

Wireless is not Enough: Five Smart Moves that can Revolutionize Your Mobile Workforce



If your business has mobile employees who sell, service or deliver products, you understand the value of real-time wireless communications. You may have already implemented wireless technology and realized some of the benefits, such as:

- Automated previously manual processes
- Reduced or completely removed paper from field employees' daily operations
- Gained real-time visibility to sales orders, work order completions and deliveries
- Improved worker transparency

Sure, these accomplishments are great, but if you stop there, you're leaving value on the table.

Pump Up Your Wireless Strategy

Get your mobile workforce really moving! Learn five smart initiatives that can help you get the most out of your initial wireless technology investment.

1. More Than Moving Dots: Integrated GPS

You are probably familiar with how GPS (Global Positioning System) technology enables detailed tracking of an entity's location and movement on a map. What you may not know is that properly integrating GPS capabilities into your wireless solution will yield far more gains than simply watching dots move on a map. A robust GPS solution can give a manager his field employees' locations, which stops they have completed or skipped and estimated time remaining at the current location. This data becomes powerful when it enables the manager to dynamically change the current route/stop schedule, based on contextual data. In addition, integrating GPS capabilities provides detailed visibility to worker performance – so managers can make sure employees are working on the right activities.

Did You Know?
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Figure 1: A sample of route visibility using GPS

2. And the Answer Is...Survey Management

Wireless technology has probably already enabled your mobile employees to meet more customers and take more orders – a huge accomplishment! However, you're missing an opportunity for these employees to become your eyes and ears into the market and competitive landscape.

A mobile survey management tool can collect market information and aggregate the data across salespeople and regions. Not only can a survey management tool allow you to collect customer responses to specific questions, but it can also be used by your mobile workers to collect competitive information such as competitive brands' shelf space, price and availability. Survey management can automate many of your data collection efforts and make the data more consumable by management at the home base. Surveys can also be used to execute and enforce compliance-oriented data capture such as inspections, meter readings and other critical performance data.

3. A New Perspective on Workforce Management

The old maxim is still true: you can't manage what you can't measure. This definitely applies to your mobile workforce. Using a robust mobile application, management and workers can set goals/objectives and track progress against these goals. For example: I want to get three end-caps in place this week, complete 10 service calls today, increase sales lift 10 percent with the ACME account, etc.

For workers on the shop floor, in a distribution center or out in the field, the simple act of measuring performance can increase employee productivity up to 10-12 percent. Empowered with wireless technology, your staff already has the tools they need to be more efficient. Add effective and objective management to the mix and you can help them achieve huge productivity gains.

4. A Stitch in Time: Inventory Management & Load Optimization

Your organization is probably used to managing inventory within the four walls of your distribution centers or depots, but have you considered the importance of managing the inventory in the field? Your worker knows the inventory is on the truck, but do they know exactly where to find it? If it's a small emergency delivery of an out-of-stock item or a spare part for a repair, the worker could spend significant time searching for the inventory they need for a specific stop. Even if they know where it is, they might spend time moving other products in order to reach what they're looking for. All of this adds up to lost worker productivity.

Before the truck is dispatched, it is loaded with the products for the entire route. Rather than load in haphazard fashion, workers can be instructed on how to load the truck (e.g. reverse stop sequence) and where to place the product to make the unloading as efficient as possible. Making some small changes up-front can go a long way toward increasing productivity in the field. Optimization helps you make sure you have the right products on board and prevents you from taking unneeded products for a ride on the truck.

5. Location, Location, Location: Where are Your Point-of-Purchase (POP) Displays?

You already know the challenges of tracking your products once they leave the warehouse, but tracking your POP displays and marketing materials can be even more daunting. Not only do you need to know where they are located, but the placement and condition of the displays is also critical. Another consideration: is there a special time-based offer that has expired which requires new POP materials?

With a mobile solution, your workforce can not only collect information on location and quantity of POP materials but also put in replacement requests for damaged POP materials. Worried about running time-sensitive offers because of the overhead? With a mobile solution you can send out alerts to your workforce creating tasks to pull the needed materials at the appropriate time. Your company has worked hard to get POP locations, now you can make sure your POP displays really shine.

Conclusion

How do you make sure you're reaping all the rewards of your wireless technology investment? This is an ideal time to take on some smart initiatives to give your mobile sales, service or delivery workforce the tools to reach their potential – and boost your bottom line!

Have yet to go down the wireless road? Hopefully you now have a taste of all the potential areas of value wireless technology can present. When you begin evaluating solution providers, don't get drawn into a point solution that only automates processes. Make sure your chosen vendor can provide the full spectrum of solutions, or you may make an investment and be left wanting for the return.

Now is the time to transform your mobile workforce into a true competitive advantage.

