who work for small- and medium-sized businesses – is the prevalence of SaaS offerings that can be tailored to suit any size company in just about any industry. Because these offerings are hosted off-site and require no technology infrastructure or dedicated staff to operate, you can pick and choose which solution best fits your business based on need, not on the technology itself. All that is required is an Internet connection to tap into a wealth of offerings that range from delivering electronic versions of simple work orders to employees in the field, to parts look-up databases so mobile workers can instantly determine parts availability. And because many SaaS workforce management solutions don't require customers to sign a contract, you can add and change applications as your business grows and transforms.

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You can tailor these SaaS offerings to fit your specific needs and work habits, accelerating their adoption and effectiveness.

"Individual businesses tend to have their own unique way of doing things or describing what they do – their own vocabulary. What one company calls a 'work order' another calls a 'service request,'" explains AT&T's Sheeran. "But they don't want to have to change their vocabulary when deploying these solutions; they want it to be simple and easy. One of the benefits of these solutions is customers can go in and create new fields of information; if they want to capture something unique they can take generic templates and rename them to suit their needs."

Bringing it all Together

AT&T can bring together all the pieces your business requires to launch an effective mobile workforce management strategy. In 2010, AT&T was awarded the Frost & Sullivan 2010 North America CXOs' Choice Award for Overall Best Mobile Workforce Management and Overall

Best Next-Generation Fleet Management, highlighting the company's positive reputation and customer loyalty. Frost & Sullivan's Best awards recognize companies across dozens of industries worldwide for their achievements and exceptional performance in areas such as leadership, technological innovation, product development, and customer service. This award was given to AT&T after Frost & Sullivan surveyed more than 300 business executives and corporate decision-makers.

In addition to offering its customers robust wireless services for voice and data and a selection of smart GPS-enabled devices, AT&T collaborates with a number of industry-leading providers that offer applications and services to help manage the mobile workforce. The marketplace is awash in offerings, particularly those aimed at small businesses that lack the technology infrastructure or expertise to run solutions in-house. AT&T takes the guess-work out of finding the right solutions by:

- Identifying best-of-breed vendors in a number of categories

- Optimizing the vendor solutions to run on the AT&T network

- Teaming with vendors so you can receive an integrated solution all on one bill

If your organization has in-house technical expertise and you want to develop your own solutions, AT&T also offers the AT&T Mobile Enterprise Applications Platform, a suite of products and services that help you design, build, deploy and manage mobile applications. The platform includes middleware technology and development tools to extend popular commercial ERP and CRM suites, as well as custom back-end applications, to mobile devices. It also includes consulting services to facilitate business-case development for mobile solutions, requirements definition, application development, testing, deployment, and support, as well as application management services with flexible deployment options.

Examples of providers that AT&T has collaborated with for mobile workforce management solutions include the following:

- **Actsoft, Inc.,** for its set of Mobile Resource Management solutions that use GPS and wireless technology to manage mobile workers, assets, and activities in the field. Features include GPS time tracking, vehicle and asset mapping, multi-point polygon geo-fencing, direct dispatching, advanced wireless forms, invoicing, and barcode scanning.

- **TeleNav, Inc.,** for its TeleNav Track software that manages the mobile workforce and related assets. The offering includes workforce management and GPS tracking and navigation capabilities, and integrates with back-office applications. Other features include scheduling, dispatching, wireless forms, wireless timecards, mileage tracking, automated reports, and barcode, signature, and image capture.

- **Xora, Inc.,** for its Xora GPS TimeTrack offering that allows you to view your field workers' exact locations on Google Maps in near real-time. The software helps field workers plan their schedules, gather data in the field, and also simplifies the payroll process.

- **TrueContext Corp.,** for its ProntoForms industry-specific forms templates. The solution lets you use mobile devices to record data from in the field wirelessly, replacing paper forms. ProntoForms are suited for mobile workers in fields like retail, health care, energy, property management, financial services, and education.

For more information contact your AT&T Representative or visit us at www.att.com/business.

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