



Whitepaper

Mobility and Productivity Technologies for SMBs

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Today's small and mid-sized businesses must work harder than ever to stay competitive in a business landscape marked by rapid evolution and constant change. Much of that change is being driven by the move to mobility and productivity technologies, including social media, smartphones and PDAs, cloud services, and advanced analytics. These technologies and services—which are used by consumers, clients, and employees alike—signal a shift away from conventional models towards a more localized, individualized approach to both professional and personal tasks.

Effectively Leveraging Technologies

While the emergence of a mobile-driven world has created challenges for businesses, it also has brought new opportunities. SMBs that effectively leverage mobility and productivity technologies put themselves at a significant competitive advantage.

SMBs need to consider each of the following factors as they build a sound transitional strategy towards mobile-enabled business models.

The rapid rise of mobile devices. Consumers and employees are increasingly using mobile technologies, and many workplaces now support BYOD strategies. The more application functions that a business supports, the greater its marketing and customer relationship management capabilities will be.

Increased machine-to-machine (M2M) capabilities. Telematics, fleet management, vehicle-to-vehicle, and other M2M capabilities are expanding so much so that they are expected to be a major area of future technological growth. As these technologies alter the business environment, SMBs need to keep pace. Complying with regulations, ensuring security, and maintaining updated, accurate information will be key as SMBs adopt these technologies.

Globalization and “the mobile generation.” As members of the so-called “mobile generation” mature, they will hold a greater number of influential positions in the business world. This, combined with the rapid Internet-fueled rise of a globalized market, will continue to impact the types of technologies that SMBs adopt and the extent to which they are used.

Social media as a commercial tool. Social media marketing is increasingly important to secure new and repeat business. Employees also are more connected to their peers than ever before. Sales, marketing, and customer support services all need to adopt social media practices. The worst-case scenario is that social media is a very effective damage-control platform; best-case scenario is that it's the most effective platform for recruiting business.

Mobility-driven business analytics. Expanded use of mobile technologies has created massive deposits of data, which can be mined

for important insights into consumer behavior. SMBs that leverage these analytics to their advantage will benefit from boosted business intelligence and strategic insights.

Cloud-based enterprise support services. The rise of cloud-based data storage, data sharing, and software applications creates a more mobile workforce, causes an upsurge in collaborative activities, and enhances employee productivity. Cloud technologies also offer one of the most cost-effective, secure approaches to disaster recovery.

Gaining a Competitive Advantage—Not a Disadvantage

SMBs that fail to harness mobile and productivity applications put themselves at a competitive disadvantage. Given the potential economic impact, SMBs simply cannot afford to be left behind as competitors embrace technologies that enhance their operations and give them a competitive advantage.

What do SMBs risk if they choose not to adapt?

Inefficient and underperforming business operations. The new technologies offer businesses an endless array of performance and productivity tools. SMBs that choose to rely on traditional approaches quite simply will miss out on the incredible range of capabilities offered by the new tools. This can lead to inefficiencies and underperformance, both of which can have a significantly negative impact on a company's bottom line.

Difficulties adapting to ongoing changes. Businesses who don't adapt now risk being left far behind in the future. Technology's impact on the commercial landscape most certainly will increase in the years ahead, and the day where it will be virtually impossible to compete without them is not too far off.

Lost opportunities. Mobility technologies have created never-before-seen marketing opportunities. Consumers are increasingly connected to the digital environment 24/7. Businesses that choose not to use mobility technologies to support their marketing efforts risk allowing competitors to scoop up missed opportunities.

Choosing the Optimal Cloud Solution

In addition to mobility technologies, cloud solutions are taking SMBs by storm. Cloud-based solutions have created a cost-effective way for businesses to offer their employees and customers Internet-based access to applications and resources, and the 24/7 connectivity of the mobile marketplace has forever transformed the consumer-shopping experience.

Cloud and mobility technologies are best viewed as codependent. Combining their capabilities allows SMBs to optimize operations, support twenty-first century marketing efforts, connect with a wider base of customers, and provide superior service.

Consider the capabilities of cloud-based services. The computing cloud is a scalable resource primarily used to deliver IT resources to end-users over a network and on an on-demand basis. Cloud services provide superior self-servicing and automation, both of which reduce costs while increasing technological capabilities.

SMBs commonly use cloud services such as these:

- **Infrastructure as a service (IaaS).** This outsourcing option allows SMBs to have a third-party remotely manage their computer hardware and network infrastructure. IaaS supports a wide range of business functions, including billing models, administrative tasks, desktop virtualization, and dynamic scaling.
- **Platform as a service (PaaS).** Businesses use PaaS technologies to access computer hardware, to license operating systems, to obtain storage capacity, and to enhance network capabilities. When choosing PaaS, businesses should carefully assess their future needs, as some providers may lack the capabilities to address changing requirements.
- **Software as a service (SaaS).** Many SMBs find SaaS to be the most attractive cloud-based service model. SaaS allows businesses to access software applications without physically installing them on their computers. This lowers costs and allows businesses to test new applications with practically no risk; meanwhile, collaboration, communication capabilities, and data security all are enhanced.

Other capabilities include desktop as a service (DaaS), which allows users to access their computer desktops from remote locations, and storage as a service (SaaS), which permits companies to safely and securely store large amounts of data online.

Overall, despite the type of cloud solution chosen, SMBs have found that one significant advantage of using cloud-based services is that they dramatically reduce the amount of in-house resources that an SMB needs to remain technologically competitive. Because management is the responsibility of service providers, cloud-based solutions also help companies cut back on IT resources, computer hardware, computer software, and administrative expenses.

Choosing the Optimal Mobility Solutions

Mobile data solutions bridge gaps that the cloud cannot fill by itself. For SMBs, the big advantage of mobile technologies is that they facilitate remote employees and customer support.

Mobility solutions can be used to achieve the following:

- Support business continuity.
- Boost productivity and extend both the work day and the work week.
- Support operations and sales in the field.
- Improve management efficiency.
- Reduce the on-boarding and off-boarding time required when new employees join the company or old employees leave.

Most businesses that already have embraced mobile data solutions say that they plan to enhance their use of those technologies in the future.

Investing in Mobility Solutions

SMBs that are concerned about the cost of adopting mobility services can adopt strategic techniques to soften the up-front investment.

Many service providers offer on-demand mobile plans that allow businesses to provide full-connectivity capabilities to employees on an as-needed basis. This liberates SMBs from committing to locked-in service contracts while giving employees complete access to mobile networks and technologies.

Another strategy is to encourage employees to make use of public wireless connections. This allows users to access network resources at a reduced cost by minimizing the use of dedicated private resources.

One related strategy to consider is that a growing number of service providers have the capacity to act as mobile virtual network operators. SMBs can maximize their return on investment by choosing a service provider with the ability to customize a service package for SMBs operating in specific markets.

Consulting Professional Services

SMBs need the technologies offered by cloud-based and mobile data solutions, but most lack the in-house resources to implement and maximize them. This is where professional services can help. They bring experience and in-depth knowledge to the task of choosing, implementing, and managing custom-tailored suites of services.

However, it is important to carefully evaluate service providers to ensure they're offering the right set of capabilities and support functions. Some service providers do little more than re-sell as-a-service packages and cloud bundles at a profit; these should be avoided. Instead, choose a service provider that helps clients select and bundle a strategically formulated set of scalable capabilities that speak to the unique needs of the market in which the business operates.

With mobile data solutions, SMBs are searching for the greatest possible range of capabilities for the best possible price. Studies note that most SMBs aren't looking to sign up for the cheapest available package; rather, they prefer to invest a little more money in a service program that delivers optimal value. SMBs extract that value by creating an integrated technological solution that addresses their current needs, offers flexibility for future growth, and boosts operational efficiency for the best possible price.