

Mobile Technology: The Future of Business

Introduction

Do you run from one meeting to another? Do you spend most of your time outside the office? Would you be lost without your smart phone or access to your email and advanced features? You are not alone. In a world that is spinning faster and faster, where breakfast is substituted by a morning latte and a granola bar, we are all becoming increasingly dependent upon tools to help us live life on-the-go.

Going Mobile

When you look at the sleek mobile devices today, with their expansive functionality and tiny sizes that easily fit in your pocket, it's hard to believe that, not too long ago, we were flocking to the stores to buy "brick" phones that weighed 2 pounds and cost thousands of dollars. Today, mobile carriers offer comprehensive data plans and guarantee a fast and affordable data transfer. Walk down any street in this country and you will notice people surfing the internet, downloading music, and watching the latest episode of Lost on their smart phones. There's no denying, America has gone mobile.

In recent years, the popularity of mobile devices has risen tremendously. The market has grown by over 6% annually and penetration has exceeded 88% of the population. This means that there are 271 million customers and that almost every American owns a cell phone [1]. Those numbers are growing fast and customers are demanding more and more from their mobile devices. While a decade ago it was a luxury to be reachable anywhere by phone, now it's crucial for everyday activities. Expectations (and capabilities) are constantly increasing. The ability to use a cell phone to place a call is now considered the most basic of functions. We also need to check email and access the internet in any spot in the world, synchronize our calendars, set up alarms and have maps handy when we get lost in the city. What used to be a phone is more like a personal computer; in fact it IS more personal than a personal computer, just smaller. For someone who is constantly on the road, these devices are not a luxury, but a necessity.



Mobile ERP in your company

Smart managers look at mobile technology and quickly see an opportunity for their business. If mobile devices have such capabilities, why not use them to help business processes? That's where Mobile ERP systems come in - delivering instantaneous access to up to date information. Your customers won't hear the "let me get back to you on that" line anymore. Nor will your salesman have to call the warehouse to check the stock on hand. They can simply check the current stock levels in the mobile version of the ERP system on their phone. With a few clicks orders and invoices can be created and printed on the spot using a mobile printer. Your salesman will have access to customers' order history and will be able to easily calculate discounts. The sales team can even preview credit limits for every customer. They can alert the customer right in the meeting if they are approaching their credit limit and need to pay off their outstanding bill before ordering more. Your warehouse staff will be able to keep track of the inventory coming in and leaving the warehouse more precisely. They will no longer need to add items by hand, instead they can scan the barcodes. Everything will be automatically saved in the system, so there won't be a need to process everything manually. Decreasing the amount of manual work will also decrease the margin for human errors.

How can Mobile ERP be useful for management?

Mobile Technology: The Future of Business

Having access to custom reports anytime, anywhere will surely come in handy. With a Mobile ERP system, you will be able to see the condition of your business when you are traveling or at a meeting. You can check if your salesmen are meeting their quotas, or access data about your customers or vendors. You will be able to view pending documents that require your verification even while you are out of the office. You will receive alerts on your phone if there is anything that requires your attention whether it is approvals, or declining profits. Because you can constantly follow what is happening in the company, Mobile ERP will not only boost your efficiency, but also save you time and money.

Real-life Problems Solved by Comarch ALTUM

P&R Distribution* is a family-owned distribution company that imports and distributes food and beverage products from Europe to the Chicago-land area. They are committed to providing their customers same day, or next day order processing and delivery. P&R has dedicated staff members in six key departments: Sales, Order Processing, Warehousing, Delivery, Administration, and Management. They receive sales orders from multiple channels: fax, phone, in person, email, and most importantly through their sales staff. These orders are confirmed and processed by the administration staff and sent to the warehouse for packaging and delivery. To process one order, it must pass through the hands of at least 4 different people. In order to ensure accurate, efficient, and high-quality service, they needed to have a comprehensive system that could incorporate cross-departmental processes.

Mobile Sales

Before a mobile solution was introduced, P&R Distribution's order fulfillment process was inefficient, cumbersome, and left room for many human errors. The majority of Sales Order processes began with the sales team hand-writing the orders manually. These orders were faxed into the Office where the Administration staff would input the orders into their system. Naturally, human errors cannot be avoided

when the exchange of information is passed from one hand to the other. Product codes, quantities, and discounts were often typed incorrectly, handwriting could be hard to read, and faxes were sometimes unclear. Additionally, the sales staff in the field had no knowledge of the inventory status, resulting in overselling, which led to unsatisfied customers.

With the introduction of Comarch ALTUM Mobile, all Sales Orders entered by sales staff are created in the mobile application. The Sales Staff now has access to real-time inventory quantities, prices, promotions, and discounts. Orders created in the mobile application are easily uploaded to the main Comarch ALTUM system where they are now instantly confirmed by the administration staff.

Order turn-around time was reduced due to several factors. Orders did not have to be re-entered into the system. When an order was completed it was instantly available in Comarch ALTUM. Order accuracy was dramatically increased. Items on order were available in the warehouse, eliminating the need to modify orders due to missing items. Prices and discounts were 100% accurate since the information was all available in the hands of the sales staff while they were away from the office. The sales staff was able to increase sales value because they could track promotions and discounts in the mobile application.

Mobile Warehousing

P&R Distribution's warehouse processes can be divided into three main functions: receiving, maintaining, and distributing inventory. The receiving process created the most difficulties for the warehouse staff. Purchase orders were placed to vendors, but were not recorded in the system until the products were received. This led to three key issues. First, the administration and sales staff never knew when products-on-order would be available in inventory. Second, problems occurred when products changed in appearance, new products were ordered, or products changed UPC codes. Lastly, all products received were counted manually which left room for human error.

When the mobile warehouse solution was introduced the results were immediate. Purchase Orders were now entered into Comarch ALTUM at the exact

Mobile Technology: The Future of Business

moment they were placed. Administration and Sales staff could accurately estimate when products would be available in stock and could give customers correct feedback on product availability. Portable scanners were used to scan all products during the receiving process to accurately match the Purchase Order. In this way, Purchase Order processing time was decreased and more accurate. If products changed in appearance or UPC codes were changed, these problems were caught and resolved immediately.

Overall warehouse efficiency was increased due the automation and centralization of Purchase Order Information. Each and every person on the staff can access pertinent information during the purchase process cycle which not only benefitted the purchase process, but also the sales process. Sales Order fulfillment could be more accurately fulfilled based upon purchase orders.

Mobile Management

Previously, when P&R Distribution management stepped outside of the office, their only connection to everyday business operations was by email or a phone call. Therefore, they made many decisions without accurate information. To make a single decision, the manager would often need to call the sales rep, administrative staff, and warehouse staff. The process was hindered whenever any of these individuals stepped away from their phone or computer, and the managers did not always have a clear picture of whose information to trust if they received conflicting answers.

The future of Mobile Applications



According to information technology and telecommunications analyst IDC, the number of mobile workers will grow from 650 million to 850 million workers by 2009 [2]. Today only 23 percent of all employees in an organization use their company's mobile ERP solution. Imagine how much more efficient companies will become when 200 million more workers begin accomplishing their business tasks through a wireless connection?

Mobile solutions for different roles are constantly being introduced into the market. We at Comarch, are working to give you even more functionality by introducing Workflow processes into our future mobile applications. Not only will management be able to view pertinent information, they will be able to approve and edit processes, ensuring the smooth flow of the business. The advances in mobile technology are shifting the way we think about work: now more than ever, work is an Activity, not a Place.

*Names have been changed at customer's request

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