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# What do Mobile Communications mean for the Modern Service Operation?

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## Executive Summary

Mobile Communications, including devices such as PDAs and tablets, are having a profound effect on the Modern Service Operation.

As the ability to communicate on the move develops and becomes ever more sophisticated, it brings with it a whole new world of opportunity for businesses in the service sector. It makes operations and processes quicker and more efficient and allows staff, both office and field-based, to be ultimately more proactive in their approach.

However, with so many options available and a plethora of new technologies coming into view, how do you decide which avenue to take and which option is best for your business, not only now but in the long-term?

Mobile communications are now more advanced than ever, providing more capabilities and increased mobility for businesses and their workforce. But each option can come with positives and negatives for your business, your employees and your customers.

The bottom line benefits of more developed mobile communications have become more and more obvious as the costs of mobility have fallen, and the flexibility of the solutions increased.

Mobile solutions can:

- improve the utilisation of employee time,
- better the service given to customers,
- eliminate spreadsheets and paper-based processes,
- support and drive growth without increasing headcount, and
- offer 360 degree visibility and management reporting.

Investing in the right mobile solution can offer exceptional value for money and provide a significant return on investment no matter what industry a field service business is in.

*“For the first time we have visibility of KPIs and performance across our entire service operation thanks to our Service Management System.”*

**Field Operations and Maintenance Director, Arqiva**

## A Fully Scalable Solution

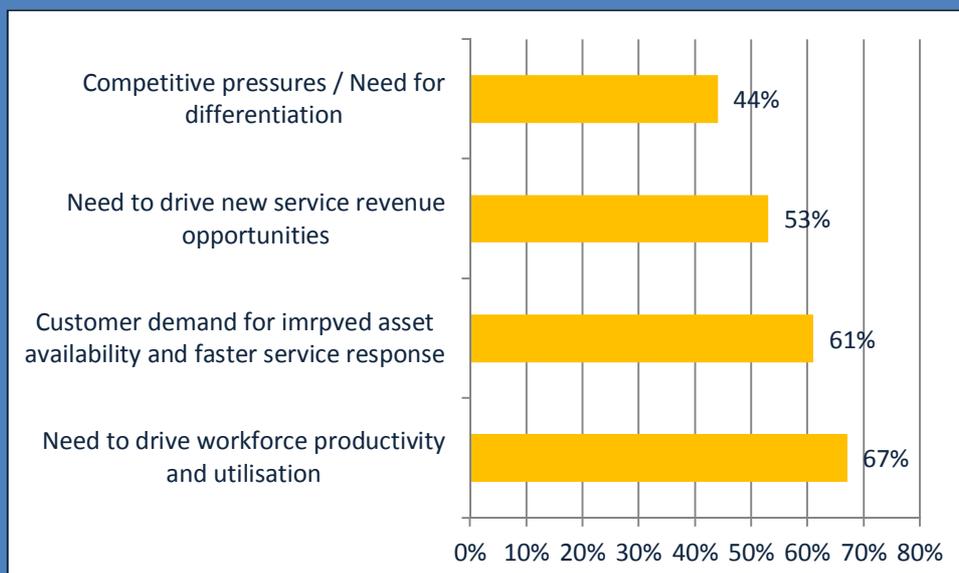
Productivity can be increased by putting more efficient processes in place and scheduling software can automatically select the right engineer with the right skills, right parts or such to attend the job; in order to boost first-time fix rates. Not only that, but best of breed service management software can provide a fully scalable mobile solution; supporting a growing business.

However, although many businesses appear to have invested in some kind of mobile solution and attempted to incorporate mobile capability, in the majority of cases they don't seem to be using the technology to its full potential. One reason for this could be the need for more education and training for staff who are working with these mobile technologies in order that they can fully take advantage of its capabilities.

This is similar, in simple terms, to buying a Swiss Army Knife but only ever using the corkscrew: Companies have the ability to perform a lot of other functions, but by not using them all, then instead of a valuable multifunction tool, they have actually ended up with an expensive corkscrew.

Mobile communication devices can now converse directly with front-end and back-office systems, retrieving product data from barcodes, accessing details of previous contact with customers, and showing site history such as previous jobs or visits. It can also show the business the cheapest available appointment for a particular customer dependent on the location or skills of engineers or even the parts that engineers have available to them. All of this saves time, reduces costs and increases efficiency, whilst also improving the level of customer service.

A graph to show the four most common reasons why businesses feel they need better field service.



Note: Respondents gave more than one answer. Source: Aberdeen Group, January 2011.

## Engineers Are Empowered

The real value of this kind of approach comes from defining a new operating model. Several leading-edge companies have begun instituting low cost models and using technologies to better support their customers and it has already yielded significant results in terms of increased revenue, customer retention and business growth.

Like the mobile phone has moved from only performing telephone calls to being the “smart device” available today, there can be a complete transformation in the way businesses communicate and undertake transactions. For example, rather than just voice calls, mobile phones can now offer text messaging, picture messaging, photo messaging, instant messaging, video calling, and social media as methods of communication.

Extending this to modern service operations, like the way advancements in mobile phone technology have resulted in changes in communication methods, businesses can utilise technology to learn, manage and disseminate data, knowledge and experience in order to completely change their service delivery model.

Certain solution providers can even offer totally integrated solutions that deal with every aspect of the business’s processes, from initial enquiry through to invoicing, as well as aiding every department such as marketing, sales, and finance. It empowers engineers by giving them the knowledge and the support they need to complete their job successfully, which in turn benefits the customers.

Reducing fix-times on site, increasing first-time fix rate, getting the right engineer to the right job and proactively managing jobs in jeopardy, rather than reacting to failure, will all become child’s play with true mobility.

A table to show the average performance of mobile engineers.

Finding	Average
Work orders completed daily per worker	3
Miles driven daily per worker	70
Average workforce utilisation	63%

Source: Aberdeen Group, January 2011

Mobile Scheduling can reduce the number of miles driven by ensuring the right engineer attends the right jobs in the correct order. By better planning of jobs, businesses find that engineers are able to complete more jobs per day and therefore the utilisation figure improves drastically.

## Continuous Availability

The "Game-Changer" of mobile communications has been the relentless increase in quality and availability of applied technology. Initially this technology was extremely expensive but this is changing, especially as a number of additional platforms have been developing such as Apple's iOS, Google's Android as well as Windows Mobile.

Many businesses, as well as their employees and customers, are familiar with these systems, but find it difficult to discern the difference between them and establish which would best suit their needs. Business owners have always had to decide on their priorities; questioning whether the positives in each case successfully outweigh the negatives, and decisions on systems pose similar quandaries.

It is now obvious that unless solutions are fully committed to being mobile, there will have to be compromises. Specialist software catering for a mobile workforce has made impressive developments in recent years, with fully mobile solutions demonstrating significant cost savings across the board; from speed of response to information available, and flexibility of technology application. Solutions that are not fully mobile lack functionality and limit productivity and reduce the efficiency of field workers, which could cost the business more in the long run.

Deloitte (2011) predicted that "no operating system will have a dominant market share" and this is certainly true at the moment. Windows has been seen as the "traditional" solution by many suppliers, which for some brings negative connotations, whilst others believe the reliability and longevity of this technology makes it still the more valuable option. Though the growing popularity of iOS and Android in the public market now makes these potentially viable options.

As these technologies are not as established as Windows Mobile and are seen as open-source, there are potential security issues for companies dealing with customer data over mobile channels, which have proven a concern for suppliers delivering advanced service management systems.

However, the battle for popularity will be seen as minor blip in the all-pervasive march of mobility. Location is no longer the challenge; even connectivity is no longer a stumbling block. Instead "mobility" can be translated to mean "continuous availability". So from a service perspective, customers will have access to a resource to solve their problem continuously and all that will matter will be the collection of relevant data to enable a fix.

Fundamentally, Pandora's Box is now open and there will be an even greater advance in mobile communication options. Mobile solutions will become the norm; driven by the pressure of businesses' desire to reduce costs, increase flexibility and maintain high customer service standards and the desire of the service management solution supplier to remain in business.

## Be Proactive

Commitment to mobile requires more than just an engineer with a PDA; it is about data-gathering and dissemination, and requires the focus of the full onslaught of technology onto a growing mobile-hungry market. Real-time data collection means the focus can be on quick and effective reactions to unexpected changes in plans in order to ensure the best possible customer service is delivered consistently.

*“The application has been very well received by our field service workforce and most importantly, our customers are feeling the benefit.”*

European Service Manager, Electrosonic

Fully mobile-enabled service management systems can anticipate, react immediately and readily action the necessary changes to plans. Not being able to provide good service when there is an expectation of performance excellence and not being able to anticipate problems and respond cost-effectively, will create significant customer, as well as staff, dissatisfaction. Enabling staff, both out in the field and in the office, to be proactive, rather than reactive, is the key.

Engineers may have a preference for a particular type of technology, or imply that the latest device will increase their job satisfaction, but the satisfaction resulting from a slick, effective system cannot be under-estimated. Ensuring that the system works to the best of its ability and offers advanced functionality will continue to boost confidence and ensure the business is well-represented by the engineer to the customer.

There is a growing shortage of skilled personnel and as the demand on engineers grows, so keeping hold of good engineers will be a major factor in keeping hold of customers.

## A Future-Proof Solution

*"Despite recent market turmoil, mobility continues to be a critical part of the global workforce and we expect to see healthy growth in the number of mobile workers. Our forecast shows that the worldwide mobile worker population will increase from just over 1 billion in 2010 to more than 1.3 billion by 2015."*

Stacy Crook (Senior Research Analyst for International Data Corporation's Mobile Enterprise Research program), December 2011

The profile of field service support is changing dramatically, and solutions will be almost unrecognisable by the end of this year, requiring a complete rethink of information systems, their interfacing and overall structure. With this expected increase in the number of mobile workers, systems will need to be truly mobile; offering all of the information and functionality available in the office to the mobile engineer in the field.

The move therefore should be towards a single service management system that holds all of the business information centrally and communicates with, and links together, all departments from sales and marketing to service and support, invoicing and customer retention. This type of universal system will support all aspects of the business and provide feedback on important management information to enable better deployment of resources, report on successes and highlight any weaknesses that need to be improved.

By implementing a system that takes full advantage of the progress of mobile communications and having staff that are fully trained in its processes, these businesses are arming themselves with a future-proof solution; a solution that is anticipating and ready for changes in service operations and is fully prepared no matter what the eventuality.

## Appendix

**Aberdeen Group, January 2011**

[Field Service 2011: Key Trends in Workforce Management](#)

By: Sumair Dutta

**Stacey Crook, December 2011**

[Worldwide Mobile Worker Population 2011–2015 Forecast](#)

By: Stacy K. Crook, Justin Jaffe, Raymond Boggs, Stephen D. Drake

**Deloitte, 2011**

[Technology, Media and Telecommunications Predictions](#)

By: Jolyon Barker

**Other quotations taken from Solarvista Software Ltd  
Customer Case Studies**

### **More Information**

Information about this publication can be found at [www.solarvista.com](http://www.solarvista.com) or please send any enquiries by email to [marketing@solarvista.com](mailto:marketing@solarvista.com).

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