PRONTO
SOFTWARE

Mobile Service
Developing a mobile service strategy that serves you

Mobility for field services
Delivering the right solution

As field service organisations continue to evolve and reposition to gain a competitive advantage, the key focus remains increasing customer satisfaction and uncovering new ways to boost the bottom line. To answer the call, businesses need an end-to-end solution that simplifies field workforce management for today's and tomorrow's markets. Mobility is the obvious answer, but how can businesses use it most effectively?

Organisations are looking to new technologies to broaden operational reach. In fact, a recent US study undertaken by Gartner highlights that revenue for packaged field service dispatch and workforce management software was approximately US$1.2 billion in 2012, with an annual growth rate of 12.7 per cent – a significant investment given the current economic climate. In particular, today's field service and asset management businesses are beginning to consider investing in mobile technologies to gain efficiencies and improve workforce 'wrench time'.

Having decided to invest in mobile, many companies choose to go down the integration path, where third-party mobility applications are rolled out to complement their existing financial and back-end enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems. Only later do they discover that the cost of mending integration at upgrade time can sometimes be greater than the initial outlay on the solution itself. Furthermore, the upkeep of these integrated technologies becomes prohibitively expensive, casting doubt on their value in a growing company's future. Sourcing a web-based solution from a single vendor provides a little more comfort for IT managers, usually entailing fewer headaches at upgrade time.

For businesses currently putting together a mobile strategy, here are the top five factors worth considering:

1. The rise of BYOD for field services

Our increasing reliance on smartphones has resulted in a growing trend of 'bring your own device' or BYOD, where employees have come to expect accessibility to company and customers' information using their own devices anywhere, anytime.

However, BYOD brings with it new challenges. According to a recent IDC study, 45 per cent of IT departments say they are not prepared, in terms of policies and technology, to handle a more borderless, mobile workforce. This perspective is reflected in the finding that 21 per cent of mobile workers in the same study experienced a security issue where their smartphone was lost, stolen or hacked last year.

There is also the challenge of supporting multiple devices with different screen sizes and operating systems, and integrating these with all systems within the business to deliver the panacea of workforce mobility.

This means that, where we once took an evolutionary approach to mobility development, organisations must now employ more agile development techniques to deliver mobile solutions that complement back-end IT systems. Multi-platform web applications could be the solution.
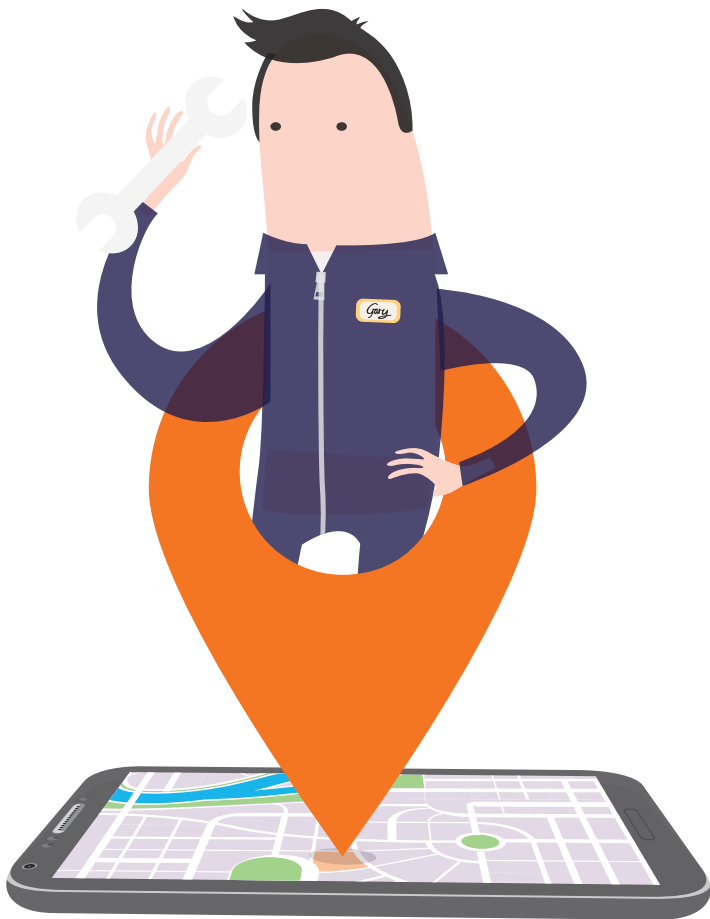
2. HTML5 mobile web apps

HTML5, the fifth generation of the programming language HTML, has emerged as a viable solution to address the challenge of multiple devices. HTML5 is supported by key mobile vendors, including Apple, Google and Microsoft. The advent of new web-based HTML5 apps means that we can now potentially do away with some traditional native apps built with older technologies such as Flash and Silverlight.

These platform- and device-independent web apps are designed to provide advanced field service technology that improves operational efficiency for remote workers. Multi-platform HTML5 field services apps are good news for businesses, providing cost savings and a greater level of flexibility compared to traditional solutions deployed only on expensive rugged field service hardware.

3. Mobility needs to deliver the full story

Multi-platform HTML5 apps are an appealing option – most offer logistic improvements via a slick, intuitive user interface – but many on the market fall short, as they fail to fix broader field service issues.

Field services businesses contend with problems such as deploying the technical content needed on site, helping technicians find the right parts for the job and, most importantly, reducing employee injury and compliance errors that lead to equipment damage. Ultimately, the aim is to fix the problem first time around, thereby minimising call-backs and reworks. With this in mind, many web apps that provide the basics for smaller service companies don't deliver the full spectrum of features required to keep clients happy.

Businesses should also consider what employee expectations are going to be in five years. While it may be seem simpler to focus only on todays functional needs, it would be prudent to adopt a more flexible and adaptable framework for workforce mobility.

4. Trending against traditional silos

Siloed business units involving traditional third-party integrated solutions, such as those that require some form of financial or ERP back-end, are sometimes hamstrung by functional limitations or simply don't offer the depth of a single-threaded approach. For example, situations in which service mobility solutions are loosely linked to financial systems that lack KPIs or statistical reporting are a major impediment to the continued growth of a business.

Similarly, front-end efficiencies can become diluted by back-end instability. Technology problems can create disruptive performance issues that prompt businesses to re-invest capital all over again when promises made during the product evaluation stage don't deliver tangible value.

A siloed approach to ERP and workforce mobility is therefore a risk that many companies should assess, as maintaining and managing separate systems and upgrade paths can be costly in time and money.

5. Unified business platforms with cross-application features

Field service providers are looking to deliver real value for their customers over and above the technical service they're contracted to perform. Technical reports, equipment checklists and detailed recommendations are just the beginning. Gathering this data is one aspect but reporting it back to the customer is another time-consuming challenge.

As far as many in the industry are concerned, the sooner this dissemination of equipment data is automated, the better. However, automation relies on technicians being armed with the right tools to ensure the initial data capture on site is simple and intuitive. Similarly, capturing incident photos, resolution details and even customer signatures is now required to justify the work performed and also speed up invoice payments. The only effective way to achieve all this is via a closed-loop approach, meaning that all critical data captured on site almost instantly becomes vital SLA intelligence.

Moreover, geographic and environmental factors need to be considered. Technicians often work in remote locations, so the provision of both 'online' and 'offline' delivery models is essential. This will allow technicians to perform work on service calls regardless of whether they're in communication range. If they're out of range, automated synchronisation protocols take over to send data to and from head office systems when technicians are back in range.

Although third-party integrated solutions are geared for bi-directional data flow, it may be more attractive for companies to adopt a unified business platform where cross-application features provide added value.

Summary

True field workforce management relies on mobility, ERP and business intelligence tools working in harmony so that service and operations managers can use their time on more productive tasks.

When developing a mobile strategy, it would be advantageous for field service companies to take a holistic look at how IT can deliver greater value for business. This might include a detailed business review to ensure that the selected solution meets the company's business objectives and delivers greater value to clients.

About Pronto Software

Pronto Software has been developing award-winning business management software for over 30 years. With in-built intelligence, flexibility and an easy-to-use interface, our flagship product, Pronto Xi, enables users to discover rich business insights.

From maintenance management and project costing, to manufacturing and inventory, Pronto Xi provides a range of modules to simplify your business. Our product can be configured to complement just about every aspect of your business. We can help you examine your business in more detail so you can increase productivity, lower costs and simplify tasks.

The new Pronto Xi Mobile Service is an HTML5 web app aimed at simplifying the delivery of mobile workforce solutions so that technicians have all the data they need anywhere, on any device platform. It is fully integrated with Pronto Xi Service Management, delivering real benefits, such as predictive Q&A to assist technicians on site, van stock allocations, purchase order creation, risk analysis, and helping technicians capture customer signatures. With Pronto, all data captured on site can be instantaneously represented within business intelligence dashboards back at the service centre.

For a free business review or to learn more about Pronto's solutions for field service companies, email info@pronto.net or visit www.pronto.net.

We're always ready to adapt Pronto Xi to perfectly fit your unique requirements.

For more information on what we can do for your business, contact us at 1300 PRONTO (1300 77 66 86) or find us at: **www.pronto.net**

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Pronto believes in the power of actively listening to clients, adapting our product to meet their needs and finally revealing the best solution. It's how we continually surpass client expectations, delivering moments of utter surprise and delight.