

■ **Mobile Technology**

The Smart Money

Five ways custom smartphone apps can drive profit

By Kirill Storch



Every so often, a new technology emerges that radically changes an industry's productivity landscape, and thus the potential for profit. Technologies with this vast transformative capability include the assembly line, telephone, fax machine and the Internet. Today, the smartphone is revolutionizing how business is done; but not for the reason you may think.

Everyone concedes the smartphone has forever changed social culture; and businesses are already leveraging them extensively for communication. But companies are just scratching the surface of understanding the power of intra-company smartphone apps as a mission-critical Mobile Process Improvement (MPI) asset that can actually drive productivity, enhance competitiveness and maximize revenue.

MPI is a burgeoning trend forecasted to have significant upside potential. Forrester's *Forrsights Business Decision-Makers Survey of 2013* revealed that MPI spending in the U.S. will grow 100 percent by 2015. By 2016, an additional 45 million employ-

ees in the U.S. are forecasted to use smartphones, priming them for MPI integration. By 2017, the MPI market in the U.S. is projected to reach a staggering \$4 billion, fueled by cloud services and demand for connected anywhere-anytime enterprises.

Altogether, MPI-based smartphone applications can hugely impact a company's bottom line. A custom-designed smartphone app could very well provide a simple solution that has an enormous impact on the business. However, despite what is clear and abundant opportunity, studies also show that just 10 percent of all U.S. firms have invested in MPI.

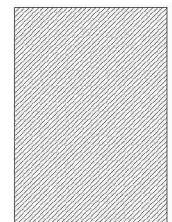
What exactly can a business do to save money with smartphone apps? With MPI, "building a better mouse-trap" is only limited by imagination and inclination. Here are five ways businesses are leveraging them to promote profitability:

1 Field Employee Management
Security dealers and integrators, of course, make prime use of employees in the field. One primary problem with field employees is limited

accountability, since their whereabouts cannot be monitored at all times. Tardiness, time theft and a general lack of information as to where employees are is an enormous and debilitating business issue, compounded by the fact that employees must frequently and proactively call in to get needed information from a home base to facilitate their field effort.

An app can tie field forces together into a huge mobile grid that is supported by the employees' own smartphones. These apps can be programmed to only allow field workers to clock in when they are at the actual job site, reducing time theft. It allows employees to quickly access home office data on the go and, if an employee is sick while afield, they don't have to wait until the next day to call the home office — their app automatically summons a replacement the second they request a sick day. The total savings can be immense.

2 Eliminating Inefficiencies
Companies seeking a paperless business or requiring speedy document access have been quick to adopt



smartphones for high-speed scanning. Documents are scanned and deposited into online repositories for easy retrieval by voice or text powered search engines. In addition, having every bit of paper an employee could need inside their smartphone empowers and enables professionals of all sorts, saving time, boosting efficiency and efficacy and saving the environment in the process.

3 Inspection Improvement

Using smartphone image-recognition, many companies in charge of inspecting sites or security companies in charge of visual documentation can use smartphones to inspect automatically. If something seems out of place, the photo recognition software is taught or programmed to report it. For example, a security guard services company in Boston found that too much of its resources were being wasted “busting” teenagers and troublemakers who were just skateboarding in front of one of their buildings. These people posed no real harm to the company, so they built an app that allowed the camera to differentiate between harmless intruders and malicious ones, saving the company the need to react with extreme force to relatively benign situations — in this case a single guard needing to respond rather than the whole cavalry.

4 Inventory Management

Companies with inventory can now place QR codes directly onto the boxes on their shelves and track inventory on employee smartphones. With an app, employees can simply walk down the warehouse aisles and scan items. The app directly links to an inventory management system, resulting in faster inventory count, employee theft prevention, and improved analytics. The back-end dashboard allows management to see exactly how much inventory is left and automatically compare it to predicted

inventory, in real time, improving visibility into the process. Back-orders can also be created automatically as soon as an inventory count runs low, saving time and human labor.

5 Becoming Leaner

Companies are leveraging the power of mobile apps for pro-

duction automation, allowing them to focus employee attentions elsewhere and creating tremendous cost savings. ■



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