How the New Mobile Supply Chain Impacts Field Sales and Field Service

The combination of powerful, inexpensive mobile devices along with easy connectivity is empowering field workers around the world to deliver benefits to businesses in ways that were unimaginable just five years ago.

Within the new mobile supply chain, these benefits are not just imaginable, they are real. In fact, mobile solutions are redefining how organizations deliver and support field sales and field service operations while improving processes throughout the entire supply chain.

Technicians in the field can use mobile devices to troubleshoot and fix problems as they occur, while salespeople can access real-time data to drive incremental revenue and improve customer support.

Mobility is changing the game in customer service and field sales in a number of ways, including dramatically reducing costs, enhancing productivity, driving new revenue streams, and creating innovative ways for businesses to quickly identify new opportunities or respond to problems in the field.

Equipping field service and sales personnel with real-time information is a critical component of the new mobile economy. And with advances in the availability of big data analytics, mobility plays an even greater role in delivering vital information to and from the field.

How can mobility make field service and sales personnel more productive? Why is it critical for organizations to infuse mobile capabilities and support throughout the entire supply chain? Here are the answers to your most frequently asked questions.
What are some of the ways mobility is changing the paradigm in field service?

Think about it: today’s handheld devices offer more power and storage than the enterprise-class mainframe computers of less than a generation ago. Putting devices that powerful into the hands of field service personnel creates all kinds of possibilities — particularly when coupled with the reality that field personnel can now remain connected at virtually all times, wherever they go.

Field service personnel can use their mobile devices to run sophisticated tests, diagnose and troubleshoot problems, and record the work they do. But more importantly, they can do so by connecting directly with the equipment or machines through integrated machine-to-machine (M2M) technology to ensure complete integrity. Field personnel can also remain in constant contact with other experts in the field or at the home office, quickly respond to requirements, communicate customer concerns, and relay critical information to customers in real time, among a myriad of other potential uses.

Home office staff can use mobile applications to stay in constant communication with field service personnel, delivering and receiving critical information. Once a technician is in the field, the home office can adjust priorities — for example, by letting the technician know immediately if there is an emergency at another customer site. The home office can also deliver information about location, contact, service history, serial numbers, delivery updates, and parts, among other information.

Beyond that, having field service personnel delivering real-time information from the customer site can have a positive impact on every segment of the supply chain. By mobilizing inventory management, for example, organizations can automate the process by which parts are reordered, with the ability to manage returns and in-store stock. Billing can get immediate information, improving cash flow. Companies are now using mobile applications to troubleshoot equipment failure, check and replenish inventory, and order new parts on the spot, in real time, while always being able to assess the impact of any downtime on consumer demand.

Every aspect of the supply chain is improved: inventory management is more accurate, customer service is more responsive, distribution is accelerated, and field personnel are better informed and more equipped to close business deals.

The benefits extend to overall business strategies as well. For example, the company can get a much better understanding of how long certain tasks or processes take, or identify skills that are needed and where additional training may be required.

The list of benefits is virtually endless, which is why field service is a huge driver of mobility in businesses, and why mobility is a huge driver of field service innovation.

What about field sales and sales force mobilization?

The positive impact of mobility on field service operations can be just as profound in field sales, and in many similar ways. Mobility puts more power and resources into the hands of personnel wherever they are; enables far more productive, real-time interactions between field sales and the home office; and links field sales operations to back-office functions such as billing, marketing, merchandising, customer support, inventory, and returns management.

Here are some of the benefits of providing mobile applications and capabilities to field sales personnel:

- **Improved sales.** Sales increase as a result of better access to product data and customer data. Salespeople can look up information about
customer needs, and the home office can push out opportunities to close incremental business based on current and new customer data.

- **Better sales support.** Real-time communication with the home office enables managers to approve deals in real time and deliver merchandising and promotional offers, including marketing material, discounts, upgrades, and other benefits while the salesperson is face to face with the customer.

- **Better customer service.** The salesperson can look up products and inventory in real time, place orders immediately, and search for substitute or associated products that may do a better job of serving the customer’s needs. Available and allocated inventory can be adjusted or transferred between locations to speed deliveries. Salespeople can give accurate information about delivery schedules, warranties, and other details while placing the order, as well as enter, view, or modify customer account information in real time.

- **Improved operations.** Information gathered from mobile devices can be used to manage inventory and accelerate billing. The company can keep up-to-the-minute tabs on hot products, pricing trends, and competitive information. As this data is collected and analyzed, new information can be delivered in real time to field personnel, which could have an immediate impact on sales.
• **Satisfied customers.** Organizations using mobility to deliver such benefits wind up with happier customers, which increases retention and eventually leads to more sales. A repeat customer spends nearly 70% more than a new customer, and retaining an existing customer is five to ten times less expensive than acquiring a new customer.¹

**What are the critical factors to consider in deploying mobile applications and solutions in field service and field sales?**

To reap the full benefits of mobility in field service and sales, you must infuse mobile capabilities and applications throughout your entire supply chain. Mobile devices used in the field will deliver the most value to your customers and employees — as well as to your entire business — if they are linked to the rest of the supply chain, delivering and receiving information on billing, inventory, marketing, product updates, and more, as shown below:

By equipping field sales and service personnel with mobile capabilities as part of a broader enterprise mobility strategy, organizations can take advantage of the following:

- **Value-added communications between the field and the home office**
- **Machine-to-machine communications, which help drive increased automation and productivity throughout the enterprise**

It is also important to consider a mobile platform that simplifies and accelerates the development of mobile applications, along with upgrades and modifications to existing apps. As mobile capabilities become more infused in field operations, management and field personnel will see new ways to use mobility as a tool to increase sales, improve service, and strengthen productivity. The IT organization should focus on providing an agile platform that enables them to be innovative, make adjustments, and extend mobility to the entire supply chain.

For example, Eastern Propane, a leading propane, oil, and service company based in New England, deployed an enterprise mobility solution that supports field service operations. Machine-to-machine technology sends customer service information and work orders directly to and from handheld devices.

Because Eastern Propane has an enterprise mobility platform in place, the IT team can easily build, deploy, and reconfigure applications as needed. Productivity has improved dramatically because IT can easily push upgrades out to technicians in the field from a centralized location, and manual processes involving scheduling services and deliveries are automated.

¹ “10 Ways to Get More Sales From Existing Customers,” *Inc.com*, Aug. 31, 2010
What should we look for in an enterprise mobile platform to support and empower field sales and service operations?

Equipping field sales and service personnel with robust and fully integrated mobile capabilities is fast becoming a necessity for companies across industries to remain competitive. Integrating field sales and service as part of a mobile platform throughout the supply chain is a way to gain competitive advantage and position the company to reap the benefits of the new mobile economy.

In choosing a mobile platform for the enterprise, however, it is important to note that all solutions are not created equal. These are some of the key characteristics to look for in an enterprise mobility platform:

- **Agility**: You want a platform that enables you to easily build, test, and modify mobile applications as needed. Consider a platform with an integrated development environment (IDE) that eliminates the need for specialized mobile developers.

- **Security**: Protecting customer and corporate data is a priority in the mobile space. Make sure your platform supports full sign-on security in addition to server-to-device and device-to-server secure communications. You also want full security management to back-end ERP systems.

- **Integration**: Mobility should be an enhancement to your existing environment, so mobile applications and capabilities should fit in smoothly, simply, and elegantly with legacy applications across the entire supply chain. However, this should not just be a representation of a few integrated fields to the mobile user, but an optimization of the business process that enables a more productive user experience for the mobile user. Consider suppliers that offer prebuilt certified integrations with multiple back-end systems along with preconfigured packages for field sales and support applications.

- **Sustainability**: Mobility is not only here to stay, but will be a driving factor in all business activities in the future, particularly those involving field personnel. A mobile application development platform (MADP) will enable you to create a sustainable mobile strategy. Gartner says organizations should select a trusted MADP partner that “specializes in enterprise mobility, has deep industry knowledge and demonstrated customer success.”

How do we get started?

When it comes to delivering the key value propositions and benefits of mobility to field sales and service personnel, DSI is an industry leader. DSI supports agile development, simple integration with legacy applications, and best-of-breed security. DSI also delivers the key characteristics Gartner noted as essential to achieving sustainability: A company that specializes in enterprise mobility with deep industry knowledge and demonstrated customer successes. Looking for a trusted partner for your mobile supply chain strategy?

Contact DSI www.dsiglobal.com.