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The Bottom Line:
Mobility in the Age of Big Data

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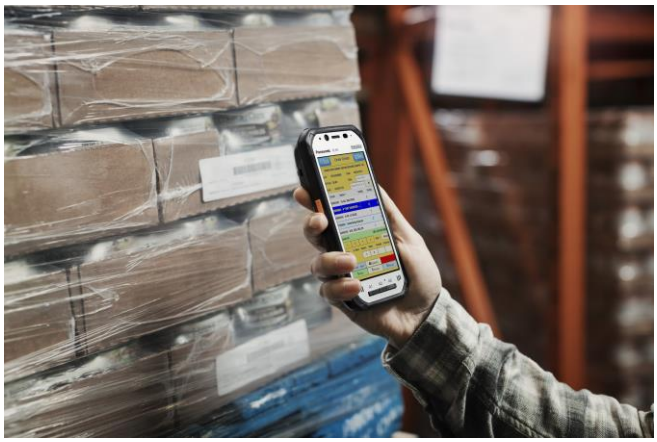
Introduction

In today's age of big data, it's no surprise that the recent IDG "State of the CIO" survey found that data analytics is the number one investment priority for IT managers in the coming year. And gaining access to that data is one of the key benefits for mobile workers, who can use it both to drive their own productivity and to enhance the customer experience.



Thanks to the mobile device explosion, data is increasingly being created, captured and consumed by devices on the edge of the network – the broad range of tablet, smartphone, and laptop devices that employees and customers are increasingly using to get work done. As that data moves to 'the edge' of the network, efficiencies are gained by lowering latency, granting more autonomy to employees in the field, and speeding the time to extract value from information wherever it resides. Furthermore, as the importance of mobile devices continues to increase, many organizations are realizing the benefits of deploying ruggedized devices, designed to withstand the rigors of a broad variety of retail and service environments, rather than relying on consumer-grade mobile devices that could become inoperable after a single drop, whether on the ground or in the sink.

Industries in Transition

Mobility is bringing broad changes to the retail customer experience, according to Jim Dempsey, National Sales Manager at Panasonic. In a recent TechByte series, Slashdot tapped Jim to share the wealth of experience he has gained as an expert in mobile devices. During our interviews, he discussed many factors that organizations should consider when looking at the intersection of mobility and data analytics.

Dempsey explained how the consumerization of IT has put demands on the CIO to deliver applications and devices that enhance the customer's experience, as well as improve their productivity. For example, when a service organization sends a technician to a site equipped with an old-fashioned clipboard rather than a smart device, it may not project the right image – especially if the repair is for a 'smart' appliance. "If a technician can download fault codes, email a receipt, and take a mobile payment, the customer is better served AND the service organization has driven efficiency up at the same time", says Dempsey.

Mobility and Analytics

What are key considerations when marrying mobility with analytics? "Unlocking the power of the data happens at the edge, where the work is being done", says Dempsey. "Businsses want to use that data to improve

efficiency and to improve the customer experience, and there are opportunites on both sides of that fence", he added.

One big help is that network speeds are continually improving, enabling rich content to be shared and moved across the enterprise. This enables new functionality, and offers business the opportunity to look back at existing applicataions to see where they can move more data to the edge as part of overall modernization or as competitive forces demand.

Who's setting the standards for enterprise mobility and analytics? "In the past IT set the standards, and handed everyting to the users", says Dempsey. "But demographic pressure from the LOB units is pushing IT to use new technology, and that makes IT's job exponentially harder, since they have to evaluate new OSs, new form factors, and of course deal with the new regulations and requirements for data handling", he added. As a result, IT now has to ensure new technologies work with old, in effect futureproofing to bridge the gap during migrations, while still meeting corporate back-end requirements such as network performance and integration with secure network access, all without getting in the way of workers going their job.

Mobility and Data

One IT trend that brings mobility and data together is the growth of the internet of things (IoT). With research portal Statista projecting over 30 billion IoT devices by 2020, jumping to 75 billion by 2025, the need for a broad array of capture technology from RFID to QR and barcodes becomes readily apparent.

Another trend to watch is the adoption of cloud-based solutions to solve mobility challenges. The adoption of subscription pricing for ruggedized devices themselves is under consideration for a few reasons. "First, there are businesses who just want to move from CapEx to OpEx models", says Dempsey. "Next, there are retailers for example who would like to scale up for the holidays, and not have to buy hundreds of devices that won't be used eleven months out of the year, but who would rather scale up or down on need. We are exploring pay per use or transaction pricing that can meet our customers' needs while offering benefits including predictable, scalable pricing", he added.

One added benefit of adopting the as-a-service model is leverage, in particular the ability for smaller companies to act like bigger companies by leveraging managed services. "It's about the service levels you can deliver, so if you don't need to buy devices, then they will never become obsolete", says Dempsey, who added that even larger companies can fill gaps by utillizing as-a-service models.

How is increased mobility impacting IT? Although IT is still the guardian of technology deployment, new tech-savvy LOB users want newer tech to present a certain image to customers, resulting in more choices, more

complexity, and more features. “It’s a balancing act”, says Dempsey. “We are seeing users and lines of business having more impact on standards”, he added.

Mobility and Devices

So how does managing enterprise-class devices compare to the typical consumer-grade BYOD devices most users are familar with? “Similar but different”, says Dempsey. “Ruggedized enterprise devices are better suited for security features, which offers great help for deployment. For example, you can lock the devices down so the only application a user sees is the one they’re allowed to see. This kiosk mode eliminates distractions, unlike consumer devices that just aren’t built that way”, he added.

Enterprise devices can play a role in better serving new customers as well. “Where it used to be one size fits all, where everyone got a laptop or handheld, now there is an emphasis on purpose built devices, enabling businesses to give employees the right tool for the job, depending on where and how they work”, says Dempsey. “For example, today’s workforce is more comfortable with touchscreens, and many don’t even want keyboards. The right tools can even become recruitment and retention tools, if employees feel that they are ‘with it’, while customers appreciate the ways that new tools speed their time to complete transactions”, he added.

How important is ruggedizing devices? “Why wouldn’t you want enterprise class technology?” asks Dempsey. “Business user needs are different than someone sitting on a couch watching YouTube videos. Gartner total cost of ownership (TCO) models show the acquisition price is the smallest part of the cost of technology, even though it gets the lions’ share of attention”, says Dempsey. “We can make devices easier to use, make them compatible with older technology, support multiple types of data capture and security, which reduces the work to deploy and manage them, lowering the TCO over the lifetime of the devices”, he added.

Adption of ruggedized enterprise devices can enhance connectivity, communications and collaboration for employees as well. “Since the networking is better, it allows opportunity for collaboration between employees and data, for example you can have coworkers access data in realtime, deploy remote assistance experts, and new workers can have a video chat or call up an expert video from the library. These devices just allow more collaboration at the point of activity, whether one to one, one to many, push-to-talk – all on top of video connections as employees work in the field”, says Dempsey.

The market for ruggedized devices in continually expanding. Although most IT people think of auto mechanics or delivery drivers as prime candidates, rugged devices are moving rapidly throughout the worlds of business, education, and medicine.

"We work with a department store who tried consumer-grade devices for their employees", says Dempsey. "They were amazing at the damage employees inflicted on their devices, even in the retail space. On one side, there are oil pipeline users, on the other consumers. This retailer wanted something in-between, and as a result we offer technology from super-rugged to semi-rugged, depending on the exact needs of the enterprise", he added. As for BYOD? Dempsey calls it "Bring your own disaster".

What's Next

CIO Insight says 85% of CIOs are seeing their IT requirements increase significantly, including more support for mobile devices that can interact with enterprise appliations. With the focus shifting to the employee and customer experience, how do you deliver on all the elements? That's where Panasonic can help.

With decades of experience creating enterprise-class devices, Panasonic can deliver the perfect fit for any business technology function, offering a broad range of handheld, tablet, or laptop devices that are built to last in your business environment. Panasonic will consult with your IT and LOB teams to craft the right device strategy for you, while demonstraing an improved TCO as compared to consumer-grade BYOD devices.

To find out how Panasonic can help you ruggedize your workforce, visit them at Toughbook.com