

BY CHRISTOPHER MUSICO

RE:TOOLING

MOBILE SERVICE APPLICATIONS

Beyond the Contact Center Walls

Lucrative return on investment is driving companies—and vendors—to look more closely at mobile service applications

PLENTY OF INK—in CRM and elsewhere—is spent on customer service within the walls of the contact center, whether those walls are made of bricks and mortar or they're virtually enclosing your work-at-home agents. Field service isn't talked about as often, but this may change, thanks to new mobile solutions.

"This is very much the second generation of mobile applications for field forces," says William Clark, a research vice president at Gartner. "From 2003 to 2008, a lot of organizations were in the first stage of successfully tooling their [employees] with mobile. Now, companies and vendors are...a bit older and, hopefully, wiser."

Aberdeen Group estimates that 67 percent of field workers are now equipped with a role-specific mobile device, up from 59 percent a year ago. Sumair Dutta, an Aberdeen research analyst, says the best is yet to come, with penetration expected to reach 74 percent next year. "The world is doing virtually everything on mobile phones," he says. "That hasn't taken over in field service yet. We expect it to...in the next couple of years."

It's unclear who leads the way in mobile field-service applications. "This space is extremely fragmented," Clark admits, citing a partial list of players that includes Oracle, SAP, ClickSoftware, IBM, TOA Technology, Sybase, and Syclo. (See "Vendor Shortlist," below, for Aberdeen's top four.)

Clark says Oracle aims to have several different projects in-house for the client-side development of mobile applications, but "SAP is going down more of a partnering path than in the past, relying heavily on best-of-breed mobile partners [such as Sybase and Syclo] to bring field-service pieces together." IBM's mobile field-service play, on the other hand, has slipped a bit, placing it a rung below Oracle's and SAP's. "[IBM's] stack is heavy, there's a lot of customization necessary, and there's a high total cost of ownership," he says.

The price of a mobile field-service software package—including scheduling, optimization, global-positioning and location-based services, business workflow, credit-card scanning, barcode reading, and intuitive user interfaces—can run anywhere from \$400 to \$1,300 per person for a high-end solution, but it's even higher when you consider the total cost of ownership. This includes rolling out

the devices, integration, and overall support, which Gartner's Clark says can bring the price tag up to "anywhere from \$3,000...to \$8,000."

Yet the return on investment can be significant, Clark says—from 150 percent to as high as 500 percent. "Most organizations find this extremely lucrative, and that's been driving adoption in the last five years," he says.

Aberdeen says the benefits include an 11 percent increase in service efficiency measured through first-time fix; a 29 percent boost in compliance with service-level agreements (SLAs), upping customer retention and satisfaction while cutting SLA-related penalties; a 23 percent rise in worker productivity (number of jobs completed daily); and a 12 percent increase in service-based profitability. Aberdeen also says the top reason for adoption (cited by 60 percent of respondents) is the need to drive workforce productivity. The second-most-common driver is customer demand for faster service resolution (41 percent).

Dutta stresses that success requires more than just putting a mobile device in a technician's hands and telling her to go forth and service. "I always caution my clients that it's not just about the technology, but rather the mobile environment," he says. "The training required, making sure you're selecting the right applications for your needs, and tying it back to the value and benefit of improved processes are all necessary." One key differentiator is the desire for a mobile-device interface that offers a full QWERTY keypad, the preference of 47 percent of users 45 and older, compared to just 29 percent of users under 30.

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>> FIELD-SERVICE LIFE CYCLE

- receive service request/route request;
- find appropriate resource;
- optimize schedule;
- dispatch service or field technician;
- perform service or install equipment for future/ongoing use/maintenance;
- debrief after call/decrement inventory;
- perform any marketing or sales information-gathering or invoicing; and
- carry out Web or phone remote activity.

Source: Aberdeen Group

>> VENDOR SHORTLIST

| Vendor | Solution | Strong Points |
|--|--|--|
| Antenna Software (www.antennasoftware.com/mobile_elements.aspx) | The Antenna Mobility Platform (AMP) includes AMP Service | Flexible enough to work on a plethora of mobile devices running a variety of operating systems. In June, acquired competitor Dexterra and its Dexterra Mobile Service, a device- and carrier-agnostic thick-client application allowing mobile staffs to check schedules, provide updates, and access and close out work orders. |
| Astea (www.astea.com/en/products/fieldcentrix/page.aspx) | FieldCentrix product line, including FX Mobile and FX Mobility Express | A lot of expertise in integrating complex partner channels; plays well in organizations that have complex technical channels. |
| ClickSoftware (www.clicksoftware.com/solutions/mobile-workforce-management.asp) | ClickMobile | Provides significant out-of-the-box functionality around work order management, navigation, and communication for the mobile field worker. Announced plans in July to acquire on-demand provider AST and its The Contractor Office brand. |
| Oracle (www.oracle.com/applications/service/srvonl_cont.html) | Siebel Mobile Service and Oracle E-Business Suite Mobile Field Service | Extremely scalable, allowing users to configure once and then easily scale to a growing workforce. |

Source: Aberdeen Group

