

# A revolution in your hands

The growth of smartphones and mobile devices in general has forever changed the way people communicate and is now changing the way we run our businesses

**T**here's a growing belief that the use of mobile phones and smartphones will provide a similar revolution in business that the advent and proliferation of the PC did in the 1990s. And indeed, many believe that revolution is happening right now and we may even witness a sea change in business by this time next year.

John Freund from JumpTech says: "In the early 1990s we saw mainframe computers shrink down to mid-range

computers and then mid-range computers replaced by PCs and servers. I believe the next 12 months will bring on the age of mobile computing with tablets and smart phones in the business environment."

Certainly, there's no question that consumers purchasing from mobile phones is a genie that cannot be put back in the bottle. IE Market Research has reported that merchandise purchased on mobile phones in the US alone will grow to more than \$40 billion by 2014. That's up from \$1.2 billion in 2009, which was itself an increase of 203% from 2008. In addition to this, Gartner Group is reporting that 85% of mobile phone sales in 2011 will be phones that can access the web.

Freund adds: "A consumer using a smart phone expects to have access to an app for virtually anything they need. When Apple released the iPhone, they positioned it as a consumer device and never thought of it as a business tool. However, consumers demanded that their office applications work with the iPhone. With the 3GS, Apple introduced integration to Microsoft Exchange servers so that workers could check their business email and sync their calendars with their iPhones. In 2011, we will see more demand for apps that automate tasks done in the workplace."

Indeed, the use of these advanced handheld devices is also changing how employees work in the field, deliver products and generally go about their daily business.

Freund continues: "Mobile apps can also help to vastly improve productivity. Applications such as proof of delivery and field sales force automation suddenly become very affordable and practicable by putting the application on a smartphone. Field

salesforce automation gives a rep the real-time ability to pull up customer information, place orders, track credits, do inventories and more. As much as we like to say we don't want our reps doing some of these functions, the reality is that if there is enough margin in the account, the rep will do the work."

## Rugged

And consumer-driven smartphones aren't the only handheld devices making their impact felt in business. Another significant factor building momentum in the mobile revolution is the increased use in business of more focused and robust handhelds, or 'rugged' (see picture on page 19), in place of smartphones.

Increasingly businesses are looking for more long-lasting and sturdy devices and proprietary apps that can offer real-time connectivity, GPS, barcode scanning and even printing, alongside the usual voice calling and text messaging services. This advanced mobile computing allows front-line workers to become more responsive, effective and capable of cross-selling in the field.

Clive Fearn, Sales and Marketing Director at enterprise mobility solutions provider Barcode Warehouse, explains: "The primary advantage you have here is the total cost of ownership. The rugged handhelds are more robust and durable as they are designed for the everyday knocks and scrapes that these devices take. Salespeople, delivery drivers, service engineers and so on will invariably all drop these units at some point.

"Fundamentally, this means that device failure in the field is much lower on ruggedised units, giving massive savings to the business through fewer support calls, reduced time spent administering swop-outs and ultimately preventing people in the field from having to work with a device which may make them less



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productive or even render them unable to work properly. Secondly, these rugged devices come from manufacturers who we know will be supporting these units for up to five years. This is totally different from smartphone manufacturers who treat devices as consumer products and therefore the availability and support of these is much shorter.”

To give an example of this, one company – which is now a Barcode Warehouse customer – was halfway through a rollout of smartphones when the product was globally ‘end of life’ by the manufacturer with no warning. The consequential effects of this were massive and the company has now switched to ruggedised units.

Indeed, a recent white paper by Motorola entitled ‘Revealing the True Costs of Handheld Computing’ found that downtime – defined as anytime that a device is not functioning at operational capacity – for mobile workers using consumer smartphones such as iPhones or Blackberrys can be as much as 48% higher than for rugged device users. The same research revealed that IT support requirements can be as much as 44% higher without sturdier, designed-for-purpose equipment.

The overwhelming majority of rugged handhelds today are also designed with windows mobile software so there is a vast choice of hardware and, crucially, software applications from vendors to suit every need and budget. And for smaller businesses they can deliver greater peace of mind and affordability given the number of years the product will be supported. This means a small business does not need to be continually looking over its shoulder worried about the next replacement device, support, software and so on.

Fearn adds: “We have smartphone users trading in these devices right now for rugged handhelds. I actually have a company that is a third-generation user of mobile technology and when they refresh this time they will have gone from smartphone to fully ruggedised laptop!”

Indeed, as the wider adoption of smartphones and even non-rugged tablets into the business environment continues this will provide a natural migration path for many companies. Smartphones are effectively growing the market size for rugged devices at a faster rate than has ever been seen before. ■

