

Out in the field

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BSA. How important is mobility to larger organisations? What sort of return on investment does mobility offer?

RL. There's a very large percentage of the workforce that is not office-based. They are the people across many industries that are constantly out in the field, such as service technicians, salespeople and workers in the transport sector. Having the technology in place to communicate with these workers easily and to send detailed information from an organisation's computer network, so that workers out of the office can perform their jobs more effectively and efficiently, is a huge advantage for organisations.

The return on investment from mobility is potentially substantial, depending on the solution that an organisation puts in place. By being able to send accurate information and data to workers in real time, there are immediate productivity gains because tasks can be co-ordinated and prioritised more efficiently.

For example, by integrating SMS text messaging into an organisation's computer system, automated messaging can be set up to notify IT staff of system outages. This can produce big cost savings for an organisation as system downtime can be significantly reduced. This has flow-ons into revenue and cash flow.

Importantly, major cost savings are achieved from using messaging technology because it is 30-40 percent cheaper than physically having to make landline to mobile calls. Where multiple employees need to be contacted, the savings are even greater. Overall, the return on investment from mobility is substantial.

BSA. What industries in particular could benefit from wireless technology that are not currently using it?

RL. Most industries are already utilising wireless technology in one form or another, but some are definitely using it more than others. Our experience in business usage of SMS messaging is that a wide range of different industries are using mobile solutions to communicate with field staff. A high percentage of organisations are also using automated messaging, relayed from their systems, to notify their IT staff and



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service providers of faults, and to escalate problems.

There's also strong growth in the number of organisations using SMS for appointment confirmations, marketing and for rostering staff and contractors.

Greater gains are definitely possible in industries that are still making outbound calls to people in the field or waiting on paperwork to be completed and returned to the office. Many of these operations can be replaced by a simple, cost effective wireless data solution.

These companies can be across any industry really, because mobile technology is a horizontal solution rather than a vertical industry solution. The benefits are common to all. Wireless mobility, including SMS, is a technology that crosses all industry segments and has common efficiency gains. Any industry that is not currently using SMS can reap the same benefits of a neighbouring industry. The efficiency and cost gains are definitely not exclusive.

BSA. Given that information is one of a company's biggest assets, how secure are wireless communications?

RL. Having proper security systems in place is certainly important for organisations using wireless communications. For example, applications stored on a PDA device represent a problem if that data is not locally encrypted. This can be a big problem if the PDA is lost or stolen.

That's the issue of having data that is not controlled by the organisation, because it's out in the field and they lose control of it to a certain extent. If it's a hosted solution, all the data is controlled from a central place because the data is never actually on the hand-held device. This can be done over secure networks, whether it be the secure internet using 128-bit encryption or by bypassing the internet entirely and having VPNs (virtual private network) connections directly to a telecommunications provider.

BSA. What are the greatest barriers to mobility adoption in the private sector?

RL. I think the main barrier is business system integration. The

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devices are out there, they're reliable, feature rich and the networks, such as GPRS and 3G, are now there to support them.

What stops a business from saying "I want to use it"? It could be handset price, but really now you can get them on a plan for any phone at very reasonable pricing.

But getting the mobile devices to talk to a legacy back-end system can be an issue. The key here is not to try and solve everything by one all-encompassing system. This never works and it never will. It's a matter of either integrating the whole system or looking at portions of the system and deciding what portions of the system do workers need to have data access to.

By taking steps that move a business forward into the wireless world, they can adopt solutions that solve particular needs now and see immediate benefits. As the business evolves, wireless solutions can be adapted into further systems because the earlier efficiency gains justify the costs of doing this.

It's a gradual approach, safe and controllable. That's why SMS is the perfect entry point into becoming wireless. Everybody has the hardware already, and a simple two-way communications solution is right under their nose.

BSA. Can you list two or three specific actions readers can undertake in their own companies to create significant improvements for mobile workers?

RL. The most important thing is to keep it simple. Flooding a mobile worker with too much information is the biggest sin. It's a matter of giving them information they need and an easy way to access it.

Look at the role of each mobile worker. They may vary enormously. Hence the selection of device and the wireless solution will

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also vary. Some may need just their mobile phone and SMS, others may require GPRS PDAs and smart web solutions to interact with business data in real time.

When you're working on a small screen out in the field, there are a whole range of issues around design that then come into play. Do you give them 20 pages of information that they have to scroll through or do you cut that down to only the information they really need to undertake their task. Out in the field it is slower to operate and harder to read and use.

So if they keep it simple for the person out in the field and give them the information they need and the easiest way to access it, that's a major step forward. ■