Smart Mobile Devices

By William Walsworth

In the end mobile devices offer new potential for field service efficiency.

Nearly half of American adults are now using smartphones. IPhones and Android handsets now dominate the mobile landscape, providing a host of advanced communications and computing functionality. Led by Apple's iPad with upwards of 60% market share, tablets are adding significantly to mobile computing numbers.

Just how strong is the move to smart mobile devices? Software solutions provider Marin Software estimates that there will be one billion smart mobile devices–phones and tablets–in use globally by mid-2013. As the U.S smartphone market continues to expand. Android remains one of the two most popular smartphone operating systems with 47 percent of the market. The Apple iPhone is the top smartphone brand, accounting for 48 percent of all smartphone units sold.

In Passion and Purpose: Stories from the Best and Brightest Young Business Leaders from Harvard Business Press, the authors found that over 40% of young business leaders ranked mobile as the most important twenty-first century business technology (cloud computing was second at 13%). The promise of smart mobile computing is simple and compelling: Armed with these devices, business users will be empowered to work better, faster and smarter, with fewer errors.

By providing instant access to a wide range of useful tools and information, Smartphones and tablets are proving extremely valuable for field service team members, including those associated with mortgage default servicing, property preservation and REO management activities. Here are just a few ways the latest smart devices are making life easier and more efficient for field people on the move:

1. **Finding Your Way**
   A phone's GPS can get the field representative to a property on time, even if he/she is in unfamiliar surroundings far from home. Typical GPS software will even provide traffic alerts and suggest an alternate route.

2. **Accessing Key Data**
   Many apps allow users to organize, store and access key data. It's easy to retrieve a history of involvement with a particular property, keeping the user armed with vital information.

3. **Staying on Track**
   When multiple properties are lined up in one day, keeping them straight can be a challenge. A number of smartphone apps allow the user to organize what and where, as well as access notes or work orders related to a pending work assignment.

4. **Getting Answers on the Fly**
   When questions arise, a smartphone allows easy checking of the company website or other online resources for needed answers at a moment's notice.

5. **Keeping Contacts Close**
   With a smartphone, the user's address book is available anywhere, anytime. One is never more than a click or two away from crucial information, help and support.

6. **Creating and Editing Documents**
   With popular ad-on apps, the user can view, create and edit Word and Excel files and PowerPoint presentations, as well as PDF documents.

7. **Generating, Saving and Sharing PDFs**

Typical device cameras can now take five megapixel pictures – more than adequate resolution for creating a visual record of a service call. In addition, a handy add-on app lets the user activate the phone's camera to scan contracts, receipts, and other documents as full-color PDFs and e-mail them to their desktops.

By providing instant access to a wide range of useful tools and information, Smartphones and tablets are proving extremely valuable for field service team members.

NOT ALL APPS ARE CREATED EQUAL

According to user forum 148Apps.biz, there are now just south of a million iPhone apps available for download, with nearly 13,000 being added monthly. Among them is a small but steady stream of new mobile apps geared for field service providers. Software firm FieldAware, has compiled a comprehensive directory of over 100 mobile apps for use by residential and commercial contractors, engineers, technicians, commissioning agents and maintenance personnel who have a smart mobile device and work in the field. It lists apps with the ability to troubleshoot and diagnose HVAC systems, calculate energy and water consumption, produce inspection reports, manage punch lists, perform HVACR conversions, and handle a multitude of other field service tasks.

The best field service technology solutions are industry specific, such as those created by Five Brothers especially for members of our nationwide field service team. The idea is simple: By helping our field service partners save time, boost productivity and reduce costs, we can more effectively serve the interests of our mortgage industry clients.

Our mobile and cloud computing solutions help Five Brothers field service team members to:

- Go paperless, streamlining preparation, distribution and completion of work-orders and related documentation.
- •Eliminate redundant processes, such as work orders that must be returned to the office, then re-entered into a billing system before they can be billed
- Prevent potential loss of paper records after jobs are completed but not yet billed
- Eliminate sticky notes, paper schedules, whiteboards and other cumbersome and wasteful manual tools
- Enter work-order completion data at point of service to increase accuracy and reduce order-completion-to-payment cycles

TAILORED SOLUTIONS ARE STRONGER SOLUTIONS

Extending the benefits of technology to field service operations has long been a key part of the Five Brothers strategy to optimize performance and productivity of our field service network. It began with FiveOnline, our state-of-the-art asset preservation workflow management system. This online portal provides 24/7 secure access to the process-critical information and control needed to increase efficiency and ensure regulatory compliance, while optimizing field service results.

To move this technology closer to the field, we created Zephyr a mobile computing application allowing our field service team members to manage

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 1995, William Walsworth joined Five Brothers as Chief Information Officer, developing all of the Five Brothers technology solutions, including MOTZ, MARS and FiveOnline. Walsworth provides Five Brothers' clients with efficient and effective solutions for loss mitigation, asset preservation, and loan modification, as well as document management, scanning, archival and retrieval. Prior to joining Five Brothers, Walsworth served as a senior systems analyst at Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation in New York before becoming President of GNU Software Development in Ann Arbor, Michigan..

Smart mobile devices are poised to play a key role in fulfilling these expectations by enabling on-site integration of work order planning, management and reporting.

field work orders from any laptop with appropriate internet access. Zephyr's rules-based engine provides an efficient, step-by-step checklist for work order completion and data reporting. Data can be uploaded directly into the FiveOnline system for faster turnaround and payment of invoices.

FivePad and FiveDroid for the iPhone and Android smartphones represent the next step in mobile computing for our nationwide field service network. With FivePad and FiveDroid-enabled smartphones or tablets, service providers complete electronic inspection forms, take required photos, and enter additional quality control data based on the situation at the property, then transmit this information to Five

Brothers in real-time. FivePad and FiveDroid even provide driving directions to the next scheduled service location.

GOING NATIVE

A native application (native app) runs on a particular device platform. (FivePad and FiveDroid run on the iPhone and iPad platform and Android phones and tablets, respectively.) Native applications run faster and more dependably than web applications because they can be used without an internet connection. Browser-based solutions often don't perform as well because they cannot run without a continuous internet connection.

FivePad and FiveDroid are extremely fast compared to typical browser-based apps. Having the software on the phone minimizes the amount of time it takes to retrieve information or make updates. The app continues to run, even if Internet access is lost or unavailable.

The device's web browser is used only to upload information to the main system database.

The FivePad and FiveDroid apps link seamlessly with the FiveOnline workflow management system and are available without cost exclusively to members of the Five Brothers nationwide field service team.

SMART MOBILE DEVICES: EFFICIENCY ON THE MOVE

Our mortgage servicing clients rely on us for rapid field response supported by timely, accurate, and complete information. Smart mobile devices are poised to play a key role in fulfilling these expectations by enabling on-site integration of work order planning, management and reporting. Through on-going development of user-friendly, task-centric mobile apps, we will continue to build on this potential while helping our field service partners save time and money on every work assignment. ❖