



[INSIDE INDUSTRY]

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Mobile computing: Instant gratification for business

If you like the instant gratification of text messaging in your personal life, you'll love the instantaneous results of mobile computing in your business world. The ability to connect to the Internet via a phone network increases productivity by allowing on-the-spot data distribution, data collection and e-commerce.

Browsing the Web on a phone has become a viable, even speedy, operation because of the new PDA phones with 3G phone service. Now, business matters including emailing, scheduling of appointments, sending requested information, receiving documentation and even receiving orders and payment, can be done away from the office. Essentially, all data and information that resides on the company network is accessible on the personal phone with no syncing required. All your mobile computing is instantaneously synchronized with your desktop.

Competitive edge

Examine the required "catch up" after a day away from the office to see the gains in productivity mobile computing affords. With mobile computing you never get behind.

Increased productivity can also be a

competitive advantage. Consider a janitorial supply distribution company that operates in a competitive market selling commodity items to institutional customers. Although its products may not be distinguishable from the competition, the company has gained a significant advantage over its competition by equipping field sales representatives with customer buying patterns and detailed product cost information giving them negotiating power.

This company is unlike many sales companies that can look back at the old days when they sent reps into the field with massive binders of printed information. As soon as the information was printed it was out of date, not to mention costly to reproduce. Now, through mobile computing this information is served up from a Web server; sales reps can browse to that Web address and see all the current information.

Data collection

Mobile computing allows efficient data collection. In the petrochemical industry, for example, there are many devices, gadgets and processes that must be constantly monitored to preserve quality of production

and assure employee safety while complying with government mandated environmental guidelines.

Historically this data collection was accomplished by sending an employee around with a clipboard to gather and record readings on paper. Since much of these facilities are outside, oftentimes recordings were compromised by adverse weather conditions. Clipboard recordings required filing, retrieval and compiling into a report for decision making. Mobile computing provides a gateway to centrally located corporate information storage systems.

Instead of a clipboard, the petrochemical operations staff carries a portable computing device and keys the data in as it is collected. Now the data is weather proof, immediately entered directly into the corporate computing system and immediately available on decision making reports. No data is stored on the portable computer so if the device is lost or damaged the data is safe. The portable computing device has sufficient processing capabilities that give the operator real-time feedback and help with data error checking, such as enforcing thresholds for appropriate data values.

E-commerce

Some portable computing devices now have built in barcode scanners, credit card swipe readers and receipt printers. Transactions can be completed at tradeshow or on the road. A seller scans the barcode on the items and the computing device pulls pricing from the corporate server to arrive at a sale amount with appropriate sales tax. The credit card is swiped in the computer. The device charges the card and returns the approval code; the onboard receipt printer prints the receipt with details of the sale and any additional information the seller would like to give in writing such as return policies. The sale is transmitted back to the corporate accounting system and it is immediately available for posting to sales journals down to the general ledger.

Mobile computing is not only practically viable but also financially. Phones are in the \$400 range and monthly unlimited data plans are \$45 flat rates. These phones come ready to be connected to corporate IT systems.

For more information, call (800) 839-1645 or visit www.applicationfactory.com. □

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Wolf Creek Business Growth Institute helps its clients to succeed by incorporating many or all of the following programs:

- Sales & Sales Management Training
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- Executive Coaching
- Leadership & Management Development
- Managing Change
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- Personal Accountability Training
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