

PART
4



AUTOMATING YOUR FIELD FORCE

Functionality – Six Final Questions

From the editorial staff
of Mobile Enterprise

MOBILE[®]
ENTERPRISE
WIRELESS SOLUTIONS FROM THE C-SUITE TO THE FIELD

1

TAKEAWAY

Look for the optimal choice in the following six areas as you finalize plans for your deployment:

1. Operating System
2. Connectivity
3. Carry Solution
4. Docking Solution
5. Battery/Charger
6. Printer/Other Peripherals

In previous white papers in this series, we've discussed how to decide whether or not to automate your field force, how to choose between rugged and consumer-grade devices, and how to select the best mobile form factors for your deployment.

To conclude the series, what follows are six key questions you need to answer in order to conclude the decision-making process regarding a mobile deployment.

QUESTION 1

OPERATING SYSTEM

Does your mobile solution need to run on Windows XP or Windows 7, or can it run on Windows Mobile? Key considerations here include the back-end systems your mobile solution needs to tie into and the applications it needs to run — does it need to tie directly into your ERP system, for example? If you don't consider this in advance, you could find yourself unable to connect to important systems, or unable to run a crucial application.

QUESTION 2

CONNECTIVITY

Do you need your workers to be always on, always connected? If so, you'll need to plan for the additional expense of a mobile data plan. On the other hand, if all you need is a batch authorization/store and forward type of solution, you'll likely be able to rely on Wi-Fi only, saving a considerable amount of money. An alternate, hybrid option would be to deploy in-vehicle hotspots for your mobile workers as needed.

QUESTION 3

CARRY SOLUTION

Consider your workers' ergonomics — do they need a hand strap? Do they need a shoulder strap with a carry case? Does the mobile device that's being deployed need to fit neatly into a specific type of bag? An HVAC technician, for example, might need a mobile device that fits easily in his or her tool bag. If you don't consider the need for a carry solution, the expensive mobile device you deploy could well be left behind in the vehicle.

QUESTION 4

DOCKING SOLUTION

Do your field workers need docking solutions in their vehicles, both to charge the device and to position the screen if GPS is part of the deployment? Similarly, if your employee also spends time at a desk, do you need a desktop docking station, both to charge the device and to connect it to other peripherals in an office setting?

QUESTION 5

BATTERY/CHARGER

Do you need an extended battery, or a specific kind of charger? How long is the worker likely to need the device to be running off the battery continuously – and will that require an extended battery, a cigarette lighter charger, a plug-in charger, or another power accessory – would a charger that includes both a cigarette lighter adapter and a standard plug be beneficial?

QUESTION 6

PRINTER/OTHER PERIPHERALS

Do you need a mobile printer — are receipts, proof of delivery, etc., critical for your field workers? Similarly, do you need a mag stripe reader to enable your workers to process credit cards, or a 2D imager to capture bar codes? If you're planning to use bar codes for inventory management, keep in mind that you may need to deploy bar code labeling solutions as well.

As with all other aspects of the decision-making process as you mobilize your field force, it's crucial to make each of these decisions by first examining your worker's needs on a daily basis and ensuring that the selection you make is driven by the fact that it's the best way to meet those needs, rather than simply making the technology selection in a vacuum.

Also ask yourself, regarding each of the questions above, will adding this piece to the puzzle lead to a definable, tangible time savings? And in many cases, how will the decision affect the customer experience – will a printed receipt provide the customer with a greater sense of trust, etc.? Consider the value that a given device or technology can add to the credibility of your brand.

But the most important thing to do is to ensure that your workers fully buy into the new solution — if the field worker doesn't appreciate the benefits the new device and technology provide, it'll be left behind, and the deployment will fail.

2

TAKEAWAY

Make those choices by first examining your worker's needs, then ensuring that the selection you make is the best way to meet those specific needs.

Ask yourself if adding each piece to the puzzle will result in a definable time savings.

3

TAKEAWAY

**Also consider how
the decision will affect
the customer experience
– how a given device
or technology can add to
the credibility of
your brand.**

**Make sure your
employees don't see
the new technology
as an intrusion, but
instead buy into the
new solution and
feel pride of ownership
of the new device
and technology.**

Field workers often exhibit certain behavioral tendencies such as choosing to not use a given solution because they seek independence, so it's crucial to integrate new technology without causing resentment ("They're looking over my shoulder"). The right strategy is to ensure that your field workers have a strong sense of pride of ownership of the new device and the new technology, as well as a strong sense of having also made an investment of their own in helping to test and select devices and mobile solutions.

If you can look at the entire solution from that perspective, then your mobile deployment has a far greater likelihood of success. ■